



(Moniales de Bethléem)

Pentecost Letter 2018 of the Abbot General OCist.

## *Ephphatha*

### **Discerning and Accompanying the Call of God Today**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

You know that the next Synod of Bishops will be dedicated to the theme: “Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment.” In the life of our Order we are realizing more and more how urgent it is for us too to consider more deeply the theme of discernment and of the accompaniment of persons who feel called to Cistercian life. At this time there are no few who abandon our life, even after ten or twenty years in the monastery, motivated by superficial discernment or insufficient accompaniment. For this reason, but also because many of us meet young people in search of their baptismal vocation, I thought to offer the Order, as Pentecost Letter, a conference on these themes that I was asked to give recently at the *Teresianum* of Rome. I think it can serve as a starting point for personal and communal meditation, and also to unite us with the reflection the whole Church is making in preparation for the Synod of Bishops. But above all to help us responsibly welcome the vocations that the Lord sends us or that we ardently desire, without forgetting that the greater urgency is for us ourselves to live out with greater truth and happiness the vocation we have received.

Last May 1 I was able to participate in the beatification ceremony of Fr. John Anastasius Brenner, martyr, who was a Cistercian novice of Zirc in Hungary. Even though he had to leave his suppressed Abbey and become a diocesan priest, we know from the older Hungarian fathers that he made profession in secret and that he certainly considered himself a Cistercian monk. That our vocation can be lived out to the point of martyrdom must encourage us to live it out ourselves in daily life – as Pope Francis reminds us in his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* – with a humble and ardent desire for sanctity in the joyful gift of life.

#### **An eternal plan for each person**

The famous episode of the call of the young Samuel (1 Sam 3:1-21) is one of the best sources of inspiration for understanding the phenomenon of the vocation, the mystery of a God who calls man and, at the same time, of the man who feels called by God. How do we face this? This mystery in ourselves and in others? How do we face the mystery of the vocation of those whom we are called to accompany, to form?

God has a plan for each human being who is born in this world, an eternal design. Each person's vocation is born before he or she is, because it has an eternal origin, has its source in the mystery of God, and in the mystery of the personal relationship of God with each human being he creates. As God reveals to the prophet Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5).

Nothing should define us more than what is before us in God, more than the knowledge of us that precedes us in God, because it is by this thought, by this eternal word, that we have been willed, loved, made, and sent. Sent already into life, sent into being, in the immense symphony of creation, in the drama of history, of the human adventure, in the sublime drama of human freedom, created precisely in order to recognize Him who made it, to love Him who loved it, to know Him who knew us before we knew ourselves.

When he came to live in the Temple with the priest Eli, little Samuel also already bore in himself an eternal vocation, had already been conceived and was born marked by a plan determined and established by God. But there must come a day when a person's vocation emerges from the depth of the mystery like a spring of water that finally gushes from the heart of the mountain at a precise point to begin running and quenching men's thirst, to irrigate the arid land, to become a stream, rushing water, and then a large and slow river that serves all as a path for reaching the sea.

### **Something new in the normality of the real**

That night, all were sleeping: "At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was" (1 Sam 3:2-3). All is calm and quiet. But all of a sudden there bursts forth the newness of a voice that calls Samuel by name. It does not seem like anything new, because Samuel is already used to feeling called. So he thinks of the normalest thing that could happen: that Eli have called him, that he have called him as he had called him dozens of times, even during the night, to get help in his old age and blindness. And this happens three times. Three times the voice of God calls the young boy's name and he reacts as if it were the normalest thing that could happen.

This is already an aspect of the mystery of a vocation: that its exceptional status takes on, in life, the form of daily normality. An aspect that is comforting and intimidating at the same time. Comforting because, if God lowers himself to speak to us as one who is familiar speaks to us, it is not necessary to do who knows what ascent to receive his calling. Intimidating because we run the risk of not realizing that we are dealing with Him.

The old man Eli also reacts at first as if it were a normal event: "I did not call you, go back to bed!" What is normal for him is that Samuel has had a dream, that he has imagined something. But Samuel never reduces the reality to a dream, even the subsequent times, he never says: "I have had a dream!", getting back in bed. God really calls him, he calls him with a real voice, and it is precisely Samuel's faithfulness to the reality in which God manifests himself that gradually will allow Eli and then Samuel himself to recognize the voice of God in his life.

