

17. The promise of Someone

“All things have been handed over to me by my Father” (Mt 11:27).

“All that is mine is yours, and yours is mine” (Jn 17:10).

This is the attitude of Jesus that the older brother of the parable of the merciful father in Luke 15 should have lived out: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (Lk 15:31). There is more possessing in hoping for everything from the Father, certain of his love, than in consuming whatever one can find: goods, relationships, freedom. The older son was called to virginity in possessing everything, not by holding it in his hands or consuming it for himself and his friends, but by cultivating the awareness that he had everything in common with a good and generous father.

We too are called to possess everything in communion with God, and not by going off far from Him with our inheritance shut up in our purse. The younger son, by departing with his whole inheritance in his pocket, made a split between his communion with the father and his freedom, his goods, his heart’s capacity to love. And this makes it such that one then gets worn out, because one is no longer nourished by him who generates us, who generates our freedom, the use of things, and our affective life. It’s like someone who goes off, carrying with himself a great reserve of water, but is distancing himself from the spring, and sooner or later the reserve runs out and he can’t reestablish it, far from the spring.

The older son stayed with the father, but he had the impression that the father was someone who keeps everything for himself without giving anything to his sons. He never realized that communion with the father was rather, for him, like a staying connected to the spring, because everything that the father possessed was continually granted to him. The more he let the father managed his goods, the more they become his own, the more he could enjoy them.

The vows educate us to practice this particular possession of our freedom, of our affectivity, and of the goods that are given to us. It is a possessing without possession. But it is only by living in the hope that expects everything always from our Father who is in Heaven that we can live out the vows with this awareness and have this experience. And only in this way does living the vows, living out virginity, obedience, and poverty, become a witness for everyone, does it propose a new possession of freedom, of goods, and of affections that is possible for everyone. One bears witness not just to a way of life, but to the life of Christ that the Spirit wants to give to all.

The space of hope that our vows imply is founded on the fact that God does not promise us something, but Someone. For whoever truly hopes, as Psalm 20 says for example, does not hope in chariots or horses but in God: “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Ps 20:7–8).

In the parable of the prodigal son too, the father reminds the older son, before assuring him of the communion of goods between them, that it is especially his paternal presence that has been and always will be given to him: “Son, you are always with me” (Lk 15:31).

At the moment he leaves his disciples to ascend into heaven, Jesus also promises Someone rather than something. He promises the Holy Spirit, “another Comforter” (cf. Jn 14:16–17); but he also promises a presence even more extraordinary and constant of himself: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

In the end, Christ basically promises the fulfillment of his mystery, foretold by the prophets and announced to Mary and Joseph: the “God-with-us,” the Emmanuel. “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’, a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’.” (Mt 1:22–23).

All the disciples of Jesus, then, are called to hope in a Presence that is already granted, that is, they are called to recognize it and to bear witness to it. Christ is what we hope for. Hope is in the Church that hopes in Him, that lives in hope of his salvation. In the *Salve Regina* we salute the Mother of God with the titles, “*vita, dulcedo et spes nostra*” – “our life, our sweetness, and our hope.” Mary is not so much the object of our hope, but our hope lived with perfection. Mary incarnates the certain and perfect hope of the Church. In no human creature has hope been lived with such purity and intensity. We can say that, during Holy Saturday, the Virgin was only hope, only expectation of what her faith believed, only hope in the Resurrection, in the life of the Son. Mary lived out for us the whole of hope in the Resurrection.

But Mary is an image and prefiguration of the Church. Christian hope is an ecclesial hope, like faith. It is what the Church hopes for, what the Church expects, on the basis of the faith in Christ dead and risen again to save the world.

For this reason it is important to explore more deeply how our communities are called to cultivate and live out this hope. How our living in the Christian community should incarnate and express hope and make us walk in it.