

23. Astonished Witnesses of the Redemption

When Jesus reproached Peter for not having the sentiments of God, but of men, he was thinking of the Father. But what are the sentiments of the Father? With what sentiments did the Father want the Son to suffer, die, and rise? Let us recall what provoked Peter's contrary reaction to the sentiments of God: "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Mt 16:21).

We could say that Scripture reveals to us two fundamental sentiments of the Father: the preference for the Son, what he expresses at the Baptism of Jesus and in the moment of the Transfiguration, and the merciful compassion for men. And in the paschal mystery, already announced in the Baptism and in the Transfiguration, it is as if these sentiments mixed together, or rather manifested their unity, because the love of God, the Heart of God is not divided. In Gethsemane, it is as if the Son consented, as he does from eternity, to the Father's loving sinners with the same predilection with which he loves Him eternally, in the communion of the Spirit. And this love redeems humanity, is the Redemption of man. The announcement of the passion, death, and resurrection was the announcement of the Redemption as fulfillment of the Father's predilection for the Son, communicated and shared with men created to become sons of God in Christ. Opposing himself to this, Peter opposes himself to the love of God that, in Christ, reaches humanity to love us even to the end, that is, up to the Redemption in his Blood. It was as if Peter wanted Christ to have come for some other reason than to redeem man, as if he thought that salvation should be something other than the Redemption. He expected from Christ that which men expect from men and not what God wanted to give men.

"To think like God" means, then, essentially to expect the Redemption from Christ. And this means expecting from Him that which only He can give. The liberation of the people of Israel from the Romans, or other values and powers, can be expected from other people too, but only the Son of God incarnate, who died and rose for us, can give us the Redemption.

In the Redemption, for the Father, his predilection for the Son coincides with his mercy for men. They coincide in the Father's sentiments which are totally accepted by the Son, and they coincide for us, to save us.

For this reason, there is no greater love of God than to let ourselves be redeemed, because this means letting ourselves be favored by the Father as he favors the Son, and to favor the Father as the Son favors him. The gift of the Spirit of Pentecost, the fruit and inexhaustible fulfillment of the Lord's death and resurrection, is this sentiment of God that communicates itself to mankind, forming the Church, the people of the redeemed, that is, us and all mankind from whom is still missing the One who has already given himself for all.

If we were truly aware of this, we would live our vocations full of astonishment.

One of the icons that best expresses the surprised “I” on the edge of a freedom that has been reawakened by the encounter with Christ is the St. Matthew of Caravaggio in San Luigi dei Francesi. The ambiguity of the scene and the gestures accentuates the surprise in the eyes of Matthew, and the surprise of the eyes defines the gesture of his finger, turned toward himself questioningly, so that the whole figure of Matthew says, “I?”, but not mumbled like the “I?” of Don Abbondio. The question mark in Don Abbondio’s “I?” is not open, is not going outward, is expressed on the threshold of a mouse hole, into which Don Abbondio is ready to flee. The “I?” expressed by Matthew’s finger, but above all by his astonished look, is already outside of the den of his company of accomplices and clients bent over money: it expresses a desire, a searching for Christ. He is drawn to come out of himself toward the You that gazes upon him, points him out and calls him, a You that is already itself a company, summarized in the painting by Peter, who mirrors and underlines Jesus’ gesture toward Matthew.

This astonishment full of desire, this astonishment of a child, that Matthew’s eyes express, is the freshness of the vocation to which we have been called to return ever anew. To be happy and fruitful in living our vocation, we must essentially always turn to this astonishment, which is a gift of the Spirit.

