

22th Chapter Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for MFC - 20/09/2014

"I met the guards who were making the rounds in the city, they beat me, they wounded me (...). I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, tell him that I am sick with love!" (Song 5:7-8).

It is as if the bride has been "infected" by the wound of love of the heart of the Bridegroom; it is as if she has caught his ...virus. It is the virus of compassion, of suffering with the beloved, of loving to the point of enduring with, to the point of suffering with the other, to the point of letting oneself be conquered by the suffering of the beloved.

This compassion is the profound nature of the suffering of God for the human person; fundamentally, it is the only way God can suffer for the human person, and therefore the purest way of our suffering with Him if we are united to His Heart, if we receive the wounded Heart of Christ.

Pope Benedict reminded us in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*: "Bernard of Clairvaux coined the marvelous expression: *Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis* – God cannot suffer, but he can *suffer with* [*Sermones in Cant., Serm. 26,5*]. The human person is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to *suffer with* humans in an utterly real way – in flesh and blood – as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus' Passion. Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with us*; hence *con-solatio* is present in all suffering, the consolation of God's compassionate love – and so the star of hope rises." (*Spe Salvi*, 39).

St. Bernard created this expression, and this profound theological thought in his Sermon 26 on the Song of Songs, where he gives vent to his grief over his brother Gerard's death. He says: "God is love, and the more one is joined to God, the more one is full of charity. And even though, God cannot suffer, this does not mean he is devoid of compassion (*impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis*); he is always merciful and forgiving."

He continues, turning to his deceased brother: "So you, who are joined to the Merciful, need to be merciful, even if you are no longer in misery; and you, who no longer suffer, nevertheless you can 'suffer with'. Your affection, therefore, has not decreased, but has been transformed, when you received your new garment from God, you were not released from caring for us, as, in fact God himself takes care of us. You cast off what is weak, not what is pious. And then, charity never fails" (*Sermons on the Song of Songs*, 26:5).

What Bernard says about the state of his deceased brother, also applies to our mystical participation with the Heart of Christ. The mystical life anticipates eternal life as well as our relationship with God. Christian mysticism is a new relationship with God in Christ from which flows a new relationship with

everyone else, because "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16). The result is a new way of loving, in which God's relationship with all of humanity dominates us. This relationship is a relationship of compassion and consolation, as pointed out by Benedict XVI.

In this regard I would say that the two translations of Song 4:9 – You have seized my heart..., You have wounded my heart... – would seem to overlap, to coincide. With a glance at Christ, we capture His Heart, because we provoke his compassion, or rather we open ourselves to it, we let it gush forth on us. Knowing the mystery of the Heart of God, we discover his divine suffering for the world, which is his limitless compassion. It is the Augustinian etymology of the word "*miser cordia* –mercy": "to give one's heart to those in misery." I would say that the love of God revealed by Jesus Christ is the meeting of "com-compassion", that is, "suffering with" with "*con-cordia*, that is "heart-with-heart". The love of God is a suffering with the other which is a uniting of one's own heart with the heart of the other. It is this love which is full of compassion and concord that must animate the communion of Christians, as illustrated in the Acts of the Apostles when they speak of the community as a place of concord in prayer and in which each person takes care of the needs of the other (cf. At 1:14, 4:32).

This compassion has its sole and absolute source in Christ crucified and risen, as manifested in the Upper Room on the evening of the day of the Resurrection, when Jesus appeared and gave his peace, showed his wounded side, and breathed on his disciples the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jn 20:19-23). This spring that gushes forth spreads out, it grows becoming a stream, a river and a sea. So we too, if we allow ourselves to be enveloped by it, find ourselves necessarily taking part in the spreading of his compassion to all human beings and all creation. And this source is such that the more we participate in its diffusion, the more we find ourselves in it, the more we are focused on it. Because the wider Christ's compassion toward humankind spreads, the more the power of this source is seen, the more the charity of the Bride, that is, the Church, is expressed in the world, the more the Heart of Christ is manifested to the world.

It is this compassion, this consolation that Christ spreads throughout the world, that humanizes the world, as I hope you recall what Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "It is urgent to recover a *contemplative* spirit, that allows us to rediscover each day that we are custodians of an asset that humanizes, which helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others." (264)

Only the compassion of Christ humanizes the world. He humanizes it if we, his disciples, experience his compassion and transmit it with our lives lived in the love of Christ.

I would like to add an observation that I think is important with regard to the mysticism of our Cistercian fathers and mothers, and not only them. The idea that to wound the heart of Christ is the glance of the beloved: "You have wounded my heart ... with just one of your glances," helps us to understand why in Cistercian mysticism the aspect of reparation is not so strong in the devotion to the pierced Heart of Jesus and the devotion to the Crucified's wounds. This is because it is not man's sin and hostility that wounds the Heart of God, but rather God himself who "is wounded" because of his infinite sensitivity regarding our love, our glance of love, that is, our relationship with Him. It is not the offense that wounds the Heart of Christ, but rather the joy of receiving the gift of our glance, of our attention. Therefore, it is not a guilty reparation that must prevail, but a sensitivity to the passionate desire of God in our regard. If we have to repair something with regards to the Heart of Christ, it is our neglect of Him, our forgetfulness of Him, our not realizing that He loves us and desires us to point of suffering.