

## 9. To cast out one's life in predilection for Christ

“Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some!” (Jn 21:6).

This is the phrase that enlightened me that morning at Fatima, because for the first time I glimpsed the importance of the detail of the “right side” from which Jesus tells them to cast their nets. Up to then I thought that this detail was there only to test the disciples’ precise obedience. It was indifferent whether one fished miraculously to the right or to the left, all the more so since, in the middle of a large lake, the distance between the two sides of a boat is truly insignificant, especially to catch so many fish. But we know that in the Gospel of John all the details are full of meaning.

That morning in Fatima I understood that the detail of the “right side” was neither arbitrary nor technical, but was a call to a preference, a predilection. The “right side,” in the whole Bible, is the better side, the privileged side, the more honored side, the side of friendship, of predilection, and also the more powerful, stronger side. The right in the Bible is, at the same time, the part of affection, of honor, and of power.

Then I understood that, in the face of the aridity of our works, the roughness of our feelings for others, in the face of all that makes the boat of Peter sail fruitlessly, of everything in the members of Christ that tires out and wears down without bearing fruit, making us generally worse than what we are, not only among ourselves and with others, but also with Jesus, so: in the face of all this, the Lord asks us to cast out everything, to invest everything one more time from the right side of the boat, from the side of His preference, from the side of closeness to Him, of friendship with Him. Before all the exterior and interior sterility which we experience, Jesus asks us to obey the offering of his closeness.

Here, indeed, Jesus asks for obedience, precise obedience, without too many reasonings and calculations, – and fortunately the disciple, who knows why, obey without reflecting! –, but Jesus asks us to obey by choosing to “cast” all that is sterile and useless into the space of the “better part,” like Mary of Bethany when she was listening with love to the Master, rather than trouble ourselves like Martha with the many things to do (cf. Lk 10:38–42).

It is no coincidence if right after this call by Jesus, it is precisely the disciple whom He ‘preferred,’ the one who was on the better side in the Upper Room too, who recognizes the Risen one: “It is the Lord!” (Jn 21:7). Of course, he says that because he sees the miracle, but for John the miracle is nothing other than the confirmation or radiating forth of a miracle infinitely greater and more beautiful: that the Word is come to dwell in our midst, to be the Friend who transforms men’s hearts that are indifferent, disappointed, and closed off, into the hearts of disciples who are beloved and are able to love him.

That morning in Fatima, I suddenly thought about the area of “fishing” that has been entrusted to me, about the “ship” in which I am sailing and working, and about the people who are with me on it. I thought, that is, of my Order. Often we have so little to offer to Christ! When He presents himself and asks us for some fruit of our work,

of our labor, of our vocation and mission, and also of our prayer, how little we can offer him! And it is as if we were annoyed with Him again, as if we blamed Him for our sterility, for the little fruit that our lives bear, our being together in his name, our having left everything for Him, our having renounced all to follow his call.

So, in the face of all this, behold how Jesus reaches us always with closeness (“children!”), and asks our tired and weak freedom for an act of possible, simple, light obedience: to cast the empty net from the right side of the boat does not involve any exertion at all. And to cast it to the right rather than to the left makes no difference in the exertion. The only task, the only “effort,” is that of the pure freedom of accepting to do it on the side that He indicates.

But of us, now, is asked a consciousness, an awareness that the choice is not between two sides that are conventionally distinct in space, but is the choice to cast all from the side of Jesus’ preference, from the side of his friendship, of familiarity with Him, of familiarity with God in Him.

This means that what Christ asks of us, more than being heavy and draining, is also something *appealing*. Is it not appealing to live in the realm of Christ’s friendship, of his predilection? But we forget it. That morning even the beloved disciple, John, was tired and disappointed, and he too responded drily “no” to Jesus like the others. He too needed a reminder, needed to hear again the invitation of the Beloved to prefer friendship with Him to everything else, to all the negative and unpleasant appearances of life, of one’s mission.

That day at Fatima, and then in the church where the holy shepherd-children prayed and adored, I thought back to all the “acts” of my vocation which I perform without choosing the better part, neglecting Christ, who continues to invite me familiarly to live everything on the side of closeness to Him.

We even live the liturgical prayers, the Eucharists, the *lectio divina*’s, the monastic silence, the common life, and a thousand other things, while casting the nets on the wrong side, not on the side of Christ’s predilection. And this makes everything sterile, annoying, wearisome, useless, sad.

And yet, it is as if Jesus remained always on the shore of our sea and always reached us, every day, every hour, with the full invitation of affection to stay there by closeness with Him, so that everything change, so that everything become miracle, so that the net and the ship be filled with fish, so that the Church, and the piece of the Church that has been entrusted to us, be fruitful for the Kingdom, for the salvation of the world.

“Children! (...) Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some!”

This invitation remains open, is always renewed, up to the end of our life Jesus renews it. Perhaps we can become insensitive to it, but Christ does not cease to renew it, because He, as we shall see, is “at the right hand of the Father” to always “fish us back out” again. He intercedes for us, casting his net first from the side of the predilection between Him and the Father in the love of the Spirit.