A Swiss Clarisse, Sr. Mary of the Trinity, in the world Luisa Jacques, who died in the odor of sanctity in Jerusalem, and was a companion of the mystic Adrienne von Speyr in the sanatorium of Leysin, when both were still protestants, expressed this freshness in a letter to a friend in 1942, written five months before her death, at age 41, on June 25, 1942:

“I am happy with my vocation, you know, you guessed it perhaps. I would like to be able to tell you so that my happiness can so spread that it fall in joy in the souls of others... But I do not know how to speak, and the happiness of a Clarisse is so interior that it cannot be explained. You have to guess it. One says that one is engaged in the way of perfection. I do not think I am there yet, and I do not know if I ever will be, but I realize that I have been engaged in a life of astonishment! There is nothing more beautiful than to come nearer to the Lord Jesus!” (Letter to Blurette, Jerusalem, January 11, 1942).

Astonishment before the beauty of the presence of Christ who calls us to Himself is the exhaustive and inexhaustible work of our vocation, and is that which, in the encounter with Christ, regenerates the joy and fecundity of our following as disciples, making it fruitful with joy for others.

A vocation is complete not when it is perfect, but when it is astonished, as at the beginning. The astonishment is the joy that one feels in front of someone other than oneself, greater than oneself, which in fact is given, and which one finds oneself experiencing. This fullness is possible right away, if the gaze, the heart, is now open, unarmed, to the beauty of Jesus Christ, a beauty that is already there, because it is His. I do not have to create it in myself, it is given to me, it is granted, it reaches me: “Jesus looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus!’” (Lk 19:5).

Our beauty is astonishment in the face of Christ who calls us now.

La fine del mio ultimo Capitolo al CFM è sempre come la fine di un lungometraggio quando si elencano tutti gli interpreti, i collaboratori, ecc. E sono sempre stupito alla fine dei film di quanta gente debba lavorare di nascosto per realizzarlo. Però di solito, alla fine dei film, la gente non rimane a leggere tutta la lista. Io lo faccio soprattutto quando un film mi ha molto commosso, e ho bisogno di rimanere in silenzio per vivere fino in fondo l'emozione e lasciar passare i segni esteriori, come le lacrime, che non si vuole esporre al pubblico...

È quindi con commozione, ma lieta, che ringrazio a nome vostro e di tutti:
il P. Procuratore Lluç, P. Galgano, Agnese e Piotr Kulczycki, per tutto l'immenso e accurato lavoro organizzativo;
le nostre care Sorelle Missionarie Figlie del Cuor di Maria in cucina, lavanderia e stireria, senza le quali non avremmo sopravvissuto un mese;
tutti i Professori, i cui nomi sono pubblicati nel programma del Corso, sono stati molto apprezzati;
gli interpreti, tutti molto efficienti, e ringrazio in particolare quelli del nostro Ordine e le loro comunità che ce li hanno prestati: P. Bazezew di Shola, P. Guilherme di Claraval e Sr. Aline di S. Giacomo di Veglia.

Un grande lavoro lo hanno assicurato tutte le traduttrici e i traduttori dei miei Capitoli: Annemarie Schobinger per il tedesco, e anche per il francese che ha condiviso con Sr. Michaela di Rieunette; Madre Eugenia di Talavera de la Reina per lo spagnolo; Sr. Aline per il portoghese; P. Stephen di Dallas, con i suoi confratelli P. Thomas e P. John per l'inglese.

E infine ringrazio voi, gli studenti, perché avete vissuto questo Corso con attenzione e spirito fraterno, aiutandovi molto a vicenda nella comunicazione, nel silenzio, nel servizio, anche di fronte ai casi di emergenza, grazie a Dio risoltisi bene.

Quest'anno ben 22 di voi hanno terminato il Triennio! Tantissimi! che rimpiangeremo l'anno prossimo, ma vedrete che la comunione nata e cresciuta in questi anni porterà frutti di comunione più forte delle distanze e del tempo.

Per questo, ci lasceremo con gratitudine a Dio, e non dimentichiamoci di pregare gli uni per gli altri, perché i semi che, spero, il Corso ha messo in noi portino frutti buoni nella vigna del Signore.

Grazie!