

21. The diffusion of availability

What changes the value and taste of our life, of what we are or are not, is Christ who takes us, offers us, blesses us, breaks us, and gives us, and this is the greatness of a life, whatever one ends up having to live through. In order to live with this memory, the Eucharist is always at the center of our Christian and monastic life. And this is what is extraordinary about Christianity, the ever flavorful taste that faith makes possible: that everything in our life has been made to be taken and transformed by the Spirit into the presence of Christ who redeems the world by offering it to the Father.

A center, however, is alive, is luminous, if it diffuses itself. For this reason, another important aspect of the memory that confirms the presence in our life of the sentiments of Jesus the Redeemer, I would say is availability, work as availability. It is directly linked to what I was describing when I spoke of the taste of life, and practically coincides with it, but it is a position that concerns more directly the theme of work, of work as a service toward the activity of Another, as responsibility. He who offers the present moment to the presence of Christ, unfailingly finds himself involved in His action even with his own capacity to act, to engage in activity, with the talents that he has received, the initiative that he must take.

In chapter 5 of his Rule, on obedience, St. Benedict says that perfect obedience is immediate obedience, without hesitation. He says that “this is fitting for those who have nothing dearer to them than Christ” (RB 5:2). But he adds other levels to establish it, to give substance to the preference for Christ: “Because of the holy service they have professed, [that is, the task professed publicly by some form of vocation], or because of dread of hell [this motive is less in fashion when it comes to nurturing fidelity, but let us not forget that it is a motive which Jesus also often insisted upon in the Gospel] and for the glory of everlasting life [that is, Paradise, the eternal destiny of glory that is reserved for us by Christ in Heaven], as soon as the superior orders something, as if God himself were speaking, they cannot put up with even the smallest delay in execution” (RB 5:3-4).

Think of the deep breath of awareness that St. Benedict proposes to his monks here for any act. One does some service, even the most banal, as the services requested in the monastery almost always are, and he is invited not to obey and that’s all, but in that act of obedience, and in the manner of deciding it, in the immediate availability with which it is done, to engage an awareness that makes him live with infinite resonances: the loving passion for Christ, the definitive form of one’s own vocation in the Church, responsibility regarding one’s own salvation, the extremely dramatic freedom that we have to damn ourselves or enter into the glory of eternal life, into the fullness of life which Christ has come to lead us to. And all of this is the density, the resonance of each gesture, and of the continual availability, from present moment to present moment, which is offered to and demanded of our life.

Let us note, however, that “holding nothing more dear than Christ” is the principal reason for obedient availability, the reason that, deep down, contains the others: the form of one’s vocation, the possibility of damning oneself by refusing this

friendship, like Judas, and the glory of eternal life, where friendship with Christ will be our place in the communion of the Trinity.

Here too, the greatness of the gesture, of the use of freedom, is always given by Christ, who is present to offer and beg for love, to offer and beg for preference, as with Peter: "Do you love me more than they?" (Jn 21:15), that is: Am I dearer to you than everyone and everything? This ever renewed encounter with the presence of Christ begging for our heart gives rise to the availability, the obedience to our task: "Feed my lambs and my sheep!" (cf. Jn 21:15-17), down to the total availability of martyrdom, of embracing for the love of Christ that which one would not want, what one would not choose, what one would defend oneself from, what one would flee, if it were not for the friendship with Him who is present: "You will stretch out your hands and another (...) will take you where you do not want to go" (Jn 21:18).

What a freedom! To be able to embrace all of reality, all the demands of the real, for a love that gives value to all, that makes everyone and everything dear!

The issue deep down is an availability to all that reality demands, to all the possible initiatives that the need for the fulfillment that penetrates all of human reality demands of us, here and now. An availability that is possible only if one does not dissociate the reality from Christ who inhabits it, who inhabits it precisely with all the human need that he assumed by becoming incarnate and dying on the cross. All human need is now Christ's need, it is Christ who demands my availability, that is, my responsibility. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Mt 25:35-36).

Ultimately Christ came to satisfy our need by filling it with His presence, itself full of the human need of his brothers, of all humanity. He offers us the gift of his love for us, the gift to us of His loving presence, which fills our life with meaning and taste, and he offers it emptied out by the universal need for salvation, which demands as it were a restitution, or better a correspondence of charity, of Christ's charity, to go and fill others' need with Christ.

The responsible, and hence authoritative, person is an available person. I see that superiors start to go bad, and make their communities go bad, when they start being no longer available, that is, when they start to use themselves and not Christ as the measure of their charity, of the use of their time, the management of their effort and their health, the occupations or vacations they have outside the community, the use of means of communication, that is, the means to reach them, to "disturb them". When availability starts to be regulated based on itself and not on the presence of Christ, its authoritative quality is corrupted, because it is no longer responsible, and it is no longer responsible toward the brothers and sisters because it does not respond any more to the love of Christ who is present.

But this is not true only for superiors. Everyone is called to grow in this maturity of following Christ, which allows the reality that is more... real, more human, which is the reality of our neighbor's need, to become God's will revealed to us, and hence a light that indicates to us the sure path of life.