It seems to me that, in this, there is a first fundamental direction in facing any vocation, one's own or another's: God rarely enters into a person's life in a supernatural way. He prefers the way of nature, of elementary human experience, the way of reality, to which every man naturally opens himself. It is God who takes nature to his service, who makes it an instrument and sign of what He wants to tell us. God uses nature to express the supernatural, as in Christ he used our flesh to express and manifest the divinity of the Son. And it is by following and respecting the nature of things, the elementary experience of things, that it becomes possible to move up from the sign to Him who wants to manifest himself by means of it. A voice that wakes Samuel in the night time, could not be anything for him but Eli's voice. Only Eli was in the Temple with him on that night. Who else could call him? Obeying the call of reality by basic instinct, Samuel responds to the call of God, he moves forward as if by progressive approximations toward the right response to the call.

This aspect of the mainly natural comprehension of the voice of God who calls us is present in almost all the biblical vocations, in the Gospel, too. Christ used this approximation, this natural way of approaching toward the one called, even for calling the apostles: "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch" (Lk 5:4), he says to Peter and companions; and it is in this moment when the veil of natural, daily action, humanly elementary action, falls to reveal the miracle, the action of God's presence, that the vocation also becomes explicit: "From now on you will be fishers of men" (Lk 5:10).

Jesus was calling Peter to become a fisher of men from the beginning, from the moment when he asked him to put out into deep water and cast the nets, just as the Lord was calling Samuel from the very first time that the boy heard himself called by Eli. Even Mary heard herself called to have a son by normal means – "How can this be, since I know no man?" (Lk 1:34) – until the angel unveils the mystery of the Incarnation by the working of the Holy Spirit.

It is always as if God wants each person to come close to the mystery by means of the path of his humanity, without skipping anything, because the mystery of God, and the mystery of each person's vocation, manifests itself within what is human, revealing its sacrality. Our humanity is revealed to itself as a temple of God: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Cor 3:16-17).

### **"Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the youth"**

But how is it revealed that God dwells in the temple of our human life? Where should it lead us, this approaching to God through the ways of our elementary human experience? Of course, it must lead us to God, but where should it lead us within ourselves, in our conscience and in our experience of ourselves?

In this, too, the episode of Samuel's vocation is illuminating, and it also reveals to us the essential role of the one who is called, to support the vocational path of the others, in particular of the young.

Eli understands first of all that Samuel has been called by God. And how does he know? By recognizing that he himself is not the one calling him. This recognition should not be understood at merely a superficial level. The third time, Eli could have lost his patience and threatened the boy that, if he woke him again, he would be punished and kicked out of the Temple. In him too, something better: the recognition of the mystery takes place *above all* in

him: “Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy” (1 Sam 3:8). And even though he had not known how to educate his own sons to be faithful to God, Eli faces the vocation of Samuel in an exemplary way.

Above all, he does not abuse it, does not take advantage of the boy’s simplicity. He does not even tell him that it is God calling him, like so many who like to say to the young: “You have this vocation! God calls you to this or that! You are made for this or for that!” making themselves masters of the mystery that has its dwelling between the freedom of God and the freedom of each person. This is an abuse as grave as simony, because it takes advantage of the gratuitous initiatives of God (and nothing is more gratuitous than a calling of God, who chooses and elects a person), for personal glory, for the personal profit even of just gratitude toward the one who set himself up to be the “father or mother of a vocation,” as some love to say.

Eli, on the contrary, sends the boy back to the mystery that calls him. And he sends him back to ascertain for himself whether that voice is God’s or not. He invites him to go further toward the mystery that shows itself in his life, with a discretion, with a respect, an incredible tenderness. Think: the Most High, in his own Temple, comes in the heart of the night to bend over a sleeping boy to whisper in his ear simply his name: “Samuel!”

Jesus will also act like this, will call with an absolute respect for each one’s freedom, proposing a test in absolute freedom: “When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ ... ‘Rabbi’ ... ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see’” (Jn 1:38-39).

