

14. The value of our unity

What I have sought to emphasize in meditating briefly on chapter seventeen of the Gospel of John is that Christ's culminating desire, the culmination of his mission, and thus the fundamental desire of the Father, of the whole Trinity, concerning us, is that we receive and live out to the end and for eternity the communion of God among us.

The culmination of the Christ's supreme prayer, and thus the essential intention for which Jesus accepted suffering and dying for us on the Cross, is that the disciples "be one as the Father and Son are one" (cf. Jn 17:21-23). As has been said, it is on this that the acceptance of Christ's mission and its realization in the whole world depends: "that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (17:23).

We do not realize how important our unity is! Jesus speaks of being "completely one," "perfect in unity," which one could translate literally: "finalized in one," "completed in one." In Latin it is translated: "*consummati in unum*." It is the same verb, in Greek and Latin, as when Jesus cries out on the Cross, before breathing his last: "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30). He had just said, "I thirst!" (Jn 19:28), expressing to the very end his most acute desire, which was not so much to have a drink but what he had expressed in the priestly prayer, the desire that, from all eternity, he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit: the desire for our perfection in the unity of the love of God.

I have the impression, at least when I examine myself, that we are not aware of the burning importance of our unity, of unity among us, among all disciples, and among all human beings, the unity that Christ asked the Father for not just in words but offering his whole life to the last breath and the last drop of blood. Perhaps it is precisely at this level that we are superficial, distracted, thoughtless. We are concerned with a thousand things, but not enough for "the one thing necessary," for the *unum necessarium*, as Jesus says to Martha (Lk 10:42). And the one thing necessary is unity itself, the communion of the disciples on account of which we are granted participation in Trinitarian communion. Perhaps Jesus reminded Martha not only or not so much that she should not worry about so many things to the detriment of Mary's contemplation, but to the detriment of the fraternal unity with her sister that Jesus came to offer her with his presence in their house.

And so it is important for us to explore more deeply what this unity means, and how we are granted to live it out, to grow in it, to experience it. The issue is not just the peace of the Church, of communities, and also the peace of the world. The issue is our ultimate destiny, the issue is eternal life, the issue is our also being where Jesus is, in unity with the Father in the love of the Spirit.

When Jesus speaks of our unity, and prays for it, it is as if he situated it between the Trinity and the world, that is, situated it where He is, as the one sent by the Father to save the world. Jesus presents the disciples' unity as a *sine qua non* means of transmitting the salvation that the Trinity wants to grant to the whole world. This means that the disciples' unity is what determines the outcome of the mission of Christ the Redeemer, and thus of every mission in and of the Church. Without fraternal communion the saving mission of Christ is not accomplished, the mission for which the Father sent the Son into the world. In fact, the first sign that the mission of Christ is realized, conquering every hostility, conquering death and sin, is the gift of the Holy Spirit that the Risen One gives to the disciples. And the Holy Spirit immediately creates among the disciples the "perfection in unity" that Jesus asked for at the Last Supper. The first Christian community of Jerusalem is right away a sign of this perfection that is possible on account of the Spirit and in virtue of the death and resurrection of the Lord. A perfection, however, that always needs to be received again and realized, and which will be fulfilled only at the end of time.

When we meditate on the first Christian community, in the Acts of the Apostles or in the apostolic letters, we see that it was perfect and imperfect at the same time. The disciples were from the start "one heart and one soul" and "everything was common among them" (Acts 4:32), that is, no spiritual or material good divided them. But we see that from the very start this unity granted by the Spirit was in need of continual repair, restoration, reconstruction. Why? Perhaps because the Father was no longer listening or listening badly to his Son's intense prayer, or was not fulfilling the sacrifice of his life for it? Certainly not. Rather, the disciples' unity is a reality that passes through every freedom, the freedom of each heart, of each disciple, and thus must as it were begin again and be put back together starting with each of the faithful, each new member of the Body of the Lord. For this reason, even in the first writings of the Church, you pass immediately from the description of the first community's ideal of communion to advice for living it out, for being ever converted again to it. And this is always true, up to today, from the magisterium of St. Peter to the magisterium of Pope Francis, and onwards to the end of time.

In this sense, it is useful for us to meditate on the Rule of St. Benedict, as also on the works of our Cistercian authors, like St. Bernard, St. Aelred, etc., in light of this essential theme of unity as the most precious experience and at the same time the most fragile in living out Christianity, in living out our vocation and mission.