

6. “They saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him”

After what we meditated about in the episode of the rich young man, we see that what’s important is to understand what it means not to act like him, so that we do not find ourselves living in the sadness of refusing joy in refusing the eternal treasure that Christ offers us.

Joy, like vocation, is a reality that is understood by experience, not in theory. If anything, the theoretical reflection is important as a deepened awareness of our experience, to help us live it out with greater attention and intensity. For this reason, in the Gospel the events and the teachings are always intertwined.

That is, we must always begin over again at the first encounter with Christ as we lived it out on the day in which the decision to follow him for ever was born in us, the encounter as John describes it for himself and Andrew: “The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, ‘What are you seeking?’ And they said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’ So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.” (Jn 1:35–39)

It is important to gather how Andrew and John that day found a dwelling place, or rather a “dwelling” that then was and grew to be like a spiritual place of their adherence to Jesus Christ. That day they did not so much find where Jesus was staying at that moment. Maybe they never went back to that house, or anyway not even Jesus remained there for long, seeing that, as John adds, “The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee” (Jn 1:43). But that day the first two disciples discovered *where they could stay with Jesus*: “So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day” (Jn 1:39). The point is discovering and letting Christ reveal to us – “Come and you will see” (Jn 1:39) – the dwelling in which we can dwell with Him, not only for a day, but for our whole life, in each instant, wherever we find ourselves, whatever happens, whomever we happen to meet.

Let’s imagine the two young future apostles when they find themselves in that house with Jesus, looking at him and listening to him all day. What experience did they have? In what sense did they find a new dwelling for their life, for all that filled up their young life and overflowed it, for all the relationships that populated their existence? They certainly experienced that in staying with Jesus a mysterious possibility of dilation of space and time comes true, which renders their life and their hearts capable of a new welcoming of everyone and everything, of welcoming without fear, without calculation, without defense.

This dilation is suggested by how John, by now an old man, tells this episode in the Gospel. He says that “it was about the tenth hour” (Jn 1:39). He says that not because he has a good memory of the past, but because in reality, on that day, at that time, for him and Andrew time stopped, it stopped at four in the afternoon. But not because after that moment there was nothing more, but because from that moment on their life entered *a new time*, a dilated time, an eternal time. And space too: after staying in

that dwelling, the space in which they began to live had no limits, was dilated to infinity.

Of course, they too, like us, often went back to be enclosed in the limits of time and space measured by themselves and not by the presence and love of Jesus. But from that day on, every reduction of their heart to the old measures will always feel to them like a betrayal, a wound, an experience of emptiness. Entering at that hour into that house, they entered for ever into a dwelling that made them without a homeland outside of dwelling with Christ, outside of his presence, outside of communion with Him.

Judas brought that betrayal to its final completion, and he let himself slide down into the depth of nothingness, far from Jesus. But he did not find a dwelling-place outside of friendship with Christ, because even for him there could no longer be any dwelling, space, or time for his life outside of that one in which Christ first received him one day. He did not kill himself just by hanging himself, but did so already in leaving Christ's dwelling: "After receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night" (Jn 13:30). Exiting from dwelling in Christ, Judas finds himself in a space and time that is night, that has no definition, an empty space, on which one cannot put one's feet, that one cannot traverse (the space of the hanged man!), and a time that is stopped, that no longer runs, without present and without future...

A little later, in the discourses during the Last Supper, Jesus perhaps also thought of Judas when he said: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5), which can perhaps be better translated, "*Apart from me* you can do nothing." Being with Christ is not just a parallel companionship, being side-by-side, but is an inclusion, an inclusive belonging, without however being exclusive; it is a dwelling, a *being in Him*, as resounds in the letters of St. Paul and St. John.

The poet Clemente Rebora, who converted and became a Rosminian Father, writes in a Christmas meditation: "When the soul does not find the point of interior solidity, it wanders after exterior satisfactions that remain vain, because they never correspond to the true interior reality."

The point of interior solidity is found when the heart discovers where Christ dwells, where it can dwell with Him. This solidity, or "consistency" (*consistenza*), is also etymologically a term that refers to dwelling: *cum-sistere*, that is, to stand firm, to stand together, to last... Dwelling with Christ, in Christ, is the firmest interior solidity that we can have. Interior in the sense that it is the firmness of our "I", that which makes us truly ourselves. It is a "point," as Rebora says, because it is a precise place, a center around which everything spins, where everything depends and is ordered, is balanced. Without this solidity, what Rebora says is true: "one wanders after exterior satisfactions that remain vain, because they never correspond to the true interior reality," that is, they do not correspond to our heart, to what it is made, desired, and loved by God for. A child without a dwelling, without parents, without family, without a *solid* relationship, does not manage to grow as a subject, as a definite, unique "I." It doesn't even manage to play. All the more is this true of us if we do not find, thanks to the Church and in the Church, our dwelling with the Lord, our place of solidity with Christ.