### **A fundamental verification**

The aspect of verification, of making the truth of something emerge, whether it be a feeling or an experience, the aspect, that is, of testing if it is true, if God is truly calling, is fundamental, is a fundamental path for living every vocation with freedom and truth. If someone who feels called must be helped in anything, he must be helped in being accompanied to verify the delicate appearing of the mystery in his life. Even when, in exceptional cases, as for Saul of Tarsus, God’s eruption is not delicate but overwhelming, even then, perhaps especially then, the one who is called needs someone who can help him and accompany him to verify the calling. Saul had need of Ananias, of the small and frightened community of Damascus, to engage further in the verification of his extraordinary vocation. One could say that Christ himself needs this, wants to need this human and daily realm of his mystical Body, to enable his callings to be verified and become paths (cf. Acts 9:3-19).

Why, then, does Samuel need help? Because he has not yet experienced that reality that calls him out. The text explicitly says: “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him” (1 Sam 3:7). And the wisdom of Eli consists precisely in introducing Samuel to the experiential verification of a mysterious, supernatural reality, which was discretely showing itself in his life. Not a moment after Eli intuits that God is addressing himself to the boy, he right away proposes an elementary method for verifying this fact, which is not yet certain, precisely because it has not been verified: “Therefore Eli said to Samuel, ‘Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’” (1 Sam 3:8-9).

We notice that Eli does not send the boy right away to pray, does not ask him to stay awake. On the contrary: he sends him to bed, he sends him to live out normally what a young boy does at night. Samuel does not need to provoke anything, does not need to evoke anything; he must leave to God the whole freedom of the initiative.

But he offers him a method of verification, a method that corresponds to the initiative that God will want to take: “If he calls you, you shall say, Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9). It is not a magic formula, but a word that means to educate the boy to respond to God’s initiative, to the initiative of God’s calling. The phrase that he teaches him, that he makes him memorize, with which Samuel probably fell back asleep, educates him to put himself in God’s presence with an openness that is a question. Samuel asks God to speak and offers God his attention. As if he had said: “Lord, I am longing for You, an empty and open desire for You!”

In a vocation, in every vocation, there are, as it were, two moments: the call, pure and simple, God, that is, who pronounces our name, in a thousand ways, perhaps through insignificant details, but details through which we hear ourselves called to Him, the heart feels called to Him. And then there is the word of God, what God wants to communicate to us. And God’s thus speaking to the one called defines his vocation more and more, it maintains it, gives it substance, even when the name that God pronounces, and sometimes changes, already brings into synthesis the whole vocation of a person: “You are Simon, son of John; you will be called Cephas” (Jn 1:42).

### **Educating toward listening**

The essential response to the call of God, to God who calls our name, is an availability to listen, or rather, demanding that He speaks to us, that he tell us everything, all that he wants to say to us, because it is in his speaking to us that our vocation comes about, is realized in us and through us by God himself. A vocation is always a work of God, a creation of God who speaks to a person. And the mission that every vocation entails is realized if the one who is called lets himself be created entirely by the word of God, to the goal that God wants to reach. To respond “speak, Lord” to the God who calls our name means asking him expressly, freely, to *pronounce*, to *express* our life, our person, according to His plan.

Every life is a creative word of God in action, but in the mystery of the vocation, from the baptismal vocation onward, being formed by the word of God must become a conscious reality, a free dialogue, agreed upon, requested and agreed upon, between God and man.

Whoever consents to a calling, to a vocation, asks God to *pronounce openly* his own life, that is, to make it an explicit announcement, a *pro-announcement*, looking to the etymology of “pronounce,” an announcement before the person himself, the Church, and the world, of what God wants to say, of what God wants to express. To consent to a calling means, deep down, to say like St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20), but with the Johannine awareness that Christ is the Word of God, the Word that the Father wants to express in the world through the breath of the Holy Spirit.

All this is totally and paradigmatically present in the vocation of the Virgin Mary, who understands right away that her vocation is realized in the coming about in her and through her of the Word of God: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

And Mary lets herself be inhabited by the Word of God in such a way that her every word, even a simple greeting, becomes an announcement of Him, or rather, becomes His *self-introduction*, His coming about for the one who listens:

“She entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord’” (Lk 1:40-45).

