

## 10. Vocation redefines identity

When Jesus called together the twelve disciples, they had already been following for a while. They had already accepted and decided to follow Jesus; they had already heard the whole Sermon on the Mount; they had already seen Jesus do great miracles, heal every sort of illness, including leprosy, resuscitate a little girl, and exercise authority over the storm on the sea. They had already seen him cast out demons, and not just one, but even a legion of demons...

That is why, when he called them together to Himself, to be in His presence, it was as if after all this Jesus wanted to re-center the whole question; as if he wanted to specify the disciples' vocation amid all these events, all these words, all these extraordinary experiences. It is at this point, in fact, that Matthew puts the institution of the Twelve as Apostles, listing their names and nicknames (Mt 10:2-5). Jesus defines their vocation by taking them back to the origin of all that they had seen and heard, to their first encounter, to the essential fascination of His presence, to their first approach to Him, to the first moment of their being called to Him.

“Called to himself the twelve disciples...”

Probably at that moment they were not physically far from Jesus, because, actually, they were already following Him. But they were not centered on Him. As happens to us again and again. They were distant in heart, distracted in their heart, they were not striving to hear His voice and to receive power and mission from Him alone, the power of their mission, the mission of being able to act as He alone could act, the power to express His presence in the world. He calls them back to Himself. He re-centers them on His presence. And the fact that, right afterward, the Gospel reports the list of the names of the Twelve makes us understand that it is only the call, the vocation of Christ and to Christ, that identifies us, that makes us understand what it means to say “I”, to be a person, to have a specific identity.

Think of how St. Benedict speaks to us of the time of Lent. He tells us that it is a time in which we are called to return to the purity of our vocation, because “the life of a monk must maintain at all times the character of a Lenten observance” (RB 49:1), which to him means to await “holy Easter with the joy of spiritual desire” (49:7). This means that, by prayer, silence, reading, mortifications in food and in word, the real point is to let ourselves be called by Jesus again, to return to our first meeting with Him, when his gaze and his voice drew us to say yes to him and to want to follow him always, toward the fullness of life that his Resurrection grants us. And it is this that enables us to be ourselves, because we are ourselves only insofar as Christ defines and saves our “I”.

Christ, who calls us to Himself, is the origin and the substance of our identity. An identity of communion, because Christ calls us together to Him, he *convokes* us to Himself, establishing among us a relation centered on Him that we could never establish among ourselves by our own choice or sympathy, or simply by kinship.

That is how the Christian community is born, and it is only in this way that a community remains Christian, or returns to being Christian when other factors than Christ's calling together to Himself start to motivate our being together, normally with the violence of a voluntaristic moralism, which is to say, with extreme fragility.

The grace is that everything is redefined from the starting point of the vocation that draws us to Christ and with which He sends us. Even the kinship between Peter and Andrew, between James and John, the fact that they are sons of Zebedee, or of Alpheus, or the career that one had, like Matthew who was a tax collector, or the Cananaean origin of Simon. Even the betrayal of Judas... all is redefined by the fact that Christ calls us to Himself, from the moment in which Christ calls us to Himself.

Because all of reality, the whole true face of reality, is Christ who calls us to Himself, is a vocation to be in the presence of Jesus. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself" (Jn 12:32). Life as a whole has its ultimate destiny in the Lord who calls us to Himself. Is this not the Christian definition even of death? "The Lord has called our brother, our sister, to Himself...". The truth and beauty, the meaning, of every experience, of every encounter, of every detail of life, is Christ's calling us to Himself, this convocation to Him that makes us familiar with every human creature, and which gives meaning to all the other creatures too, from the blade of grass to the stars, because Christ calls us to Himself even by means of a blade of grass, even a blade of grass, like the stars, is granted to us by the Mystery that draws us to Himself, is an echo of the Word that created them to draw us to Him.

All of reality is Christ calling us to Himself. It is not just the beautiful things and people, or the beautiful moments, that call us, that draw us, but it is always Christ who calls us to Himself by means of everything, and this makes everything beautiful, every person, it makes every experience intense and eternal, even the gnat I am watching. To live a beautiful experience without feeling called to Him, drawn to Him, makes beauty insubstantial, renders the experience of beauty incomplete. But His presence is so decisive for the fulfillment of human experience that even the mere recognition of this incompleteness, this delusion, this nostalgia for the "unknown God" (cf. Acts 17:23), makes man great, makes him human.

What exhausts us, what makes reality tiresome and draining, is the loss of the sense of this original vocation. We no longer listen to Jesus who calls us to Himself, to Himself and nothing else, not to do this or that, but to Himself, to Him first of all. He who also wants to give us the power, the energy of the Holy Spirit, that is, the grace, to do everything, to fulfill our task beyond what is possible.

St. Benedict wants us to remember this at least each time the signal for the divine Office sounds, so at least ten or so times a day, and he wants us to leave what we are doing to hear the Lord's call. In fact, he says that "nothing should be preferred to the Work of God" (RB 43:3). And we know that this means "to prefer absolutely nothing

to Christ” (RB 72:11; cf. 4:21), or “to hold nothing dearer than Christ” (cf. 5:2), which urges us to obedience without hesitation.

But this teaches us to hear ourselves called in every circumstance of our day, when a guest calls upon us, or a poor person, or a pilgrim, or the abbot and every brother and sister of our community. The whole rule wants to teach us to hear ourselves called by Christ in every occasion and instant of our life, that is, to live everything as a vocation.

But this is the essence of every Christian vocation, founded on baptism. And of all the gestures that the Church refers to us: prayer, the divine Office, the sacraments, silence, *lectio divina*, community life, and in family life too for the laity, or in the ecclesial and catholic, that is universal, dimension with which one lives out solitude... All is Jesus who calls us to Himself, and an aid in corresponding to this calling. Who calls us to Himself, to give us what is impossible, to express the impossible, to accomplish the “mission impossible” that he entrusted first of all to the Apostles so that the whole Church could take it on, without forgetting that it is impossible, and therefore that one cannot be faithful to the mission without fidelity to the vocation that draws us to Christ and that’s it.