

10. A Constant Invitation

It is striking to realize how closeness with Christ had already moved the disciples before they had recognized him, before the miracle. How is it possible that seven tired men in bad moods, with the temper of Peter, Thomas, and Nathanael, would right away and without exception, like a single man, obey the advice of a stranger speaking to them from the shore? It is possible only if, along with his voice, his word, the fascination of closeness with him reached them, the intimacy that they knew well, that had always appealed to them. It is like for the disciples of Emmaus who, well before recognizing the Risen one, feel burning in them an irresistible correspondence between that mysterious Presence and their confused and disoriented heart (cf. Lk 24:32).

Our heart perceives the relationship of closeness that Christ has already established with us as the dawn of the arising in us of the full consciousness of faith. And we must not doubt that Christ is calling forth this dawn for all, and we, like John, have been called to pronounce over this deep human sentiment the explicit recognition that we are dealing with Him, the risen Lord.

Since that day in Fatima when Jesus's phrase was revealed to me as an invitation to invest life and works in the predilection with Him, I began to discover how much this invitation is present in Scripture and in the Liturgy.

The Psalms, for example, often use the image of the right, both of the hand and of a side, to call us back to a relationship with God in which is expressed his love and his protective force. It is not possible for me, in this occasion, to go more deeply into a meditation on all the passages in which this theme is touched on in the psalms, but I invite you to be attentive yourselves to this in your prayer.

I limit myself to mentioning only two psalms, where the expression "stand at the right" is used in an apparently contradictory way, provoking thus a particular moment of recognition in us.

In Psalm 15 the Psalmist says: "I put the Lord ever before me, he stands at my right, I cannot be shaken" (v. 8). But at the end of the psalm, it is as if the position is flipped. "You will show me the path of life, the fullness of joy in your presence, sweetness without end at your right" (v. 11). First it is the Lord who stands at the right of the psalmist, at the end it is the psalmist who stands at the right of the Lord. The point in both cases is the positive presence of the Lord in our life. God walks at our right to sustain us, to help us, to defend us. We cannot be shaken. But this path of life will be fulfilled in an eternal and most delightful communion in which we shall be at the Lord's right.

This psalm is prophetic of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, as we shall see in the New Testament. But here I like to note that the "standing at the right" is something reciprocal between us and the Lord. In fact, it's not the right side that is so important in itself, which is a relative convention anyway, but the expression "at the right" is a symbol of nearness, of predilection, of affective and protective proximity between us and God.

The Lord's presence is near to us, touches us, is with us, and we shall always be with Him in eternal life. We shall all be with Him not far off, but all next to Him, all right by him, in an eternal embrace of the Father for his lost and found sons. That the same psalm speaks of God at our right and of us at his right is like the description of an embrace, of being face to face with God.

In Ethiopia and Eritrea you greet each other by giving the right hand and at the same time exchanging three hits with the right shoulder. It is like a trinitarian embrace in which the two who greet each other take and hold the other at their own right.

Another psalm presents this ambivalence about the right side: Psalm 109. This too is a messianic psalm. "The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand'" (Ps 109:1a); and a little later: "The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath" (v. 5). In this psalm it is sort of the opposite of psalm 15, since first there is the sitting at the right in glory, and then it speaks of the presence of the Lord at the right of the one who undergoes the trials and battles of life. Here too, then, there is the idea of the presence of the Lord who prefers and defends his faithful one and accompanies him to reach a destiny of intimacy and sharing of glory. But already when the Lord is at the right of the one who makes a journey or struggles under trial, the image makes us understand that God sustains and defends us, giving us a foretaste of an eternity of communion and friendship with Him. His predilection, and our predilection for Him, is already in this life an anticipation of eternal life, and as such his presence sustains us and strengthens us on our journey.

Psalm 109, "The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand,'" was cited by Jesus himself, and Peter cited both psalm 15 and 109 in his first discourse after Pentecost.

Jesus cites the first verse of Psalm 109 to provoke and confuse the Pharisees by putting them an enigma that they do not know how to resolve: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?' They said to him, 'The son of David.' He said to them, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, "*The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet*"? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?' No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions" (Mt 22:42-46).

This passage is interesting because Jesus basically sets the Pharisees in front of the mystery of his person, of the fact, that is, that the Messiah is the Son of God and not just a descendent of David. Jesus reveals that in Psalm 109 David, that is the Psalmist, describes the trinitarian dialogue between the Father and the Son, of the Father who says to the Son: "Sit at my right hand," and that, therefore, this psalm is a prophecy of a Messiah who is Lord on the same level as God, a Messiah who is God, Son of God. No one manages to understand, but it is clear that Jesus begins to express a revelation of Himself, of his mystery, which will carry him along to his death, but which will also be realized fully with his resurrection.