From Eli Samuel learns the method for letting himself be thus recreated by the word of God who asks to form him according to a particular design, a particular mission, who asks to be expressed through him, through his life. This method is essentially listening to God, that is, the silence that asks God to speak.

This is an essential aspect in the concept of vocation, of life as vocation, and a crucial point today more than ever. It is not possible to educate the young toward life as vocation without educating them to listen to God, without forming them to the silence that asks God to speak. I am always grateful to the priest who followed the first steps of my vocation for having advised me to pray like Samuel, to repeat with him: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!” It was not a magic formula for receiving immediate answers, but a gesture that taught me to stand with simplicity and poverty before the calling that I was hearing, and which was not definite, waiting for God to suggest to me, when and how he wanted to, the form that this intuition, this calling, would take. And, rather than grand illuminations, the response has been life itself, the course that my life has taken, traced by the events, by the positive and negative sides of my temperament, of my psychology; the response has been the encounters that I have had, the experiences that have been given to me, the needs of the Christian communities in which I have found myself, the readings that have spoken to me, the intuitions that turned up in my heart, often tied to a word of Scripture, which, verified in their proper time, accelerated my path, or provoked unexpected shifts.

The method of listening, the method of silence that listens to God, is not only for the initial consolidation of the vocation, but concerns permanent formation, or rather is the method for *living* the vocation and enabling it to bear fruit, from the beginning to the end. If there is a maturity which, with the passing years, should deepen in living any vocation whatsoever, I think it is precisely that of listening ever more to God and ever less to ourselves. The more I find myself required to speak and express myself in following the mission connected to the vocation God gives me, the more I sense how vital the silence is, and the more I sense as absolutely necessary the little Samuel’s begging: “Speak, Lord! Speak yourself and make me silent, because I need to listen to You and express only your Word, your Son Jesus Christ!”

The greatness of the prophet Samuel is entirely related to his serving the presence of God who speaks to him, and to the absolute preference that Samuel accords to this mystery in his life: “As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord” (1 Sam 3:19-21).

## **Distracted thirst**

So we can ask ourselves, as all those ask themselves who concern themselves today with vocations, but also simply with familial education and scholastic formation of youth: is it possible to respond to God's calling today? If listening is necessary, if silence is necessary, if what is necessary is a freedom that listens and consents, and lives, finds nourishment and expresses itself by listening to God, does it make sense today to speak of vocation, of vocations, of life as vocation?

I confess to you that I do not pose these questions to myself regarding young people who live in the world, but above all about those whom I meet in monasteries, who say or think that they have already made the choice, already responded to the calling, already left everything to follow Jesus. They are already novices, temporary professed, or even solemnly, at times already ordained priests. In certain places, like in Africa, there are dozens, and in others, like Asia, there are hundreds. Often they are already engaged in philosophical and theological studies, after a rapid novitiate. And it is as if no one has yet taught them to say: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!" They are full of desire, of desire to correspond to the calling that they feel in their heart, and they ask with humility and urgency to be accompanied on this path. It always astounds me to hear from the youngest members of our monasteries, on all continents, the request, or rather the cry, to be helped, be formed, be accompanied, because they want to respond, they want to follow Christ with their whole heart. But it is as if no one has taught them to listen to God, to make silence, to beg for His word, the one that 'tells' them their life, which expresses God's plan for their life. How will they be able to live out the vocation? What vocation will they live out? What mission will they incarnate? Unfortunately, the answer to these questions is almost always before our eyes: young people who are already old, already tired, already sad, already disappointed, sterile, incapable of announcing, incapable of infecting others with the love of Christ. In place of the thirst for water from the spring of God's call, they have substituted the dream of pre-established goals, like solemn Profession, but above all priestly Ordination, which, once reached, show themselves to be a mirage that disappoints, that disappoints precisely because one longed for them as for an end goal, a culmination of life, and not as a beginning, or rather as a new beginning in allowing God to express Himself through our life. And then one begins to desire the ephemeral, to fill the void with worldly values: material goods, places of power, affective relationships other than belonging to Christ and the community, the synthesized wholeness of the computer, in the most sacred freedom of use and abuse of the Internet, with all that is associated and connected with it.

How does one insert listening to God, the encounter with a God who speaks to us, into the life and heart of this man of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in this man who is no longer just post-modern, but post-contemporary, because he is not present to the present in which he lives, but lives in a beyond, or virtual elsewhere?

