

## 18. *Pia consideratio*

What I was saying about the term "to consider" is too important not to deepen it. I said that St. Benedict asks us to convert our contemplation of the stars, our thirst for the absolute, our search for the ultimate meaning of life and the universe, the "*consideratio*" that unites us to the stars; into a "*pia consideratio*" (RB 37:3) in order that it become merciful, charitable, an act of love in our hearts and in our gaze — and then in our behaviour towards our neighbour.

It is as if we were to say to ourselves that we must look to our brother, our sister, the poor and the weak as if we were to scrutinise the sky in order to contemplate the beauty and mystery of the stars and discover our infinite destiny. It is as if we were to call on ourselves to find in the weak brother, the mysterious beauty for which our heart is made, and in which lies concealed our fate, the meaning of our life. The neighbour in need is like the stars for the Bedouin in the desert or for the sailor who navigates by night: only through them comes good direction, which allows us to orient ourselves and arrive at our destination. But the neighbour in need shows us not only a geographical direction, helps us not only to arrive to the end of the journey: our neighbour in need is a star that leads us to the ultimate destiny of life, that leads us into Heaven beyond the stars; that is, to the Father's House.

The human being, from his prehistoric origins, has certainly discovered and developed his religiosity looking at the stars. Lifting his gaze to the starry night sky, he discovered that his heart was made for the infinite, through marvelling in front of the infinite mystery of which the universe is a sign.

For this, not only the term "to consider" comes from the word *sidus*, star, but also the term "desire — *desiderare*." It would seem that "desire" literally means "to detached oneself or to separate oneself from the stars," and therefore to feel their lacking. During the night one is filled with the beauty of the stars, but they disappear in the morning, and then man passes the day in desiring the stars!

I stress the density of meaning in these terms, because this teaches us the density with which St. Benedict conceives everything we are able to do in the service of others. It is as if Benedict were to say to us: "Look, when you treat a patient, when you serve a weak and infirm brother, when you treat with gentleness the elderly and children, when you are patient with their needs, when you lose time and energy over them, you're not only doing a due service, you're not only doing a job: you are instead realising your destiny, that for which you exist, and you satisfy the desire for the infinite in your heart, that desire that awakens itself in you when you contemplate the starry sky, or a sunset, or the immensity of the sea, or snow-capped mountains, or the harmony of a rose ..."

This density of the conception of life is taught to us first of all by Holy Scripture, and manifests itself perfectly in Jesus. A few days ago I quoted Psalm 8:

"When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have fixed in place;  
what is man that you remember him,  
the son of man that you care for him?  
Truly you have made him little less than a god,  
with glory and honour you have crowned him." (Ps 8:4-6)

It is exactly this, the meaning of "always consider the fragility" of one's neighbour. It means having the profound gaze of God who creates the stars and yet He bends down to scrutinise man, to take care of him.

A passage from Psalm 146 also says this, which I find among the most moving of the Psalter:

The Lord "heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.  
He counts the number of stars  
and calls each one by name" (Ps 146:3-4)

It is the same God who creates every star, who knows the infinite number of them, and who busies Himself with the hurt and the brokenhearted of the little human creature. The same infinite love which expresses itself in the creation of the universe, focuses itself on every human heart that suffers, and binds it; that is, occupies itself with it, cares for it, heals it, consoles it.

The mercy of God has this infinite thickness that embraces the totality of reality, and does not lose sight of — it considers — every single heart, every single wound of every heart. And every heart has for Him more value than all the stars, because every heart is created in His image and likeness, is created in order to be merciful like His heart, in order to have a gaze of mercy, a "*pia consideratio*", like Him.

When man contemplates the stars and the infinite sky, he feels a longing, and especially he feels small and insignificant compared to the universe. On the bus once, I heard someone say something terrible: "But deep down, what are all the sufferings of humanity, what are the millions of Jews exterminated by Hitler, in comparison to the infinite dimensions of galaxies, of the universe?". I understood then how the Judeo-Christian revelation is important and humane, that it frees us from a pagan sentiment in front of the universe. Because the revelation given by God to Moses and the Prophets, the revelation that culminates in Christ, saves us from the abyss of melancholy that we experience in front of the stars, revealing to us and proving to us that He who makes the stars and calls each of them by name is the same as He who bends Himself down to say "you" to every little human heart, who bends down to cure the sadness of every human heart; and that for Him each heart is worth more than all the stars, more than the whole universe.

Our God is a God who cares for every wound of our hearts, and at the same time knows the name of every star in the firmament! If we were truly conscious of this, what a profound sentiment we would have of reality, of the whole of reality! Imagine how we would look with a sentiment of unity and totality at every detail of everything! Because there is something that connects the wound of my poor little heart with all of reality, with the last stars of the last galaxy of the universe.

But not in a pantheistic, or materialistic or spiritualistic sense; not in a way that would level out all the beings and to scatter us in the universe like flakes of dust. Because what creates unity, what creates the relationship between my heart and the stars is not matter, nor spirit, but someone, an immense and nevertheless so close and familiar YOU who knows the smallest suffering of the smallest human heart!