

## 17. Entering into the prayer of Jesus

Jesus' prayer in our flesh opens Heaven to the world so that the Spirit can descend upon it, with the beauty and peace of the dove, and the Father can say to every sinner who unites himself to his Son, and whom the Son unites to himself with baptism: "You are beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Lk 3:22).

I was saying that St. Luke "pauses" on this scene, on this image. In the end he invites us to stop before the mystery of Jesus' prayer, and to enter into it, to penetrate into it. Because we always have the tendency not to stop to enter truly into the mystery of Christ. We run toward what we desire, what we want to obtain, what we want to possess. We also run toward all that Christ came to bring to the world, for example his salvation. But it is as if we were running in front of Him, as if we had surpassed Jesus to obtain what he gives us. We forget that all that Christ has brought is "enclosed" in Him, and we cannot possess it except in Him, in his presence, in his love, in his Body, in his Heart. St. Paul says it very clearly, writing to the Colossians: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him" (Col 2:9-10).

What can be more precious in Christ than his communion with the Father in the Spirit, and hence his prayer? Whoever enters into the prayer of Christ, enters into his eternal love, and into all that the Son asks, obtains, and receives from the Father for Himself and for us all. Thus, I was saying, the first thing that St. Benedict and all our fathers, mothers, and masters want to teach us is precisely this pausing in order to enter into Christ, who receives us with an open heart, indeed with a torn heart, into his communion of prayer and love with the Father.

It would be enough to cite the end of chapter seventy-two of the Rule: "Let them put absolutely nothing before Christ, and may he lead us all together to eternal life" (RB 72:11-12).

To "put before" or "prefer" something to Christ implies the choice or the tendency to put before Him, and thus between Him and us, something that is not Him. It is like creating a distance, a distance of time, or of interests, between our heart and the person of the Lord. It means affirming that something other than Him is more important for us; maybe even just for a minute, but this is enough because in fact we choose and decide that He is not the most important treasure of our life. Certainly, in theory we affirm that He is all, and we are convinced in the depth of our heart that He alone saves us and that he is the Lord of the universe and of history. But now, in this little moment, in this small circumstance, it is like we make a parenthesis, as if we were to say to the Lord: "Wait a moment, give me time, let me finish what I am doing, what I am thinking, what I am saying, then I will give you the attention you deserve!" As if he did not always deserve our complete attention right away!

But the Rule shows us that St. Benedict, like the whole monastic tradition, was aware that we have this tendency, to make Christ wait, especially in prayer, when the issue

is entering into his prayer. In fact the Rule asks us in the same terms and the same tone to “prefer nothing to Christ” and to “prefer nothing to the Work of God,” that is, to common prayer (cf. RB 43:3). For after all St. Benedict is aware and convinced that the first and fundamental gift that we receive in Christ is his prayer, his relationship with the Father.

But St. Benedict does not have a dualistic conception that distinguishes prayer from life, prayer from work, prayer from human relationships, with the brothers or with the poor who knock at the door. Why? Because St. Benedict, like all the saints, knew from experience that it is through the prayer of Christ that we receive all the rest, that all the rest is a gift of the Father, and that all the rest can be lived as Jesus lived it, receiving it as a gift of God.

The dualism between prayer and life, between action and contemplation, between daily life and spirituality, is a dualism between *our* prayer and *our* life, between *our* action and *our* contemplation, between *our* spirituality and *our* daily life. But if we accept the gift of participating in the prayer of the Son of God, this dualism is overcome, for the prayer of Jesus is a relationship that, in his love for the Father, embraces the whole of life, all activity, all daily life. How does it embrace them? By receiving them from the Father, receiving all as his gift, as his work, as his providence.

But this means that we truly enter into the prayer of Jesus if, in it, we are disposed to receive all that Jesus asks of the Father and receives from Him. To understand what this means or should mean for us, let us return to chapter seventeen of St. John. As I have said, it is the longest prayer of Jesus to the Father that the Gospels recount. If we want to pause truly before Jesus praying after his baptism in the Jordan and enter into the mystery of his prayer, this chapter of John must become an object of special meditation.

One thing must be noted, however. In the Gospel Jesus does not teach us many “prayer techniques.” The gestures and forms of his prayer were not particularly original. Jesus prayed like devout Jews of his time. He liked to withdraw in silence and in the night time. It is said he sometimes prayed on his knees. Certainly he prayed with the psalms, which he knew by memory. Regarding the times and moments of Jesus’ prayer the Gospel does not enter into details, but just says that one must “pray always, without losing heart” (Lk 18:1). So, as indeed St. Luke says in the scene of the Baptism, Jesus “was standing in prayer,” was an *orans*, whatever he did. Jesus was living prayer. He lived in prayer and prayer embraced his whole life and everything in his life.

Since it was a relationship of love with the Father, Christ’s prayer was by its nature greater than his earthly life, permeated it and embraced it all. His whole life was unified by his relationship with the Father, by his state of filial prayer. Jesus was the first to correspond in every instant to the Father’s desire to have “worshippers... in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:23).