

## 12. Waiting for God

The whole of reality exists for the sake of our relationship with God, the whole of reality exists so that we can live stretched toward embracing the Father, because we are made for God, to go towards Him. In the letter to the Romans, St. Paul recognizes this expectation of all creation that focuses on us, called to become children of God: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” (Rom 8:19-21).

We are called to await the redemption that makes us children of God because in this the meaning and expectation of all creation is fulfilled. Our hope is, in us, the conscious expectation of the fulness of all things in Christ.

Paul writes again: “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Rom 8:23-25)

To be human persons means being created for God. Everything in us: the body, soul, spirit, is created, has been granted to us, in order to go back to the Father, to embrace him, to be eternally united to Him. For this reason the Son became incarnate, died and rose, and for this reason he remains and walks with us and will come at the end of time: to allow us to go to the Father like the baby of van Gogh. Perhaps it is in just this sense that Jesus warned us: “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3).

For this reason, hope is the virtue that allows us to live our humanity with fulness.

Hope begins in us as expectation, and it is exercised as expectation lived out consciously in our humanity. Man knows how to await, man is always in a dimension of waiting, because he is the creature that lives in time in a conscious way. The angels do not live in time, do not have to wait. For them everything is presence and eternity, an infinite time that occurs now. The animals live in time, they instinctively expect that which satisfies their appetite, or that the day rise, or that their master return home. But they are not aware of the expectation.

Human expectation is the true measure of time, a measure that is not numeric, not chronological. We are accustomed to calculating our waiting, to saying that we have waited an hour, that the train is five minutes late, that the Internet made us wait 14 endless seconds before responding to our click. But when we measure it like that, we denature waiting, we make it a thing, a phenomenon split off from ourselves and from what we await. It is as if waiting were something on its own, in itself, without relation. Waiting, rather, and this is the crucial point, is relation, is a dimension of the mystery of relation.

When he was a soldier in the first world war, the Italian poet Clemente Rebora described in a brief prose piece the situation in the trenches, when it would drizzle, when nothing was happening, in a setting of mud, suspended between life and death. And in the midst of this description, there comes from him a two-word phrase that summarizes everything: “Awaiting the waiting” (Clemente Rebora, *Stralcio*).

Only the human being is capable of being so aware of the nature of time that we can live out waiting as an activity, as a free choice, as a work that coincides with itself, that operates on its own. Internet culture, by introducing into all our activities the numerical calculation of wait-time that all these activities can entail, and above all by giving us the illusion that everything can arrive right away, without waiting, deprives us of an essential dimension of the human experience: it deprives us of the freedom of waiting, of willingly waiting. To know how to wait, to know how to “await the waiting” that human life entails, is not simply a question of superficial behavior, like when you say that one needs to know how to bear life philosophically or be *zen*. To know how to wait, and Jesus tells us this, is necessary for our salvation, that is, it is necessary for the recovery and fulfillment of our humanity that God offers us with the Redemption worked by Christ.

“Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.” (Mk 13:33–37)

To keep awake, in the Gospel sense, means to await the waiting, but with the consciousness of faith that our true and most decisive waiting is waiting for God. The true human waiting is waiting for God. Only waiting for God, seeking God, gives meaning to time, is the meaning of time. Time will end and be completed when the definitive meeting with the Lord introduces us into eternity, and also all the time spent seeking God will be made eternal. The true nature of human time is the wait for the definitive meeting with the Lord.