

20. Concern for conversion of heart

If the conversion of our heart has such a universal importance, if on it depends the manifestation of God's holiness to the world, we must then ask ourselves if we effectively give it this importance.

Do we really take seriously what we promise solemnly at the moment of Profession? Is it truly important for us? Is it truly important for the community that receives us and ratifies our vows? Are we truly concerned for each other about conversion of heart? Do we fraternally spur each other for the work of God, not only and not so much for getting up in the morning to pray, but for the work that God wants to complete in the heart of each brother and sister, for the deep work that the Spirit wants to complete in each of us?

Let us ask ourselves with sincerity: am I really concerned for the conversion of my brother, of my brothers and sisters in the community, and for the conversion of all?

It is a question that all should put to themselves, in every state of life and vocation, for example regarding one's own wife or husband, one's own children, siblings, friends, colleagues: does the conversion of their heart have a place in my heart, does the work of the Spirit in him or her have place in my heart, the work of transforming the heart of stone to a heart of flesh, made by God to live in His image and likeness, to live on his divine love?

For this question coincides with another, which is: Does the other's true happiness have a place in my heart? Do I love my neighbor as myself, desiring the deep happiness of their heart as I normally desire my own? But often, as I desire the happiness of my own heart in a mistaken way, so also I desire a false happiness for others too. And I desire my own and others' happiness in a mistaken way when I do not desire that God change my heart and the other's heart, when I am not disposed to let the Holy Spirit transform our heart of stone into a heart of flesh, into a heart formed by the Lord, *sensitive* – precisely because it is of flesh and no longer of stone – to the point of letting itself be wounded by the Word of God, by God who, through his Word, Christ, creates us and recreates us, and which, for this reason, draws us into the desert, as Hosea puts it so well: "Therefore, I will now persuade her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart" (Hos 2:14).

For, as Ezekiel and the whole Bible suggest to us, it is on this that the manifestation of God's holiness in the world depends; it depends on this for the name of the Lord, that is, his salvific presence, not to be profaned but adored, and therefore received and able to act and save humanity.

Let us be honest: often in community there is more concern for helping each other work, for making the monastery function, or for singing the divine office decently, etc., or even just not bothering each other too much, more than concern for helping each other reciprocally to be converted, more than concern for conversion of heart, more than concern that the heart of each member of the community be a living heart and not a heart of flesh.

What is a living heart? A living heart is a free heart, a heart capable of love, a happy heart, a heart that repents of its sins, a heart that is attentive, that listens, a heart sensitive to the need of others, a merciful heart, a heart that perceives how much Christ

is in love with us. A living heart is a meek and humble heart, like Jesus's, that is, a heart that does not seek self-affirmation, but affirmation of God and the brothers. A living heart is an undivided heart, which loves with fidelity, without running away, even if it takes effort. A living heart, above all, is a heart that lets itself be created by God at each heartbeat, that lets itself be formed by the Lord to His image, a heart, that is, that loves the God who loves it.

Are we concerned about this for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters?

Let us notice that when Ezekiel speaks of this heart recreated by Spirit he defines it as a "new heart" (Ez 36:26). And the principal characteristic of this "newness" of heart consists in the fact that this heart *is a gift of God*, is given to us by God: "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."

The true and deep newness that we can experience is that of being a gift of God, that God gives us what we are in our depth, our deepest "I." Our heart is not an organ, a muscle, and not even a bundle of nerves or of psychological feelings, but rather the point of our self-awareness in which we recognize that we are a gift of God. We are a gift of God at the center of ourselves, at the root of ourselves, and so in all that we are, have, and live. For this reason the heart is also the seat of our joy, of our happiness, since what makes us happy is knowing that we are loved, knowing that we are given, and our heart is given to us in order to be aware of this. Joy in us is the gratitude that springs from the experience of being a gift of God, and only this gratitude, this awareness, makes us capable of loving with gratuity, transmitting the superabundance of what fills our heart.

It is not necessary for this awareness to be always sentimental, that is, perceived sentimentally. St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta passed her life overflowing upon others with the awareness of being a gift of God, without feeling the sentiment of it. Faith is deeper than feelings. But thanks to God, our little faith is helped by the feeling of being loved which God makes us experience, often through others.

This "newness" of heart is the true youth of man. A youth that does not depend on age, or which, rather, is experienced more and better by the old than by the young. The Church is preparing for the Synod of Bishops on the theme: "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment." How important it is, however, that the young be helped to find that true youth is a "new heart," a heart given by God. There are young people who bear this witness to "older" people in an exceptional way, and who thus enable others to receive conversion of heart from God, and so also a new youth. As there are old people who bear witness to the young about youth of the heart. But for all it is important to understand youth, newness, at the root, where God wants to and always can renew people's heart, at whatever age, in whatever condition they may be found.

A great effort is made in the Church to understand the new generations, so different on the surface from the preceding ones. But one must not lose the profound level of the mystery of man of every time and culture, of every age and condition: only God is able to make us new at heart, only God grants us a new heart, and he wants to do this always, always anew, and it is this that reveals his sanctity in the world: "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).