

17. The sense of self as a redeemed "I"

The Unnamed and Zacchaeus are reborn thanks to two realities that entered into their lives: a call and an encounter that began an accompaniment. Indeed, as Jesus comments after the conversion of Zacchaeus: "The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Lk 19:10).

God never stops seeking man, each man, in every way and through everything, calling him, offering him the event of a call that draws his heart beyond itself, that draws his heart to desire the infinite, true life and happiness.

But the call back is not enough, and God knows it. Christ does not call only to come to Him: he calls us to *follow him*, that is, he offers a path with Himself, which is above all his path with us, his accompanying us on life's way toward its fullness.

This God who, in the midst of the crowd, seeks and calls a man who desires life and good days, St. Benedict puts him on stage at the beginning, in the Prologue of the Rule. Which means that what follows upon this call is the offer of a journey with a companionship, so that life and the heart may grow in this experience.

The examples I have given of a degenerate, a "mumbled" "I", describe our presumptuous and stingy "I", stingy because presumptuous, and holed up in a thousand defenses. And this miserable and lost self, that does not even know who it is, who does not know any more that it desires happiness, that the Mystery has come to search, *in multitudine populi*. It is the self of Peter which Christ came to seek and accompany, and to correct, up to self's complete maturity to give life for Another, bearing witness to Another. *The mature self is the redeemed self*, the self that consents to Christ's suffering, death, and rising for us, to save us, to give fullness to our heart's complete need.

The redeemed self that unites in an irreducible fraternal communion. Think of the unity between the self of Cardinal Federigo and the self of the Unnamed. Two completely different men, two absolute opposites. And yet the holiness of one and the conversion of the other gave both a common identity: the Redemption, being redeemed by Christ. The perfect Redemption of the pastor grown old in asceticism, in charity, in purity, and the equally perfect Redemption of the evildoer embraced by God's mercy after a life of hate and sin. There is no difference in identity. It is like what is between Mary most holy and Mary Magdalene below the Cross. The Redemption creates among us a unity, a communion, that makes all other aspect of distinction insubstantial.

The "sense of the things of God" that Jesus energetically asked of Peter was the sense of Redemption, a sense of Christ as Redeemer and a sense of self as a man redeemed by Christ.

The redeemed self, the self of Cardinal Federigo, transmits redemption, communicates the mercy of Christ the Redeemer of mankind. This communication is the virginal fecundity, the monastic fecundity transmitted to all the forms of virginal consecration, so that it be not the flesh that generates but the redemptive Incarnation. Under the Cross, Mary and John receive the ministry of this fecundity, the fecundity of new relationships in the Blood of the Redeemer.

It is to this that Peter instinctively opposes himself: he did not want Christ to generate humanity with death and resurrection. He wanted him to generate it through human fecundity, human success, realized with means we ourselves have in hand, which are not the gift of the Spirit that the Crucified One pours forth by dying for us, by loving us to the end, to completion. And the completion is His love that gives his life for us and our love that receives all from Him, even the endless love with which we have been sent to generate the whole world to filial life by transmitting the new life that has been given to us, the redeemed life, the life of sons of God.

Indeed, we are not dealing with *self-expression*, that which disgusted Graham Greene's architect, that presumption of fecundity by ourselves and for ourselves that sterilizes the paternity and maternity of Christ in us: "Self-expression eats the father in you, too". Pope Francis would speak of "self-referentiality".

"Have in yourselves the very sentiments of Christ Jesus", St. Paul writes to the Philippians, using the word *phronein*. It is to this that Jesus called Peter back when he told him that he did not have sentiments according to God but according to men. And what are the sentiments of Christ, what is Christ's "sensing", the sense of reality that Christ has, what is the wisdom of Christ, what is Christ's taste for life? Paul explains it with a hymn that he probably receives from the primitive Church, hence from the awareness of the mystery immediately stirred up by the paschal event:

"He, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:5-11)

To have the same sentiments as Christ, the sense of Christ in our conception of ourselves, of God, of the world, of reality, is to let ourselves be conquered by his passion, death, and resurrection, which shine upon all of reality, “in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth” (Phil 2:10), because nothing escapes from the love of God in Christ, dead and risen, nothing escapes from the Redemption. Only our freedom can escape, withdraw itself from the redeemed face of the universe, but by the freedom of God nothing and no one *per se* eludes the Redemption. One actually has to want to slip away, like Satan, and for this reason Jesus corrects Peter so strongly, to shake up his freedom, to warn it that we too will be able not to stand before the gratuitous freedom of God with a freedom that consents, that accepts, that listens, that lets itself be penetrated in its way of thinking by the sentiments of God.