

5. “Blessed are the peacemakers”

When the Risen Jesus reaches the two disciples of Emmaus, he finds them without peace and hope (cf. Lk 24:13-15). They have left Jerusalem and therefore, the tiny remains of Jesus’s disciples, who, despite everything, were gathered together fraternally around the Mother of Jesus in the house of the Last Supper. “We were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:21), they tell Him. But Jesus had been crucified, was dead and that hope had failed.

What the two disciples say, betrays two big mistakes in their relationship with life and Jesus Himself. The first is the mistake on which they found their hope. They expected a political and worldly success from Jesus. They hoped that thanks to Christ, they would receive power and glory. They hoped He would defeat and annihilate their enemies.

How often we incur in this mistake even when conceiving and living our vocation and community life. We put our hope in a peace which comes from power, often even economic, or from success or the defeat of our enemies. That is, in a peace which is only for us and not a good to be shared with others and everyone. This false hope in an even falser peace, is the root of so many acts of unfaithfulness, and above all, of so many divisions, not only in the world but also within the communities.

The second mistake made by the two disciples of Emmaus, linked to the first, is to not understand that what they describe as their sadness and desperation, should be for them the reason for infinite joy. “Our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him” (Lk 24:20). Jesus died on the Cross and for this they have no more hope. But in reality, the Cross is the fountain of all hope, of a hope that absolutely nothing can delude. The attachment of hope to worldly power prevents them from opening their hearts to the hope arising from the Cross and thus to the peace which nothing can ever take away from them.

When we see the wounds of the Cross, the weakness and absurdity of the Cross present on the Body of Christ, that is, on the Church, on our communities and indeed on ourselves, we lose hope and peace. We cannot see that all this, in reality, should fill us with hope and peace, because nothing, not even death, can take away from us, the life and love that flows from the open heart of Christ.

But let us note that Jesus joins the two disciples of Emmaus on the road they have already taken, the wrong road as they go in the wrong direction and do not take the path towards hope. Precisely on that road, the Risen One reaches them and walks with them in the wrong direction they have taken. But as soon as Christ who is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6) walks with them, the road becomes the right one, the way of the truth which leads to life.

The Church seeks its synodal road and invites us to find this in every community as well as within the Order. It is important for us to be always conscious that the

synodal way of the Church is fundamentally Christ Himself, who walks with us on the road we are traveling. This road is tiring for some and sad for many. For many it is also wrong, or blocked by many obstacles, real or imaginary. Before we correct the direction of travel, like the disciples of Emmaus who, that same evening travel along the same road in the opposite direction, we much help each other to see the Risen One who is walking with us now, talking to us now, is close to us and loves us to the point of setting our hearts on fire (cf. Lk 24:32). By walking with us, the Risen One is already giving us the experience of a peace within us and among us which, like a ray of sun in the clouds, often returns to give us consolation and hope, renewing our tired energy to run ahead and proclaim that Christ is alive and with us.

Sometimes, when we go through difficult moments personally and in the community, we risk remembering Christ and speaking of him as though He were someone dead in whom we can no longer put our hope. Instead, we should speak about Him and remember Him as the Risen One who cares for us and always reaches us to give us back not only hope, but also what we actually hope for, what we have lost, the Spirit who gives us love, joy and peace (cf. Gal 5:22).

In the Beatitudes, Jesus makes a list of the gifts of the Spirit which He himself comes to communicate to us when we experience our limits and those of the others. One beatitude concerns peace, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9).

To be peacemakers is not different from “seeking peace and pursuing it” which St. Benedict asks of us. The peacemaker or peace worker is precisely the person who puts himself totally at service, so that peace may be accepted and grow. We serve peace by constantly seeking for it, asking God for it insistently, as we have seen, as well as also being open so that the Spirit of Jesus may give what this beatitude promises as a gift to the peacemakers, that is the recognition that they are children of God. All the Beatitudes promise the Kingdom or the hundredfold of what has been taken away. So, this beatitude promises that we will be called children of God, that is, we will be identified with Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

To be considered children of God because we seek peace, implies that the absolute sign of peace is *fraternity*. Peace, both peace within the heart and peace with God, is above all, fraternal peace, the fruit of reconciliation. The peacemaker is a maker of fraternity, and thus of forgiveness, reconciliation, sharing, consolation, attention to one other, fraternal correction, service and care for those in need. Fraternal love is the principal road of peace. The whole Rule of St. Benedict asks us to seek peace through seeking fraternity. And St. Benedict helps us to live all of the vows, obedience, poverty, chastity, stability, so as to build fraternal life in peace. Otherwise, no Christian or monastic commitment, no act of asceticism, no effort of conversion at all, would take hold in us or become flesh in our lives. To be recognized as children of God is the same as being recognized as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In a community there is a real search for peace when there is a real search for true fraternity. If fraternal relations are distant, perhaps there can still be a certain tranquility in the community, but there will not be the experience of real peace, the peace of God which surpasses every intelligence and keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 4:7). For this reason, real peace is always the fruit of reconciliation. Reconciliation does not mean the absence of conflicts and failings among us, but rather, that by mutually forgiving one another, we can resolve these in the love of Christ, the communion of the Spirit and the mercy of the Father.

The last three “instruments of good works” in Chapter 4 of the Rule express this in a simple and sublime manner:

“To pray for one’s enemies in the love of Christ.

To return to peace before sunset with the person you are in disagreement with.

And never to despair of God’s mercy.” (RB 4,72-74)

Peace, for St. Benedict, is that interior state of mind and relationship with others, that is, as it were, in tension between the love of Christ, who prays on the Cross for His enemies, that is for all us sinners, and the mercy of the Father who answers the prayer of the Son. Really because of His prayer, we can never despair. We can never despair even about peace itself, about peace in our heart, in the community, in the Church and in the world, ***because true peace is the gift of the Holy Spirit which the love of the Son asks the merciful Father for us.***

Outside this dimension of the Trinity, we cannot understand peace in a true way and we cannot accommodate and live it. The truth that allows us to accommodate peace is above all the truth about God, that is, Love up to the point of death on the Cross, and infinite Mercy. Only within this truth about God, revealed in Christ, can we discover the truth about Man, about ourselves and others. This alone allows us to seek and pursue peace, never despairing of finding it and living peace within and among ourselves so as to transmit it to the whole of humankind.