

## 18. Christian memory, taste for life

Jesus energetically corrected Peter so that his freedom would no longer escape Redemption. Peter, for better or worse, treasured the harsh lesson. When the situation represents itself at the foot-washing, and Peter still reacts by instinct: “You will never wash my feet!” (Jn 13:8a), Jesus will no longer need to give him a whipping: a gentle recall will be enough for Peter to straighten out right away at least the desire to think like Christ: “Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’” (Jn 13:8b-9).

It is not necessary for Peter to have a solid freedom, a freedom that does not fall, that does not deny, but a freedom *that corrects itself*, that readjusts itself to the freedom of Christ, with humility and imploring. The same will happen elsewhere after the denial: Jesus looks at him and right away Peter’s freedom readjusts itself to the freedom of Christ, to his charity, that is, to his death and rising for him, and hence it is enough to cry, to feel pain for the pain of Christ, to feel the sense of self, of Him, and of all, that corresponds to the Redemption, that offers its heart and life to his work of Salvation.

These sentiments, this thinking and tasting that correspond to the sentiments of Christ the Redeemer, are a memory filled simultaneously with the whole mystery of Christ and of our life. Christian memory, which is Eucharistic, a memory, that is, that celebrates and renews the paschal mystery by offering to it and in it the whole created reality, history, culture, our existence, and hence the Church which, in the Redemption, embraces the universe and humanity from the beginning to the end of times.

To live this density of memory is the task and the beauty of the Christian life that the monastic vocation is called to cultivate and express with particular concentration. The memory of Christ is not just a thought, “thinking about him”: it is a global experience that involves all of life, such that life itself becomes proof and substance of the commemorated Reality, of the Redemption of the world in Christ, who died and rose.

I would like to underline some aspects of this memory that confirms the Redeemer’s sentiments in life, aspects that it seems to me always necessary to recover, especially when I look at the situation of religious and monastic life today.

The first aspect is the *taste for life*. As I said, *phronein* is translated in Latin with *sapĕre* or *sentire*, and *sapĕre* also means to taste, to perceive the taste of things. To taste something means that it becomes a good for us, a goodness, a beauty for us, in us; that we assimilate its flavor. God created the good taste of fruit to invite us to eat, to nourish ourselves with good things, and so to grow and live better. Just as he created the color and scent of flower to attract the bees, the butterflies, or the other insects. Taste is for a positive assimilation that makes life grow, that makes us live better. To live with taste makes us live more, more intensely, the good and the beautiful, what our heart has been made and given to us in order to gather.

I say this because it seems to me that the origin of much sadness and infidelity to the vocation that one sees in consecrated life, but also in priestly life, and in the Christian life in general, for example in marriage, comes from *insipidness*, from a lack of the capacity to taste life, and to taste it a hundred times over as Christ came to allow us to do. And this does grave damage not only to the people who do not have this experience, but also to the witness to the Redemption which, in this way, is taken away from others, from the Church, from the world. He who lives with the taste that the Redemption gives to life is an expert in and a witness of the Redemption as a possibility for the fullness of life for all. *To live with taste* is a mission, and is a diffusion, is like the smell of a roast. The smell is the diffusion of the taste, and an invitation to taste. It's not for nothing that St. Paul writes to the Corinthians that we are "the aroma of Christ" and that God "through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him" (2 Cor 2:14-15). But that is what we are if we have flavor. A frozen roast gives off no aroma because it has no taste. And so it is like it is not there. No one has the urge to eat a frozen roast. And often we reduce the Christian life and the consecrated life, too, to something frozen that we ourselves do not taste and that does not give off an aroma to invite others to taste it. Of course, a frozen roast keeps for a longer time. But a mummy also keeps for millennia, but it will never have the attraction of a living person that looks at you and smiles.

The problem is that often the taste for life in Christ has been demeaned for fear of that pleasure in life which, as they say, easily slips into sin. Perhaps because the real but subtle difference between tasting and enjoying has not been understood. I would say that tasting is an intensity of living; enjoying, as our current language intends it, is to consume. One can taste life without consuming it, with respect, gratitude, chastity. When taste consumes for enjoyment, it destroys the source of its own enjoyment, and hence the possibility of tasting again of continuing to live with taste.

Jesus condemned the self-referential enjoyment when he described the rich fool who says to himself: "And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry!" (Lk 12:19). See, he has a lot of roast in the freezer, and he anticipates tasting it and consuming it without end. But the problem is that his life is taken from him, and it is taken from him, not so much by God as by his position in life, by his way of conceiving of his life as an instrument for consuming joy rather than as a place to have an experience of it, to taste it.

How beautiful the spectacle of old monks and nuns who during their whole existence have learned to taste every instant of life, every detail! They give off an aroma that evangelizes, because they pass on the desire to live with taste, with fullness, and to know the secret of their wisdom, in the etymological sense of the term *sapientia*, from their capacity to taste what is real. And the secret is always just one thing: fidelity to the exercise of a memory of the sense of life that Christ granted to the world, that Christ the Redeemer left for us as a living inheritance so that we could experience it: "Do this in memory of me!", exercise, that is, the sense and taste for life that I myself live and that I leave to you with my Presence to live in yourselves and to share among yourselves.