

12. Defined more by Christ than by ourselves

Peter's mistaken position regarding Jesus when He announced his passion, death, and resurrection was that Peter did not want to allow the Christ event to define him more than he wanted to define Christ. Judas too betrayed Jesus when he realized that Jesus did not correspond to his expectations, to his feeling about things. It's just that, unlike Peter, Judas did not limit himself to opposing the Christ event: he wanted to destroy it, he wanted to empty it of meaning, render it completely irrelevant, cancel it. Peter had the candor to express to Christ the objection that he felt in himself against the modality of the event, and so he allowed the event to be affirmed, even against him, or against what he thought he was. And thus the Christ event could hit Peter again, with even more overwhelming force. And Peter realized how much Christ defined him, defined his "I", his relationships, and the whole of reality, even more strongly than before.

When our vocation does not affect our life, the problem is not so much what we are or are not, but the fact that the event of Christ, dead and risen, does not define us more than we define ourselves. At times I am left bewildered by the extreme and insane consequences of some people's leaving their vocation. But when you look at it more closely, you realize that the true problem is not fragility, but the fact that the Christ event, which in a vocation should be everything, like the mother's womb for the fetus, did not define the self-awareness, and so the whole, more than other factors. Other factors, even quite noble ones perhaps, but which do not coincide with the Christ event. "Things of earth," writes St. Paul. "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. *Set your minds* [he uses the verb *phronein*] on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col 3:1-2).

The "things of earth" does not necessarily mean low, worthless, contemptible things. But things that are not the Christ event. They are destined to receive a hundred-fold value from the Christ event, but they do not coincide with it. But who decides their value? Our heart, our "I" that lets itself be defined by the Christ event more than by these other things, and thus allows the Christ event to define them, to give them the meaning they have in function of the whole, and the whole is the risen Christ.

When you realize that insane infidelity is the fruit of this, then we understand that none of us is vaccinated against these extreme consequences, because allowing ourselves to be defined more by Jesus than by all the rest begins with the most banal distractions. Or, you realize that a person, a monk, a nun, never allowed herself to walk toward this sense of the things of God because she lacked from the beginning an education to put the Christ event at the center of her life and herself more than anything else.

It is depressing to notice that even in monasteries sometimes not even the years of initial formation, like the time of the novitiate, are truly consecrated to this. There is as it were a hurry to do other things, to concern oneself with something else. But this comes from the fact that often even those who form have not been formed to give Christ more room than all the rest for defining the person. But when one does not have this experience at the beginning, it's like someone who gets married without being in love with that woman, with that man, on account of which the heart's feelings are right away defined by another, drawn by another, and most of all by one's self.

One must therefore always begin from an education of the self toward the memory of what it has encountered and has called it to follow. This experience of the Christ event should become a kind of work on ourselves, and so on our relationship with all and with the whole.

When we say that the event defines us, in Christianity this means "that it become incarnate in us". Mary is the model of every fulfilled vocation because she is the paradigm of a person, of an "I", of a body, of a soul and a spirit, in which the Christ event was able to be incarnated all the way, was able to make itself present all the way. That is, with obviousness, with its own obviousness, with Christ's. Christ, through the Virgin Mary, was able to manifest Himself with complete obviousness. Through Mary Christ was made manifest. And this is sanctity. A saint is greater or lesser according to the measure in which the incarnation of Christ makes itself evident in him or her, the presence of Christ becomes manifest.

But, paradoxically, it is this which accentuates the "I" of a person, that makes it fascinating for others. In fact, God does not call body doubles, or manikins to simulate a human presence. He calls the person, the "I", with all its liberty and its desire for happiness, thus of self-realization.

St. Benedict asks for this from the very beginning, and this means from the "I" of each person who feels called and wants to follow his vocation. St. Benedict asks that, at the door of the monastery, a man come to knock, an "I", an "I" that comes with its whole self, uncensored, and above all that it come with a thirst for life and happiness (cf. RB Prol. 15), because if one does not want life and happiness one does not want Christ, does not want Christ's incarnation in himself. Christ becomes incarnate, in fact, to bring completeness to the life and happiness of each man.

When Jesus calls us to follow him, in reality he comes to respond to the desire for life and happiness that we bear in our heart. Feeling a vocation, the human heart emerges as if from the waves of the sea to show that it is there, and that it is there exactly as a seeking for life, as seeking for salvation. And it is then that, in man, the "I", an identity, his personal being, is affirmed.