

7. From expectation to hope

The most important step to make, or one could rather say: the most important *leap* to make or remake in order to travel this path of life is that *from mere expectations to hope*.

To every problem, difficulty, lack, we react with the instinct of awaiting the immediate, of awaiting a solution, a satisfaction, something, that is, that comes to satisfy our need as quickly as possible. The internet and consumer culture of “everything now” has emphasized this tendency, or at least has made it the permanent condition in which we live out everything: human relationships, work, study, the conception of time, health and sickness, etc. But also religion, and hence also the way we live out a vocation, even if it were monastic and contemplative.

On this topic too Pope Francis’s Bull for the Jubilee has a very explicit passage when it speaks of patience: “In our fast-paced world, we are used to wanting everything now. We no longer have time simply to be with others; even families find it hard to get together and enjoy one another’s company. Patience has been put to flight by frenetic haste, and this has proved detrimental, since it leads to impatience, anxiety and even gratuitous violence, resulting in more unhappiness and self-centeredness. Nor is there much place for patience in this age of the Internet, as space and time yield to an ever-present ‘now’.” (*Spes non confundit*, § 4)

We must become aware that this cultural tendency of everything-now has as it were penetrated into our heart, into our awareness, into our way of living out our self, and hence our freedom. We do not realize that, when permeated by this tendency, determined by this tendency, freedom undergoes a retreat, a sort of alienation, because it is not free, it is not free to choose. The desire for immediate possession becomes greater than our freedom, on account of which it is as if it did not have any more space for action, space for its exercise, and hence it suffocates. We have lost the awareness that the space in which liberty breathes is a desire that does not grasp what it desires, but lets it be, loves it without assimilating it to itself.

This reduction of freedom is not at all new, since it is basically the characteristic of original sin and hence of every sin. The *Internet* has not invented anything. Eve and Adam seize the forbidden fruit that God had pointed out to their attention so that, by looking at it, they could exercise the freedom of a desire that does not possess and does not consume. The forbidden fruit also made up part of the garden that God had made for them, and hence it was given to them, it was for them. If God created it, if he put it in the garden that he created for the man and the woman, if he did not hide it, it means that this tree also, and its fruit, were made for and granted to man. Just that it was not granted them for it to be taken and consumed, but for letting it be granted as a mystery that God would have revealed to them in time.

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" (Gen 3:6-9)

The fruit was "to be desired to make one wise." The desire for wisdom is certainly a good desire that God has put into the human heart. The error is not this desire, but in thinking that wisdom consists in possessing a power and not in humble and confident opening to the gift that God is giving us.

Having fallen into this error, the man and the woman close themselves off not only to the gift of all, but also to the Giver who comes to meet them and seems to be confused not to find the human creature coming to meet him like a child who runs with joy toward its father when he comes home. Sin closes the heart off from God's expectation. And the human being who loses the openness to the Lord sinks into the sentiment of being abandoned.

It's as if St. Benedict had picked up the human story from this point, starting from that moment when God returns to look in the midst of the crowd for a human heart that thirsts for life and happiness, and so thirsts for Him, thirsts for God.

How did and does God return to seek the human heart, athirst for Him but hiding itself?

As he is about to arrive at Jerusalem, where he will undergo his passion and death to rise again on the third day, Jesus reproduces the scene from the earthly paradise when he notices the tax-collector Zacchaeus hiding, like Adam and Eve did one time, among the leaves of a tree, a sycamore. Jesus sees him, calls him, goes to his house and welcomes his conversion (cf. Lk 19:1-10).

Jesus' final comment in this scene is a phrase that summarizes his whole mission: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Lk 19:10).