In my humble opinion, the most decisive influence of the information culture is not in the image, in what one sees or perceives through it, but in the conception of time. Time no longer has duration, it no longer needs to endure. Everything, right away: this is the ideal of the information culture's relation to reality. But this means that there is no longer waiting, that waiting is no longer positive, is no longer a positive human experience. But without waiting there is no longer the experience of time as a setting in which something new can happen.

Without waiting, time can no longer host the silence that awaits a new word, the word, that is, of Another. Music has become deafening, like the discourses of politicians who have success, that is, a noise that destroys hearing. One feels and perceives noise, but does not listen to it. Noise does not make room for listening because it does not make room for freedom. Noise imposes itself, it does not invite, like the word, like a calling, like music that calls you back and sets you at attention, in tension toward beauty.

The evangelization of contemporary man, and vocation is deep down an evangelization, a being reached by the Gospel and drawn by it personally, the evangelization of contemporary man must account for this deafening, and must find a way to penetrate it. Is it still possible for a voice that comes and whispers our name to be heard in the midst of this uproar? Is it still possible to perceive Christ's knocking at the door of one whom he desires to meet to share dinner and life? It is as if today Christ were closed up in the room Himself, and knocked from within to recall the one who was called, who stands around out in the middle of the city traffic. How will he be able to be heard?

### **An innocent deafness**

Perhaps we must begin to realize that this problem, even if it seems accentuated today, is not new. Didn't the God of Israel, the patriarchs, Moses, the prophets, have to deal with a people that was hard of hearing in listening to the voice of the Lord? And Jesus, did he not perhaps lose patience before the deafness of heart, not only of the crowd, of the scribes and the Pharisees, but also of his own disciples? "Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear?" (Mk 8:17-18).

Yes, we are made in order to listen to the word of God, every man is made for this, has ears for this, as he has eyes to see the works of the Lord. Why then does one not look, why does one not listen? Perhaps the answer is simple: because we cannot, because we are not capable, we are truly deaf, we are truly blind. Deafness to the word of God is not a choice, especially in the young, especially in contemporary man. It is a choice in us, in the disciples of Jesus, in the apostles, and for this reason Christ is right to be angry with them, with us. But in the young, in contemporary humanity, we are not dealing with a responsible deafness. Never like today has the cultural climate been a condition suffered, not a free one, precisely because the means by which this culture penetrates, with its noise, are minute and sneaky, and give rise to a pathology of deafness of heart that one could call autoimmune.

What position does Christ hold in front of all this, this condition of the crowd? Is it not perhaps compassion? "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way" (Mt 15:32). If Jesus felt compassion for the lack of bread, will he not feel it more intensely for the lack of that which is more necessary than bread, that is "of every word that comes forth from the mouth of God" (cf. Deut 8:3; Mt 4:4)?

It is never fruitful for the Kingdom of God to confront the problems of the world and of the Church starting from a phenomenological and sociological analysis of the situation. For that it would not have been necessary for the Son of God to come into the world. Instead, he has come, and has brought the newness of His gaze, which is an eternal gaze that penetrates time, history, hearts like nothing and no one can penetrate them.



With what compassion would Christ look today on the crowd, the young, who are fasting from the Word that comes forth from the mouth of God, who are fasting from Him, from his presence, from his Gospel! If he was worried that the crowd not go on fasting from bread, “because they might faint on the way” (Mt 15:32), would he not have compassion for the path of the man of today who lives his life fasting from the word of God, from God’s presence, and not only for three days, but always? In every epoch of history, God has always sent prophets and saints capable of incarnating Christ’s gaze toward the crowd lost without a shepherd. Our epoch, too, is very rich with these gazes of compassion, transparent to Christ’s gaze on the world. It would be enough to think of the Popes.

### **Starting over from the *Ephphatha* of Christ**

But if Christ certainly feels compassion for the deafness and blindness of the human world today, does he not perhaps want, or can he not, shout his *Ephphatha* over this world, over these young people?

