

## 10. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"

"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mt 27:46; Ps 22:2).

With this cry too, Jesus then has revealed what gives rebirth to hope, what makes it spring up, from the depth of every possible desperation. To call on the Father, to call on God: from this cry hope is reborn, or rather: this cry is the rebirth of hope, it refills the abyss of desperation with hope.

We understand how the crucified Jesus's cry of desperation should be interpreted by the other words on the Cross, especially those in which, according to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus cites another psalm: "It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last." (Lk 23:44-46; Ps 31:6)

Entrusting himself to the Father in this way is the expression of a hope that is greater than life and death. It means having total hope in the Father, the hope that one's whole person, even dying on a cross, will not get lost, does not end up in nothingness, because the true and real horizon of everything is the Father, not life, not the world, but only the Father. In the last breath that comes from the martyred body of Jesus, his whole person is commended, entrusted, to the hands of the Father.

How is it possible to put the spirit, the soul, into someone's hands? Human hands can hold everything, but not a spirit, not a breath. But the Father's hands about which Jesus speaks are the symbolic image of an embrace. Jesus entrusts himself to the Father who embraces him, who grasps him to himself, as the father of the parable grasps the son who returns to him after losing himself in a distant land (cf. Lk 15:20). The hands of the Father then are a symbolical image of the Father's love, of the love that, for Jesus and for us, is the house of the soul, the dwelling in which our spirit finds welcome. Dying this way on the cross, Jesus grants us to live our life too and every motive for desperation, like sin and death, with this invincible hope in the Father's embrace.

"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" This apparently desperate cry of the crucified Jesus, reported by Matthew (27:46) and Mark (15:33), is thus to be interpreted alongside the last cry reported by Luke: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

But Luke reports two other words of Jesus that I think must be listened to in order to understand how Jesus faced the human desperation that he took upon himself during the passion and his dying on the cross. If in the last cry he expressed the commendation of his spirit to the Father, the other two words expresses rather the commendation to the Father of us sinners, a commendation that Jesus has as it were included in the final commendation of Himself.

While they are nailing him to the cross, Jesus finds the strength, and above all the love, for the most merciful prayer that has ever been expressed by an innocent victim: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

A little later, after having heard the dialogue between the two thieves crucified with him and above all the good thief's request to be remembered by him when he enters into his Kingdom, Jesus says another word full of mercy for all sinners: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43).

With these two words, Jesus receives all of sinful humanity into his commendation to the Father, into his putting his spirit into the Father's hands. It is for this reason, after all, that he accepts to suffer and die on the cross. But it is important that we realize how much these words of the Lord open before us, before every sinner, a space of hope, of hope for certain salvation, of hope for eternal life with Christ, of filial life with him, of total redemption from every lack or failing of life.

Even the Roman soldiers who had so badly mistreated himself up to that point, even the Jews who had requested his crucifixion, hearing Jesus' request to the Father to pardon them, found themselves as it were before an open door that was inviting them to enter with Jesus into the Father's house, into the Father's embrace. Probably none of them thought about it, but maybe afterward, remembering those events, those words, repenting of such cruelty, of having been savage, instruments of the demon to mistreat and kill Jesus, what a breath of hope must have come into their hearts from the memory of that word! "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Who knows how much the centurion thought of that word who, immediately after the death of Jesus, exclaimed: "Certainly this man was just!" (Lk 23:47). If he had not thought of this word, of this pardon, of this commendation that Jesus made for them to the Father, maybe he would have despaired, would have killed himself like Judas.

The same for the good thief: just imagine what an incredible space of hope Jesus opened before him, before him who was at the end of life, and at the nastiest end that can be imagined, when he told him: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise!" "Today, you will be with me in the Father's house, you will be embraced by the Father with me, your spirit, your soul, your life, today they will be in the hands of the Father like my spirit, my life which is eternally with Him!"

Just imagine the hope with which that evil-doer lived out the last minutes of his disordered and failed life. He believed, he had faith in Jesus, he believed in the love of Christ, and he lived in total hope that little time that remained for him to live, and to live suffering terribly on the cross, and then dying, when they broke his knees so he would suffocate.

If we want to understand what hope is, what it is for, what it changes our life into, we must think of the good thief between the moment when Jesus promised him eternal life and the moment of his death, when hope in eternal life, in paradise, became reality for him.

We cannot desire for ourselves a less intense life, less redeemed and saved than his. It would be truly absurd to refuse such a life, such a fulfillment of life. And the Gospel announces this to us, describes it to us, so that this experience become the experience of our life, and hence the hope of our life.