

## 20. The unleavened bread of the Eucharist

I give an example of how the memory of Christ makes you taste life, an example that was and remains very meaningful to me. In February 2015 I guided some spiritual exercises for priests, and one participant was a young man who had studied physics and who, at the end of these exercises, entered the seminary of Barcelona. Ten days later, however, on February 21 of 2015, Marcos Pou Gallo died in an accident. The day after the end of the exercises and his entry into the seminary, Marcos had written me an e-mail in which, among other things, he told me: "Your lessons are already accompanying me in the first challenges of seminary. Suddenly I face them with a more positive view; let's pray it continues this way. Like when I was getting out of the shower this morning, there are only two minutes of hot water, and my room is the north pole. So I got out of the shower at 6:45 in the morning with a first reaction of anger, but in that moment I remembered the "patiences" and this word came to my mind, as if Christ himself had spoken it: "But did you not want to give me your life? And is this not part of the form that you are given to give me your life?", and I lived the moment with a sense of taste" (2.12.2015).

Where did the possibility come from, the experience of living out with a sense of taste the first unpleasant detail of the morning, which usually, for "normal" people, that is for each of us, can ruin the whole day, putting us in a bad mood, making us capriciously desire "revenge" against everything that comes up to us? It was not an effort of good will, nor a pain-loving resignation, but the upspring of the memory of Christ, formed by his family and his community, from work on what the Church says to us (which in this case also came through my lesson about Christian patience), but, above all, exercised as the memory of Christ who is present. Christ, therefore, not just evoked, not just remembered, as an example of life, but present there, in that moment, "getting out of the shower", in the frozen room. That word that recalled him to the sense of that circumstance Marcos heard Jesus himself say in direct language, Jesus present there to speak to you intimately. And what recalled to him this living memory of Christ? His vocation and his freedom; his freedom that desires to be given to Christ, his heart, drawn by Christ who died and rose, by Christ who alone conquers death with a greater life, beginning with the "death" of an unpleasant circumstance which, normally, ruins so much or so little of life, the life that one takes up by getting up in the morning. The memory of His meaningful presence means that he proposes to us a truth for our life, he puts our freedom back in harmony with our vocation, the desire of our heart with the call to give our life for Christ.

And this is what unleashes the taste of life – "...and I lived the moment with a sense of taste" –, what gives us the possibility to live each circumstance as a good for ourselves and for Christ, and so for the whole world. The taste of life is an experience of gladness that we are given to share with Jesus who is present.

Deep down, the point is to agree to be taken more than to give ourselves, because in giving ourselves some project of our own is always mixed in, some project that is

never free from the desire for realizing ourselves for our own sake, which is illusory, unreal, because we are not created for ourselves. And that dissatisfaction that we often feel for our present situation, our situation in our community, for example, the task that has been entrusted to us, the brothers and sisters with whom we must live, is perhaps part of the purification of our freedom, until it can abandon itself like a sail to the wind of God's project. Then God will bring about the project that is his, that is also great, always great if it is His; he will bring it about even in the smallest things, in the things that "are not", as Paul says of the members of the Christian community (cf. 1 Cor 1:27-29).

This year I met Fr. Ibrahim of Aleppo, a Franciscan, who impressed me with his gentleness, peace, and joy. He said that, in Aleppo, when they had no more food, electricity, water, and the bombs were falling, they understood that the only solution was to abandon themselves to God, and from that point on their lives were always a miracle. This must happen for each of us, and we should not be content with anything less than this, than *this*, not than some increase that is just an addition or multiplication of what we have and plan. To be sure, it is good to desire a full and interesting life, but our mistake is to desire it like the fermentation of enzymes that are already in us, rather than as a gift of the Spirit that descends upon the offering of our self-abandonment.

Perhaps that is why one needs unleavened bread for the Eucharist... When I think about it, I realize that I love all that is "unleavened" in my life: dead time, long trips in which I am too tired to work, meetings that demand patience rather than fill me with satisfaction, or the anonymous encounters that leave no trace, the poor and simple praying of the psalms, of the rosary, the continual invocation of the heart, or the useless and hidden labors, like packing a suitcase... It is like an objective offering of life that the Lord grants us to prepare in and around us the unleavened bread in which He will descend, the unleavened and tasteless bread to be transformed into His Presence and Love.

When we pray the Angelus, we should always think of the poor, unleavened daily life in which the Trinity was totally enwrapped with the human. Mary lived with this memory of God's presence which gave taste to each instant, starting with her humble heart.

Christ gives life a taste by transforming it with His presence, enacted by the Holy Spirit, just like the unleavened bread of the Eucharist. Maturity is not found where we manage to do more, but where we offer more, offer ourselves more, offer the reality of our human condition by discovering that it is the material of Christ who makes himself really present to redeem the world. Baptism already changed us in this way, made our person, our body, our life "material" to allow Christ to make himself present in the world as Redeemer. But it is precisely the unleavened bread that highlights that the principle of fermentation, that which transforms the material, is the divine Presence itself.