Benedict XVI commented on the gospel of the healing of the deaf-mute, in Mark 7:31-37, by saying that the word “*ephphatha*” “in its deepest sense – sums up the whole message and the whole work of Christ.” And he added: “We all know that a person’s closure and isolation do not only depend on the sense organs. There is an inner closure that affects the person’s inmost self, which the Bible calls the ‘heart.’ It is this that Jesus came to ‘open,’ to liberate, so as to enable us to live to the full our relationship with God and with others. This is why I said that this small word, ‘*ephphatha* - be opened,’ sums up in itself Christ’s entire mission. He was made man so that man, rendered inwardly deaf and mute by sin, might be able to hear God’s voice, the voice of Love that speaks to his heart, and thus in his turn learn to speak the language of love, to communicate with God and with others” (*Angelus*, Sept. 9, 2012).

But then, where is the problem? If Christ looks upon the world of today with compassion for the Word of eternal life that it does not receive, and if only He is able and wills to open the heart of every man with his “*ephphatha*”; if this is the essence of his mission, and therefore of the Church’s mission, we see that the true problem, the true closure, is in ourselves, in us who, for one reason or another, and certainly through an unmerited grace, know the word of God, know Christ’s gaze, have already been opened by a baptismal *ephphatha* directed personally to us. The problem is not the world, is not the young, is not the Internet, or who knows what other thing: the problem is our faith, our lack of faith which keeps our life from incarnating and transmitting to the world this word that Jesus expresses in a breath, in an exhalation as deep as the heart of the Trinity.

In the episode of the healing of the deaf-mute, of the man closed to relationship, closed to hearing and the word, closed to communion with God and with others, it is as if the healing gesture of Jesus convoked the whole Trinity: “He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘*Ephphatha*’, that is, ‘Be opened’” (Mk 7:33-34). All alludes to the incarnate presence of the Word, to his praying trust in the Father of Heaven, and in the breath of the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian love comes to be as it were concentrated in the *ephphatha* of Christ, which reinstates the man in his nature and vocation as the image of God, in listening and in the word, which allow for a relationship of reciprocal love.

The faith enables us to belong to Christ, to identify ourselves with Him, precisely in his mission as Mediator between the Trinity and the man who has been willed and created to reflect that Communion, by living in the Christian community, in the Church, as a living and harmonious member of the Body of Christ.

The great urgency of the Church, the great urgency of Christians, is to belong to this Christ who is stretched, as on the Cross, between the love of the Father and the misery of man. Before asking ourselves what techniques and tactics to adopt to reawaken and educate the young toward the Christian, baptismal vocation, in all the forms that this can take, the urgent task of faith and charity is to identify oneself really, not formally, with Christ in this Gospel, who is the Christ of the whole Gospel.

We can ask ourselves: in front of the man of today, of the youths of today, of the contemporary world, do we belong to the Christ who touches man in his blocked capacity for relation? That is, do we keep him company? Are we standing near him, are we close enough to him to touch him, to sense the “smell of the flock,” according to the famous expression of Pope Francis?

But also: in front of man closed in on himself, do we lift the gaze of our heart, of prayer, of faith in the good and merciful Father, ourselves filled with filial begging, trusting that He always listens to us, always hears us out, even if we ask for the resurrection of a dead person (cf. Jn 11:41-44)?

And from this prayer, from this trust in the Father, we draw that “breath,” that groan of the Spirit which, united to the word of Jesus, has the divine power to open the heart, the mind, the life of each man, to friendship with God and with all?

It seems to me that, by avoiding these questions, we risk always posing the problem of the Church’s mission and of the pastoral care of vocations with a worldly mentality, which has nothing to do with the Christ event. Of course, every means should be used, everything can be a useful and effective instrument, but if the Trinitarian and Christocentric heart of our approach to the human condition, ours and others’, is missing, all the instruments will turn out to be worthless, because the core of the question is not only to do better or to correct what is not working well, but to resuscitate a life, to revive a charism, a divine grace. And only God can do this, and the faith that makes us His instruments.

\*\*\*

Dearest brothers and sisters, let us, of one spirit in prayer, entrust our hearts to the measureless gift of the Holy Spirit, so that, beyond our weaknesses and in the trials we pass through, we not be lacking the hope of always being able to live our vocation with faith and charity!

Yours, in deep communion in the Cenacle of Pentecost,



*Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori*  
*Abbot General OCist*