

4. Following in order to let Jesus walk

Jesus makes Peter and the other disciples realize that without metanoia, without a conversion of thought, of feeling, of the sense of things, following Christ would not be true, would not be following, would not go where Jesus goes, would not adhere to what He is, does, says, thinks, loves, suffers, would not even share in his joy.

So we must understand the meaning of this conversion of thought that helps us live our vocation not thinking “in the manner of men” but “in the manner of God”. And the elements necessary for understanding this are given in Jesus’s words to the disciples after correcting Peter (cf. Mt 16:24-27). We must take them back up to understand what they mean for us, for our vocation and mission, what conversion of judgment and so also of life they ask of us.

Right there in Jesus’s reproach to Peter, in the motive that Jesus describes for considering Peter a scandal, an obstacle to His vocation and mission, there is a positive indication of the truth of what it means to follow. Because here Jesus describes Peter’s betrayal, Peter’s true betrayal, more serious than the denial he fell into out of weakness, Jesus describes Peter’s betrayal by giving him a clear judgment on that which our freedom is called to choose. Jesus makes Peter and the disciples realize what sort of crossroads they are at when they want to follow him, and what the only direction that follows Him really is. In fact, he explains the choice that not only follows Jesus, but that lets Him walk in front of us. If one is a scandal for Jesus, a *skandalon*, which literally means “obstacle”, it means he does not let Him walk, that he keeps Him from going on the path of His mission.

Think of what head-stirring importance our following has, our truly following Jesus, and so our vocation, the “yes” we say to our vocation! We are not dealing so much or first of all with making some journey ourselves, of running the good and just path of our life: the issue is nothing less than letting Jesus Christ run His journey in the world, His road, His vocation and mission, those that the Father has given over to Him from eternity.

We do realize this? Are we aware of it? I, I confess, very little, too little. I perceive it in the sense of disorientation that I feel when facing certain situations. That I find myself there asking myself how to continue the journey. That is fine; but if I am asking it of myself and I do not ask Christ, it is an unreal and sterile presumption.

This mystery is not so strange, because it is inherent to the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, who wanted to found the Church as his Body, as a sign and instrument of His redemptive presence in the world. If a member, even the smallest, does not follow Jesus in the scope of the function to which it is called in the living Body of the Church, then that function there, Jesus will not be able to live it, will not be able to unfold there His redemptive mission. It is as if in that area Jesus were impeded from advancing in the world to save it. A member of the mystical Body that does not follow Christ is a scandal that blocks the road of Jesus on the way of his mission.

On the positive side: how great is the mission of each Christian, of each baptized person! Even when it seems that he has who-knows-what importance in the Church and in the world, even when one is called to live as a Christian an entirely ordinary life, totally quotidian, that no one notices, always extraordinary is the fidelity of following within a form of life willed by God and assigned to each, because every fidelity, even a totally fragile fidelity full of slip-ups, allows Christ to take his journey in the world, to penetrate the whole of reality with the Redemption in His Blood, and therefore with the Resurrection, with regeneration in the risen Christ of human reality ruined by sin and death.

Jesus was always on a journey during his earthly life. Even before the public life. Already in the alleys of Nazareth, or in the country of Galilee, His every step was the path of His mission that went forward to save the world. And what a web of itineraries he wove during the three years of his public life! Impossible to reconstruct, so much so that the Gospels at a certain point limit themselves to repeating the refrain: "Jesus went about all the cities and villages" (cf. Mt 9:35). Well, all those paths, those by-ways or main roads, all *continue now*, Christ continues passing through cities, villages, countrysides, deserts, mountains and valleys, and across rivers and seas, to complete His mission, with a heart-wrenching passion for universal salvation. So much so that one of his last words is actually "Go!" (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15), and the final scene of the Gospel of John shows Jesus going off walking, followed by Peter (cf. Jn 21:19-22). *Jesus who walks, followed*: this is the form of the Christ event, of the Kingdom of God that comes now.

The endings of the Gospels of Matthew (28:18-20) and Mark (16:15-20) express the transfer of the mission of Christ to the mission of the Church, the transmission of Christ *going* to the disciples' *going*. Now it is the disciples that continue the Lord's mission, or rather that prolong it in the world. Jesus remains present, even more present, to live His mission in us, His pushing himself further into the whole world to redeem man with the grace of baptism. These texts should be meditated upon with the thought that Christ says this to us as to his apostles, and that they therefore speak of our vocation and mission.

The "outgoing Church" so dear to Pope Francis is "outward bound" from the very beginning, it is the Church in which the disciples, wherever they are, even in a cloister, or nailed to a sick-bed, do not become scandals, obstacles to Christ's going forward in the world to redeem the whole of humanity.

Then we understand that Jesus's harsh reproach to Peter concerns each of us, and we want to understand it, we want to assimilate it, to let ourselves be corrected by it, since nothing worse can happen to us than to be an impediment to Christ's path in redeeming the world. Which then coincides with rendering the Cross meaningless, with a stance of the free will that wants to keep Jesus from dying and rising for the salvation of the world, as Peter wanted to impede him. To empty Christ's mission of meaning is the same as making the paschal mystery meaningless, they are the same satanic opposition to the eternal merciful design of God.