

8. Called to communion

“God is worthy of faith; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9).

Our whole task with God and God’s whole task with us are centered in the communion with the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord (St. Paul makes us give all the titles that define the mystery of Jesus). Communion with Christ is our original and essential vocation, at the heart of every particular vocation, and it is the crux of the verification of our faith in God. I always think of a phrase that has accompanied me since catechism classes in high school: “The core of faith is belonging to Christ.” This phrase gave me back as it were the right direction in a time when rationalism and the ideologism reigning in this years were tempting me to think that the verification of faith would have to be purely intellectual, the proof of abstract truths, an abstract proof of abstract realities, as if the truth were nothing other than duties to doubt. But that phrase made me feel a proof that conformed to my heart, and to my reason, a truly existential verification, truly interesting for my life and my heart, and which valued what I had already received from my family and the Church, what I had seen, what already fascinated me: the verification of faith within a relationship with Jesus, the verification of faith as an experience of a living relationship with a present God, which was what had always fascinated me in the saints and in the true people whom I had known and was meeting.

God’s call is his will for us, is that which He wants from us, personally. To understand the will of God as a vocation means to understand that, for God too, there is nothing abstract, no abstract will, but for Him everything is given and requested within a relationship, saying “you.” God is not content to reveal himself as “I am who am” (Ex 3:14). God hastens to inflect his identity in a relationship: “God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’.” (Ex 3:15) Our God is a God of communion, who at the peak of his self-revelation will reveal himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, to ascertain the truth of faith in Him as God, God calls us to communion with the Son, to experience the closeness to the Son whom he sent into the world precisely for this reason, and who precisely for this reason died and rose: “He died for us that we might live with him” (1 Thess 5:10).

Thus, it is important, when we speak of vocation, of faith, of obedience to the will of God, not to lose sight of the setting in which these realities have solidity and can become effective experience for us and for others: communion with Jesus Christ our Lord; otherwise everything gets crazy, everything can become absurd, unbalanced, and ultimately false. To speak of vocation without referring it to communion with Jesus is erroneous. To live out of obedience without living obedience in the setting of communion with Jesus is slavery, is not freedom in action. To speak of faith, to discuss faith, to say that you believe, outside of or even alongside communion with Jesus Christ, is practical heresy, even if perhaps the ideas and conceptions are all dogmatically correct.

But to what does the Father call us when he calls us to communion with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord?

The week after Easter, after my retreat in Cortona, I visited our nuns in Portugal, and we made a brief pilgrimage to Fatima together, where I had never been before. What struck me most of all was the testimony of the little shepherds who saw the Virgin, two of whom, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, died as children and are already saints. The authority of their relationship with God impressed me, the awareness they had of their own mission, the seriousness and passion with which they learned from the Mother of God to pray and offer themselves for the conversion of the world.

That same day I had celebrated mass in the chapel of the apparitions at Fatima. In that Octave of Easter, the Gospel was that of the appearance of the Risen one on the shore of Lake Tiberias: John 21:1-14.

The disciples had fished all night, but had caught nothing. When Jesus presents himself mysteriously on the shore and asks if they have something to eat, something for Him, the apostles have to respond from Peter's boat, symbol of the Church, with a frank "no!" The frankness of this "no" is striking. Normally, when a customer appears at the fishmonger's and asks if he has such a fish, if the fishmonger does not have it, he says so gently, in order not to lose the customer. Maybe he gives an excuse, a small lie, but at least the customer goes away with the feeling that the fishmonger was unhappy about not satisfying him. It is true that, in the face of the many requests that I must refuse, it would also be nice for me to be able to write in e-mails a simple, "No, and many greetings!", and not waste time justifying myself. But, in fact, what is at play is not so much the thing that is requested and is accepted or refused, but the relationship with the persons, and to that it is necessary even to sacrifice a little attention. Once I took the trouble to write a brief but thought-out message of condolence to a person for the death of a relative, and exactly two minutes afterwards I already receive the response: "Thanks!" without even a signature. I felt frozen.

I say this to bring out in the scene of that morning by Lake Tiberias how much the disciples, through weariness, a bad mood, diffidence, were closed off from entering into relationship with Jesus, even if they did not recognize him yet. That man on the shore was only a pest, and they had no desire to enter into relation with Him, to get to know Him, to get off the boat and stand there a moment to speak about everything and anything, about the weather, the scarcity of fish. They were closed to any familiarity. Surely among themselves too the same bad mood was lingering, the same frankness. All the more since the apostles named, like Peter, Thomas, and Nathanael, were all of a rather rude and diffident character.

And yet, Jesus turned to them with rare tenderness and familiarity: "Children, you have no fish, have you?" (Jn 21:5). He could not be more gentle, delicate, and affectionate. And they, by contrast, right away say, "No!", like sullen adolescents.

But it is important to keep this rejected offer of closeness in mind, because it brings out Jesus' phrase that comes afterward: "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some!" (Jn 21:6).