

4. To walk with hope in the promise

Faith believes in God's promise, and, basing itself on faith in the promise, hope walks onward, or better: it makes us walk. God's promise is not just a word, it is not just a type of insurance contract: it is a Person, it is a risen and glorious Person, a Person who has lived with us, has spoken to us, and has performed signs of salvation, and who above all has suffered for us to the point of death, is risen, is ascended to Heaven, and remains mysteriously but really with us, in the mystery of the Church, each day, even to the end of the world. With exactly this promise Jesus left us to reunite with his Father: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

Christ left us with the promise not only to return at the end of time, but to remain present, to remain with us here and now, even to the end of time. Hence he left us while promising to stay with us as He is with the Father in Heaven.

It is the same promise made by Jesus during the last supper:

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:3-6)

All this expresses the promise on which Christian hope is based and in which it makes us walk, directed toward this reality already accomplished in Christ, in God, but toward which we have begun walking through our life, the life of our communities, through the history of the Church and of the world.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6)

Precisely by the way it has been made to us, this promise of eternal life does not skip over the walk of life, it is not a leap on high, it does not propose that we jump onto a rocket that separates from Earth and flies into space, leaving on Earth the road, the dust of the path, or letting the ship go off course without us in the midst of the sea. This promise is indeed an anchor that is fixed in the eternal but to which we remain attached by a line that come to make the ship secure as it crosses the sea. And it is precisely the fact that it is fastened in Heaven that allows the ship not to remain still in the midst of the sea, but to advance through the waves.

If the anchor of Christ was fixing us the bottom of the sea, we would remain still where we are, tranquil perhaps, without problems, but unmoving, without voyaging, without going forward. Instead, precisely life's being anchored to Heaven makes things such that the promise that gives rise to our hope does not halt our walking, does not give us a safety in some refuge in which we could close ourselves up and stay still, but it grants us a certainty in walking, in continuing the journey. The promise of a certain destination that Christ has already reached for us makes every step in the path of our life steady and decisive.

But how do we tie ourselves to this line attached to the anchor that the crucified and glorious Christ is for us in Heaven? It is important to understand what it is tied to in us, how the promise is connected to us that has already been completed in the glorious Christ but must be realized in our life.

When Jesus says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6), he announces himself as the way and fulfillment of our hope. Basically, the great promise made to us by God in Christ is that of reaching the Father, of being embraced by the Father. It is a hope of total realization of our person, because whoever is embraced by God the Father becomes wholly son like the only-begotten Son, in the only-begotten Son, and lives eternally in the communion of the Father and of the Son in the love of the Holy Spirit. All this is the substance of Christian faith and also the fulfillment of love, but this substance of faith can be accomplished in love if we live in hope.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." With these words has, as it were, summarized the parable of the prodigal son or the merciful father of Luke 15:11–32. This phrase of the Gospel of John is deep down the exegesis of that parable, but at the same time, it is as if the parable of Luke gave flesh to these summary words of Jesus at the last Supper. Our life is granted to us so that we return to the Father. We are all born bearing within us the heritage of the sin of Adam and Eve, we are all born bearing the wound of being sinners, a hereditary lack of grace, a hereditary lack of filial communion with God. The Virgin Mary was preserved from being marked by this inheritance, not because she was not a descendant of Adam and Eve, but because the grace of the Redemption was graciously granted to her by God from her very conception.

This grace has now been granted to us with baptism. Baptism takes us immediately back to the Father's embrace in the Son to whom the Holy Spirit makes us identical in virtue of his death and resurrection. But it's like that complete event that is realized in the sacrament of baptism had to penetrate, like the oil of chrism, into our whole life, into all that we are and live. Our whole life has been given to us to live out our baptism, so that the grace of baptism become our whole life, the whole path of life. And this means that after baptism, our whole life is stretched out between the death and resurrection of Jesus, that is, between the distancing from God of our being sinners and the embrace of the Father who gives back to us fully the dignity of being his children.