## 13. Christ reveals and fills our solitude

How ugly our faces immediately appear when they are clouded over, downcast, made dark and closed off by a look of envy, of antipathy, of scorn. St. Paul expresses this when he introduces the hymn of the *kenosis* and glorification of Christ in the letter to the Philippians: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus…" (Phil 2:3–5).
That is: have among yourselves the meek and humble gaze of Christ on yourselves and on everyone. This is what St. Benedict wants when he asks the brothers to "outdo each other in rendering respect" (RB 72:4).

Why do we fall so easily into this lowering of our face, of our gaze that is made to be lifted up in desire for the infinite, for God, in the desire that elevates us, that holds our face up?
The problem is a lack of truth, of truth about the view on ourselves, on others, on God. How well St. Paul expresses it as he accompanies the view of the Philippians from being downcast and closed on themselves to the contemplation of Jesus, of his feelings which are revealed in the Paschal parable of his life. As if he said: "If you want to learn how to lift up your gaze, if you want to know your true face, look upon Jesus, learn from Him: rather, absorb Jesus into yourselves, his feelings, his relationship with everyone and everything, his relationship with the Father! Because this is the truth of your face, this saves the beauty and goodness of your face, of your person, of your life, of your vocation, of your mutual relationships."
As Psalm 34 says: "Look to him and you will be radiant" (Ps 34:5). Whoever looks at Christ will have a face radiant with his light.

For this reason it is essential to realize what happens when we meet Jesus Christ, what it means and how this encounter transforms or should transform our life, our heart. If we really want being with Jesus to be a paradise, we must understand what Jesus changes in our life and in our heart when he is with us.

The first change that the presence of Christ gives rise to in our life is simply that *we are no longer alone*. The shepherds of Bethlehem understood this first.
"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them" (Lk 2:8–9).

Christ chose the shepherds, as he will choose Zacchaeus and the tax collectors, as he will choose Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, to show everyone, rich and poor, great and small, holy and depraved, that he has compassion for us. Compassion for what? *For our solitude*. Yes, we are alone! The shepherds are alone, Zacchaeus is alone, and all men and women of the world are alone.
"But, really" – we could all object – "you don't need to exaggerate! We have our families, our friends, our brothers, our colleagues, we are surrounded by so many people… so we are not so alone!"

Agreed! But the shepherds too, like Zacchaeus, and even Mary and Joseph, and the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus too, the centurion and the good thief, did not feel, did not think they were alone before the day on which an announcement resounded in their life, in their heart: "A Savior is born for you; a child is born for you! He is here for you, for each of you! He comes to fill your solitude, the one you carry within you always, but which you have so cheated, eluded, filled with so many relationships, meetings, and things, without ever managing to satisfy it."

In the long, starry nights of Palestine, the shepherds must at any rate have felt that solitude, because they could not escape or cheat those nights, those silences, those infinite and faceless spaces. They were too poor to allow themselves the luxury of avoiding their heart's appointment with their true solitude.

A phrase of Br. Roger of Taizé has always echoed in me from the time of my distant monastic youth: "*Je m'attache à vivre en homme qui sait sa part inéluctable de solitude* – I prepare myself to live as a man who knows his unavoidable part of solitude" (*Ta fête soit sans fin*, Taizé 1971, p. 147).

In the night of Christ's birth, when there appeared "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he loves!'" (Lk 2:13–14), it was as if, before the amazed eyes of the shepherds, the true beauty of the sky was revealed: not an infinity of stars lost in the darkness of the firmament, but a joyful communion, the communion of the angels who reflected on them the love of God, the loving glory of the Trinity.
What a surprise: in Heaven there is no solitude! Not so much because the celestial beings are numberless, but because they are all united in the love of God.

But once the spectacle is finished, the shepherds could have been able to feel even more alone. Imagine the silence after having heard the song of thousands of angels! Imagine the darkness after being dazzled by the light of heaven! No angel remains with them to console them in their isolation, in their exclusion. But the angels know that man's heart suffers from a solitude that only God can console. The angels are numberless and yet they send the shepherds to a single baby, poor like a son of shepherds. He is already there, he is at their house, in their dwelling of hay, manure, and poverty. Jesus already reigns over the kingdom of their solitude.

So then they run to meet Him, thirsting for consolation. They enter and see. A mother lying down, tired from giving birth; Joseph busy trying to arrange the improvised lodging as well as possible… and Him! The Baby! There is nothing but this little family that lives in poverty the moment of its greatest joy. Myriads of angels have come to draw the shepherds toward Him, and no one, except this young couple, is near the Baby?
The shepherds see *the solitude of Jesus*. It is like their own, like that of all men, of all hearts. The Son of God is alone out of compassion for our solitude. He lives an immense solitude that awaits us, that needs us, our company, our smile, our tears of deep feeling.