

15. The work of God

In a homily on the prophet Ezekiel, St. Gregory the Great says something very beautiful: “The work of God is to draw to himself the souls created by him and to recall them to the joys of eternal light – *opus Dei est animas quas creavit colligere, et ad æternæ lucis gaudia revocare*” (Homilies on Ezekiel, Book 2, Homily 4.20).

The work of God is to reunite to himself our lives that are made for Him, drawing them with the joyful beauty of eternal light, that is, with the light of his Face. The work of God is basically the mercy of an embrace that is already open to receive us into his Fatherly heart. The work of God is like the father in the painting of van Gogh, who drops all his other work to concern himself only with opening his arms wide and smiling at his child so that it comes to him. Like the Creator who, after six days of creation, stops after the creation of the man and the woman to concentrate on the relationship of love with them (cf. Gen 1:26–2:3). Jesus came to complete this work, to contribute to this work of the Father, to incarnate, that is make visible and perceptible in time, this attraction of God which gives meaning and fulness of life to each man.

And each of us is called to cooperate with God in this work, for ourselves and for everyone. One cooperates with God for everyone if one cooperates first of all for oneself. Whoever lets themselves be drawn to communion with God, whoever lets themselves be drawn to unite with Him who makes us, participates in the work of God who draws all souls, all hearts to himself.

This work that is personal and for everyone animates the Church, is the nature and mission of the Church. A community is alive if in it and through it one cooperates in the attraction of God that is incarnate in Christ, manifested in the face of Christ, and intended for all the souls created by God.

The mission of each person in the Church, the mission of the Church in each person, is the attraction of God who gathers us, who brings us together, who calls us back, to make us one single thing with Him. This attraction, which by uniting us to God makes us participate in the luminous joy of his eternity, is the beauty of God, the beauty of his love, of his infinite mercy.

Jesus incarnated this work to the point of death on the Cross: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die” (Jn 12:32–33).

To become available for this work of God that is accomplished in the attraction of Christ crucified, so that all people can be gathered into communion with the Father, in the joy of the Spirit, is the most urgent, appropriate, and responsible missionary effort that we can offer to the world. The problems of the world, the tragedies of the world, can find salvation only if, through us, Christ can come and draw us to himself, to the Father. We are created for this, and all people, all souls, even those of the worst enemies of humanity – of their own humanity and that of others – cannot find salvation and fulfillment if not on the path traced out by the attraction of God for

the human heart. This awareness of faith, which Christ announces to us and grants us, is what transforms our life, and hence our way of living out time.

In Psalm 129 we read: “My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption” (Ps 130:6–7).

The watchmen wait for dawn throughout the night, they await the morning. That is, they live out time by waiting for another time, they live out a moment by waiting for another moment. They live by awaiting a better time than what they are living out. Israel, rather, is formed to await Someone, to wait for the Lord, and this changes everything. Time is no longer just waiting for another time, time is no longer just waiting for itself: it is the expectation of the eternal. Awaiting the eternal in time. An awaiting that is lived out within time, but for Someone who is eternal, but for an encounter with the Eternal. Time could remain as it is, could stay burdensome, painful, and mortal like it is, but it becomes the space for a relationship, for an encounter, for a presence that are eternal, infinite. And this changes everything, as testified by the saints, martyrs, and so many witnesses around and among us.

This position of the heart, which expects in time not another time but the coming of the Lord, makes us free. Christian freedom, the freedom of the faith, is precisely the echoing in time of the expectation of the Eternal. Because this expectation full of hope frees us from the dictatorship that we impose on ourselves and on others when our happiness depends only on what escapes from us, on what passes away, or on what will pass away in an instant, even if we manage to grab onto it.

Only the relationship with the Eternal allows one to live in time with freedom, the freedom of a detachment that grants us the ability to respect everything, to let everything be, and hence to love everything without setting conditions by our projects, our demands, our thirst for possession.

St. Martin of Tours said before dying: “Lord, if I am still necessary for your people, I do not reject the effort: your will be done!” And his biographer comments: “He did not fear to die nor did he refuse to live” (Sulpicius Severus, *Life of St. Martin*, letter 2:11, 14).

This is the maturity of Christian freedom: freedom from fear, from fear of death, but also from fear of life, from fear of the effort to live, to serve, to give life. Only such a position contradicts the culture that dominates the world today, the culture that fears death without loving life, the culture of euthanasia and abortion, of terrorism, or war, of individualism, of sterile self-referentiality.

But indeed, it is a question of freedom, a freedom that the coming of Christ makes responsible. All the parables and all the discourses of Jesus on Christian watchfulness speak of a responsibility, of our freedom that is stirred by the fact that He comes, that He is now coming, in this hour, in the hour that we are living out. Hope in Christ makes us free and responsible.