

3. "Where is your God?"

From everything and everyone, even from ourselves, comes a great provocation, which Psalm 41 describes well: "My tears have become my bread, by night and day, while they always say to me: 'Where is your God?' (...). My enemies insult me while they break my bones, while they always say to me: 'Where is your God?'" (Ps 41:4,11).

The provocation of the enemies and tempters is precisely about the meaning of life. For the sake of what do you live? What is the goal of your life? Whom do you love more than all else and all others? Whom do you adore? Who is "Everything" for you? And where is this Everything for which your soul longs, for which you have such thirst? Is it a present God, is it a living God, or only a concept, a morality, a threatening judge who makes you stand up straight for fear?

It is like the provocation of the bride's friends from the Song of Songs: "What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?" (Song 5:9).

The question "Where is your God?" is not a question that should make us look around ourselves to search for where on earth God might be found, like some lost object. The question "Where is your God?" should provoke us, should push our gaze upon ourselves, on our heart. The beloved of the "fairest among women" of the Song of Songs is not objectively spoken of as being better or more beautiful than other men. What makes him unique, what gives him an absolute value, what makes him more beautiful than all others, is the love of his beloved, the passion with which his beloved seeks him out, desires him for herself. And it is as if Jesus Christ, certainly the most beautiful man in history, the most precious human person of all time, because both true God and true man, it is as if the Son of God submitted himself, bent himself low to the point of having no other value than that which our love grants to him. He submitted his presence – his real, sacramental presence, and therefore the possibility for all to know where He is, where God is – to the passion of our eyes, of our heart, to the value which we give him or do not give him. This is a tremendous mystery, because we recognize that our preferential love for Him, our gazing toward Him, is responsible for the salvation of the world.

I often think of the confession of the Roman centurion after the death of Jesus. Jesus has just breathed his last, drinking to the dregs the chalice of total contempt, of total emptying out of himself. The crucified and dead Jesus no longer has any value at all to the eyes of men, humanly he has disappeared, has been reduced to zero. It would be enough to meditate on the songs of the suffering servant in Isaiah. Even St. Peter cried out that he did not know him, that he did not know who that guy was, as if Jesus had become indifferent to him, or anyway meant less to him than his fear in front of a chatty doorkeeper. And yet, immediately after his death, behold how a pagan gives Jesus back all his value, recognizes the infinite value of that man who has been emptied out, reduced to zero, without honor and without life: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39).

Think of how the Virgin Mary present there must have heard this confession. She always knew that "this man," true man because she had carried him herself in her

womb and given birth to him, had breast-fed him and seen him grow into his real humanity, she knew that this man was true God, Son of the Father, conceived in her by the Holy Spirit, and she was the only one in that moment, by the Cross, who maintained that faith, everything else notwithstanding. And behold how, in the absolute solitude of her faith, she hears one of the soldiers who performed the crucifixion, and even the commander of the soldiers who had executed the most horrible act that a mother can imagine, precisely this man cries out a confession of faith corresponding to the most pure faith she has as Mother of God. Not even John, there next to her, was able or knew how to express such faith in that moment.

Let's imagine how Mary's heart must have leapt at that moment, what mysterious consolation she must have felt, right in the very moment when she should have despaired. Indeed, she must not have felt sustained even by John as much as by the incredible cry of that pagan, that violent man, that certainly religiously crude man, and who knows how immoral, how vicious. She, the most pure, the most chaste, the most faithful.

She must have felt this shudder 33 years earlier in Bethlehem, at the sight of the shepherds. And even then this breach that her Son was opening where humanity was most fallen had filled her with wonder, and she kept meditating on it in her heart. But here, in this moment, in this situation, in this sorrow, in that man there, the mystery was total, the silence total, and yet, for precisely this reason, it was full of a new hope, as if suddenly from the Cross had risen the dawn of a new day, of new times, of an impossible renewal of humanity. The newness that conquers the world, faith in Christ, began suddenly, suddenly gushed forth from the Cross. And Mary heard it, seen and received by a pagan, by one of those who had killed her Son. Mary saw rise from a pagan the appreciation of the absolute value of her Son, in the moment in which this value was already totally eliminated.

The same can be said of the thief who recognizes that Jesus is the King of the universe who can save him on the other side of death (cf. Lk 23:42-43). In him too Mary had heard the same faith vibrating.

But even earlier, during his whole life, especially in the public life, it is as if the value of Jesus, the recognition of his divinity, were always coming from the most miserable, from the smallest. The faith of the little ones, the faith of the Canaanite woman, the faith of the woman with a hemorrhage, the faith of the centurion, of the thief, of the tax-collectors and the prostitutes, gave Christ his value, allowed Christ to affirm his total, divine value. The faith of the little ones is the answer to the question, "Where is your God?", and it is an answer that does not explain, but indicates, shows; it is an answer that leads to Him, and therefore allows others to find him, to know where the living God is, and so to meet him and to be with Him, to prove to others that He is all.

These things must become a labor of awareness on ourselves, of awareness of ourselves with respect to Him, to recover the fundamental Christian and monastic vocation which is the preferential love for Him who loves us, the choice of Him who has chosen us, belonging to Him who made himself "ours," who belongs to us, who is, indeed, *our* God, *our* Beloved, even if we are so unfaithful to Him.