

19. Nothing is impossible for God

“Nothing is impossible for God” (Lk 1:37), the angel says to Mary, who had maybe opened her eyes wide at the news that her old cousin was six months pregnant. But Mary believes right away, she believes right away in what she has always believed: that for God all is possible. It is sufficient reason for belief that if God is God, all is possible for Him. But it is in working out this truth of simple and evident faith that we often have trouble believing. We believe that everything is possible for God, we repeat it continually when we define him as “omnipotent,” but that in this “all” is included what we are asking for, that in “all” is included also the changing of our hearts, of our feelings, above all our feelings toward our enemies, that in “all” is included changing our brother or sister who seems incorrigible to us, this we have a hard time believing.

And that is where we are lacking faith. It is not such about the existence of God that we doubt; it is not so much that He is omnipotent, Creator of all things, that we doubt. We doubt that this omnipotent God can change a little heart of stone, a little circumstance in which we are having trouble, a relationship in which love is not being shared, thoughts in which truth is not dwelling. There, we struggle to believe that all is possible for God. It is absurd, but it is so!

Mary, by contrast, needs no proof: she believes right away that God’s omnipotence was able to make the womb of an old and sterile woman fertile.

So, the great omnipotence of God can and will heal our freedom too, our heart. And this is, deep down, His first work, the first new thing that only He can do, for the sake of which we go to meet him in the morning, for the sake of which we go right away to the “Work of God” of our first prayer, and for which we spur each other on. Because if God changes our heart, if he makes our heart new, the whole day will be new, will be full of light, of beauty, of goodness; all of reality will be new, made new by the work of God.

As the Lord says through the prophet Ezekiel: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ez 36:26–27).

The newness of flesh compared to rock is that human flesh is not the fruit of the sedimentation of minerals, but rather is a creature molded directly by God and animated by his vital breath (cf. Gen 2:7). The passage of Ezekiel describes something like a new creation of Adam in us. God gives us a heart made by Him and animated by his Spirit, a heart capable of doing His will, that is, of working as God works, of doing what God does or wishes to do through us in the world.

Freedom is recreated in the sense that obedience to God is no longer a constriction for man, but is like a spring that flows from the heart, a choice that the heart knows how to express. The heart is no longer a rock on which the ten commandments are written, but a person who lives out the laws of God, who makes them his own, who adheres with love to the Father's will. The freedom of God becomes interior to man, becomes the freedom of man. It is as if the heart of man became a spontaneous spring of God's will, of the working of God in him and in the world.

The great work of God, the great new thing that God does in us, is the conversion of our heart, of our freedom.

This is the most urgent work not only for us but for the whole world. The passage of Ezekiel on the transformation of the heart of stone into a heart of flesh, which, in the liturgy, is used as a canticle, is preceded by a verse that is not cited often, but which makes us understand the universal breadth of the conversion of our heart: "I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes" (Ez 36:23).

Pope Francis recently reminded us of this with his "Letter to the People of God," which calls all the faithful to prayer and penance for the grave failures of good witness on the part of members of the Church herself, for example with the scandal of abuses. Yes, often it is we, Christians, religious, priests, bishops, who, as Ezekiel says, profane the Name of God, that is, his loving and salvific Presence, among the nations, in the world. The members of the Church, called to transmit the presence and the gift of Christ the Redeemer of man, are a scandal instead, an obstacle to belonging to Him, to accepting the Salvation that He offers to all from the Cross.

But God does not say: "Enough, with you I cannot manage anything good! I will transmit my Salvation through others, or in another way than through the Church and her ministers!" No, God remains faithful to his method of saving the world, he remains faithful to the mystery of announcing Christ through the Christian community, through the ecclesial and therefore human Body of the Lord. God says ever anew, as in Ezekiel: "So the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes" (Ez 36:23b). God shows the world ever anew the sanctity of his Name through those who, indeed, have profaned His presence among the nations.

What a strange method! What an absurd method God has for making himself present, for making himself known ever anew!

But it has also been like this. God remained faithful to the choice of his people Israel, notwithstanding all their infidelities; and Jesus remained faithful to the choice of his apostles, to the choice of Peter, notwithstanding all their infidelities, notwithstanding all the abandonments and denials, notwithstanding the continual failures of his disciples' faith. Jesus did not expel even Judas from the group of the twelve apostles: it is he who abandoned Jesus, it is he who chose not to belong anymore to the setting of his vocation and mission. What a mystery!

Actually, precisely the infidelities, precisely the fact that the disciples are the first to betray and fail in coherence and faith, precisely through this God makes them instruments to manifest himself to the world. How? "I will show my holiness in you!" says the Lord. And how does this happen? By recreating their heart, making them human again, made by God like Adam, a heart petrified by infidelity, by lack of faith, by corruption. God manifests in us his holiness before the world, with the gift of the Spirit who converts our hearts. The conversion of heart is the great manifestation of God's holy and omnipotent Presence to the world.

So we understand that the conversion of heart in living the monastic life that St. Benedict asks us to promise solemnly in the vow of "*conversatio morum*" (cf. RB 58:17), is the great missionary work, the fundamental mission in the midst of the world that God entrusts to us, as he entrusts it to each Christian, in every state of life.

When Jesus begins his mission by crying out, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (Mt 4:17), basically he calls all to become missionaries of the Kingdom, to become, among the nations, the sign that God saves by converting hearts. Whoever receives grace and the task of conversion becomes a witness that the Kingdom of Heaven is near, he manifests, that is, the salvific and sanctifying presence of God in the world.

And today this is more urgent than ever. And for this reason God has called us, has given us a vocation. And we must not live our vocation for any other goal than for this, for any other goal than manifesting the holiness of God by accepting the conversion of heart that the Spirit wants to work in us.