

15th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for the MFC - 10.09.2014

The tradition of the Church has understood that the life that flows from the Heart of Christ is the Holy Spirit. While standing in the Temple, Jesus cried out: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As scripture has said: Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'. Now he said this about the Spirit which believers in him were to receive" (Jn 7:37-39). John understood that it was on Calvary and then in the Upper Room of the Cenacle that this announcement of Christ had been fulfilled, for Jesus and for us.

Also Ezekiel, immediately after announcing God's conversion of the heart of stone into a heart of flesh, announces the gift of the Spirit: "I will put my Spirit within you, and I will make you live according to my statutes and I will make you observe and practice my laws." (Ez 36:27)

The image that is suggested, with respect to the Heart of Christ as our own, is that of a heart that becomes the source of the gift of the Spirit. Also in the Rule, St Benedict makes it clearly understood that the humble, contrite, pure heart, is a heart that can, so to speak, express the Holy Spirit, loving "*ex toto corde*" (RB 4:1), expressing the truth "*ex corde et ore*" (4:28); and Benedict also says that the word of God should be recited by heart, the Latin has the beautiful expression "*ex corde*" (RB 9:10; 12:4), which was preserved in English.

The idea basically is that the gift of the Spirit makes our heart, in the image of Christ's Heart, a wellspring of love, prayer, witness. Christ gives us his heart so that the Spirit can express Itself from our hearts, as It does from His. The gift of the Spirit means that from the heart the Spirit can express itself, precisely gushing, exiting, in order to express in us the relationship of Jesus with the Father and our neighbor.

And perhaps we need to change our way of imagining the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not fill hearts in order to inflate them like geese, or inflate them like soccer or footballs, but to make them the wellspring of love and prayer. "Abba!" is the cry of the Spirit of Jesus that is fully intent on the Father, without any self-absorption. The Spirit gives us the Heart of Christ as the source, not as a pseudo-sea which sooner or later becomes the pond of our ego. The Heart of Christ is an "I" which denies himself in order to invoke, to love, to serve, to praise the "Thou" of the Father, and to love the "thou" of every other that the Father has given to us as brothers and sisters.

The gift of the Spirit is realized not so much in filling our hearts, but in gushing and pouring from it, and, therefore, more in an emptying of Himself from within us, and of us for Him. Gushing from us with a love of no return is the true fullness of the gift of the Spirit in us. When we allow Him to gush from our heart as from that of Christ's, the gift of God reaches in us its fulfillment without end, infinity, without measure, without measure of personal advantage.

When in the Gospels it is said that a person is full of the Holy Spirit, as was the Virgin Mary, it is at the moment in which this person empties him or herself in order to give to others joy, a song, a witness to the point of martyrdom. The Spirit does not inflate, because it likes to blow, to gush, to pour, to flow, as it does eternally from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father, because the Father and Son possess It by giving It and receiving It one from the Other without reserve and without measure.

When I met Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta for a few minutes, the impression that I had and the image of her that immediately came to my mind was that I was in front of a gushing wellspring of joy and love. And this overflowing wellspring was directed towards me, as if I were the only person in the world. It was the year before she died. With the revelations published after her Beatification, we discovered that she rarely had been able to taste anything of this love and this joy. She had lived fifty years in interior dryness, in a sense of abandonment, of not being loved. When I learned of this, at first I was almost annoyed about this, because it was as if the impression that had been given me, and that I carried and always carry in me, was that her dealings with me had been a simulation, false; perhaps it was full of charity, but fake, not true, none the less. Then I began taking account of the nature of the gift of the Holy Spirit. I realized that Mother Teresa had not been faking it, the joy that gushed up in her was not play-acting, but it was really the joy of the Holy Spirit, it was really the joy and the love of the Heart of Christ. But in her the gift of the Holy Spirit, so to say, completely flowed out, entirely gushed out, leaving her in a constant interior dryness. Mother Teresa possessed joy as Christ possessed it; it was given to her, as joy for the other, which was constant, because the Spirit always gushes up in those who do not hold back love. In the end, the source is the point of the river where the water is less, where the water never accumulates.

St. Therese of Lisieux went through the same experience, as well as many other saints in Church history; perhaps all of them had this experience. I also think of St. John Paul II, when he was seen praying, and that strange murmur that one heard next to him in prayer: just like a continuous flow of living water from a deep heart.

Jesus seems to allude to this mystery when he speaks to his disciples about the woman's pains of child bearing that lead to true joy: "When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when she has given birth to her child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world." (Jn 16:21).

What is greater than pain or fatigue? It is a relationship with and a love of someone; it is meeting with someone. The relationship of a mother with her child is greater than the pain she has to endure for him. However, we must not forget that here Jesus uses the metaphor of birth to describe the relationship of the disciples with

Him: "So you also have pain now; but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away. On that day you shall ask me nothing." (Jn 16:22-23a).

Jesus promises the joy of the heart that no one and nothing can take away, the joy of seeing Him again. "I'll see you," I think here the sense is "We'll see each other again!", "We'll meet again." And this means an eternal seeing each other again that enables a joy of heart that is deeper than every pain, every trial, every temptation. This does not refer only to meeting Him again in eternal life, because in heaven nothing will tempt us, nothing will threaten the joy of our hearts. I think He wants to announce to us that profound joy that is possible on this earth to those who let themselves give the joy of their heart born from a relationship with Christ, from the relationship that He always comes to renew with us.

"That day you will no longer ask me for anything." Not only will we no longer ask Him for anything, but we will also not ask Him for anything other than Himself, we will not ask him for anything, we will only ask for Him alone, for his presence, for his gaze, for his Heart.

This is the birth of life in us and among us: that the relationship with Christ surpasses everything, and prevails in our hearts, as a motive of joy, as a satisfaction deeper than any dissatisfaction, deeper than any motive of sadness in us, in the others, or caused by the others, or by circumstances.

This birth in our life is a continual rebirth. It has not been given to us, or rather, we do not let ourselves be given this gift once and for all. Mary, did; instead we have to always "be reborn from on high", from a relationship with Christ in the Holy Spirit.

In the Upper Room in the Cenacle, after the Ascension, the disciples were waiting for this new life, this "seeing Jesus again," this inalienable joy of the heart. The Spirit is given to us in order to respond to this desire for life in communion with Christ. What is the Eucharist, if not this meeting again with the Risen Lord whom the Spirit renews in the flesh of this life, transforming our hearts like the bread and wine we offer? What is the Church, if not the body that allows us to see the Risen Christ again and again? What is the apostolic college if not a guarantee that the hearts of all persons will always, until the end of the world, see again, hear again, and welcome the Lord who is alive and real, and unite themselves to Him, and be incorporated in Him? And what are all the different charisms given by the Spirit, and what is their usefulness, if not to find Christ again in the multiple ways He gives Himself to every human person of all time, as an answer to our structural need for salvation, love, truth, beauty, unity?