19. With the Heart of Christ

Ad quid venisti? Why have you come? Why are we in the form of vocation to which we have been called? We have come because we are called to be with Christ, to be with Him who gives us life in truth and fullness. We have come and we remain truly only for Him who is with us, and so that He, received by us, can be with everyone, can reach everyone with his presence that gives life to every human creature who awaits Him from the depth of their own desolation.

Christ is with us in the Church, in the sacraments, in our community, in his word, in our needy brothers and sisters, in the unique and mysterious relationship of friendship that He cultivates with each of us. The companionship that the Lord offers us, his always being with us, is an infinite grace, which has no limits or exemplars. We cannot live anything greater, more beautiful, happier, more profound, more intense, more illumating that being with Him, than living in the presence of Him who looks upon us, speaks to us, loves us.

St. Benedict was on fire with this awareness, and for this reason he insists that we prefer nothing to the love of Christ (cf. RB 4:21), that we hold nothing more precious than Christ (cf. RB 5:2), that we prefer absolutely nothing to Christ (cf. RB 72:11). For him, the monastic life, the Christian life, is a continual recognizing of Jesus as present, always, in everyone, everywhere, in every circumstance. A "recognition" that is a "standing before Him." I would have to cite the whole Rule to illustrate this insistent command.

But why then are we so distracted from the presence of Jesus? Why do we forget Him? Why do we think of something else or other people? Why, doing everything, living everything, meeting everyone, do we not think of Him, do we not keep our heart united to Him who is already here with us?

Certainly, this tendency in us to be distracted from Christ who is present is the fruit of our condition of being sinners. But it is just for this that Jesus has come, to save us from this he became man and dwelt among us, in us. How can we truly open ourselves to this salvation? If Jesus is present precisely to save our life from insubstantiality, why do we let ourselves be saved so little? What must we do to counteract this trend of distraction, of forgetfulness, or superficiality that makes our life superficial and baseless, our relationships, what we think, say, do, and the witness of our person and our communities?

Perhaps it is because we do not experience deeply enough the presence of Christ in our life, and his power, his beauty and goodness, and how being with Him changes our life, does us good, transforms us, makes us better, makes us holy.

At each appearance of the Risen One, the disciples realized that He was already present before they saw Him, before they recognized Him. And yet, they also perceived how much his presence filled their life with meaning and light: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road?" the two disciples of Emmaus say to each other (Lk 24:32). Their heart perceived that meeting Jesus does

not call us only to listen to his words, to be in his company, to have strength and energy to accomplish good works: *it calls us to have one heart with Him*.

A friend suggested to me a further interpretation of the phrase written on the door between the cloister and the church of Chau Son Nord, *VOLO TECUM*; an interpretation that translates the two words without implying the verb "to be." Thus the phrase would mean simply: "I want with you," that is, that the ultimate desire of our seeking the presence of Christ is that we be able to unite ourselves to Him so deeply that we can will with Him, that we can unite our will to his, our freedom to his freedom, our love to his love.
The point is basically to express an act of obedience so radical that we not only do what Christ wants, but unite our will to his, such that we do not will anything other than what He wills, that we do not choose anything other than what He chooses, that we do not love anything other than what He loves, and that we not love in any other way than He loves. Paul would say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).
VOLO TECUM describes then something like *a coinciding of our heart with the Heart of Christ*. In fact, St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Whoever is united to the Lord forms with him a single spirit" (1 Cor 6:17).

For this very reason, we are called by the Lord and we have come where we have been asked to follow Him: so that, in us, being with Him can be able to reach the perfection of the communion of hearts, the communion of his Heart, wounded by love, with our heart, wounded by the misery of sin.
The heart of Christ is an inextinguishable fire of eternal love that, uniting itself to our poor heart, consumes all its misery. But Jesus does not consume our misery just to eliminate it, like when one burns weeds or garbage. The love of Christ is a fire that burns up our misery by transforming it into love.

This is what the Risen One achieved in Peter by asking him three times: "Do you love me?": he transformed all the misery of his denial, of his frailty and infidelity, into communion of love between their hearts. And this communion of hearts immediately became for Peter an inexhaustible spring for his mission: "Feed my sheep!" (cf. Jn 21:15–19).

The Lord makes us ask the Father each day for this grace of being able to will and love with Him: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!" (Mt 6:10). And Mary has been given to us as the Mother of this profound communion, since at Cana and at the foot of the Cross, she asks us to obey Jesus's desire to save our spousal communion with Him: "Whatever he tells you, do it!" (Jn 2:5).

VOLO TECUM. We are called to correspond in the depth of our heart to the Presence that is already granted, to the Presence of Him who has already died and risen for us. And so the universal desire for happiness finds fulfillment and rest in the Lord who enters into our life, into our communities, into the world, taking us with Him, today and always, into the paradise of his Love.