

#### 4. Christ, principle of every renewal

“Friend, why have you come?” – “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!”

Calling us friends and asking us to realize that this alone is the meaning of our vocation, Jesus, following St. Benedict, St. Bernard, and all the saints, helps us also understand where our vocation is born from and renewed. For Peter everything is reborn when he manages to say “You” to Christ, entrusting to Christ himself his response to the call to love him. It is as if Peter said to Jesus: “You call me to be your friend, your best friend, to prefer you to everything and every other person, to prefer you above all to myself. But I understand that if I do not ask You for this love, this friendship with You, I cannot guarantee anything, I cannot promise you any fidelity. My faithfulness to your love can only be the fruit of your love for me, of the friendship that you grant me. I can live out my fidelity, my love, only if I obtain them from your love, I can reestablish them only by starting from the friendship that You offer me here and now!”

It is as if here Peter remembered a word that Jesus spoke in the Last Supper: “You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” (Jn 15:14–16)

Jesus does not say “I have called you friends” as if he were giving us a title. He says it in the sense that he calls us to be sharers in what is most dear to Him: his communion with the Father, his sharing everything with the Father. Through his friendship, Christ opens us up to enjoying all that He has in common with the Father. That is, he gives us the Holy Spirit, he gives us their whole Trinitarian Love and all that this love possesses, wants, creates, and loves: not just the whole universe, but all of humanity, which is a gift full of responsibility and compassion, full of the desire for the salvation in Christ of every human being. In friendship with Christ, we can ask for everything from the Father. And what is granted us is the ability not only to *ask* for everything, but to *obtain* everything from the Father.

Jesus offers us all this gratuitously, it is his choice, not ours. But he does offer it to us, and this means that he asks us to receive it as one receives a friendship. Everything is offered to us in the friendship of Christ. But we can reject everything. How? By rejecting the Lord’s friendship, like Judas.

Peter, as he humbly receives the offer of friendship that he has betrayed, sees that everything is renewed in him a hundredfold, that the whole mission for which Jesus chose him is renewed, is reborn. No longer because of what he does, or what he gives, but thanks to the friendship that Jesus reestablishes between them.

After this dialogue, Jesus basically asks Peter two things: “Feed my sheep!” and “Follow me!” (cf. Jn 21:17, 19, 22). What do these mean? They mean that, in the exchange of love with Jesus, the vocation and mission of Peter are wholly renewed. The one condition for accomplishing his mission will be to follow the Lord, that is, to stay always with Him, united to Him, at each step of his life, up to death. United to Him in friendship, that is, with the heart.

It is thus that we must understand what that phrase of Christ’s in the Book of Revelation means for us: “I make all things new” (Rev 21:5), and so also how we must open ourselves up to the renewal of everything and in particular of our life following the monastic vocation.

During the most recent Easter Vigil, which I celebrated with our nuns of Cortona, I was particularly struck by the prayer that is recited after the reading in which the Prophet Ezekiel announces that the Lord will give us a new heart and a new spirit: “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Ez 36:26–28)

The prayer says:

“O God of unchanging power and eternal light, look with favor on the wondrous mystery of the whole Church and serenely accomplish the work of human salvation, which you planned from all eternity; may the whole world know and see that what was cast down is raised up, what had become old is made new, and all things are restored to integrity through Christ, just as by him they came into being.”<sup>1</sup>

It is a text of the liturgy that expresses all the need for renewal that the whole of humanity, the Church, each community and individual person feels. Who in fact does not desire that everything that has been destroyed by evil, by sin, by violence, by ambition and the greed of the powerful, by war, could be restored? If we think of the images of the cities destroyed by the recent wars; if we think of the moral destruction of our societies, of so many families, of so many young people; if we think of the precarious situation of the political, cultural, and religious institutions in all the world; if we think of the crumbling of so many ecclesial and religious communities, through infidelity, through abuses, through the narcissistic deviations of those who should be in charge of their edification... How great a need for reconstruction there is everywhere!

Then the prayer mentions growing old, not just in age and in strength, but sometimes in heart, and will, and enthusiasm for grand ideals, the aging of our passion for Christ, the “first love” that made us say yes with enthusiasm and desire to run after him as a follower.

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<sup>1</sup> Testo latino: “Deus, incommutabilis virtus et lumen ætérnum, réspice propítius ad totíus Ecclésiæ sacraméntum, et opus salutis humánæ perpétuæ dispositiõnis efféctu tranquillius operáre; totúsque mundus experiátur et vídeat deiécta érigi, inveteráta renovári et per ipsum Christum redire ómnia in íntegrum, a quo sumpsére princípium.”

But the prayer summarizes the experiences of destruction and growing old in the loss of integrity, that is of unity and harmony. The loss of the harmonious unity of our life, of our communities, of humanity, is the experience that makes us feel most fragile, most lost. It is the condition that fills Jesus's heart with compassion as he sees the crowds "like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36). The experience, that is, of dissipation, of disintegration of the heart, of life, and of all that constitutes life. Or again the loss of unity and communion among peoples, or within peoples, but also of the Church, of communities, of charismatic families, of Orders. The realities that were at one time united, whole, harmonious, maybe thanks to the guidance of a good shepherd, split apart, disintegrate, because everybody goes his own way, seeks his own interest, his own little power, his own glory.

What can bring back to harmonious unity all that has disintegrated? What can give the human world back its unity, its wholeness?

The prayer of the Church sees in just this the victory of the risen Christ. God foresaw from always that he would save humanity with the death and resurrection of Christ, through the "wondrous mystery of the whole Church," through the mystery of the Church who guards, announces, and transmits universal salvation in Christ the Lord.

The prayer of the Easter Vigil that we are meditating on announces to us that the salvation that God works is the mystery of the resurrection of Christ, who communicates himself to human reality through the life of the Church. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ becomes the origin, the source of an impossible renewal of human reality: "What was cast down is raised up, what had become old is made new, and all things are restored to integrity through Christ, just as by him they came into being."

The Risen One is the origin and means of every renewal, of every reconstruction, of every rejuvenation, of every reestablishment of complete unity of all that is human, starting with our hearts, our relationships, our communities.

Everything, in fact, needs resurrection, but only Christ is risen and only He is the origin, the source of every renewal for us and for all.

The faith should not make us believe in the Resurrection just as if it were an isolated reality, but in the Resurrection that, with the gift of the presence of the Lord, renews the world, reawakens all that man, by sin, has destroyed and disintegrated. The renewal we need is that which only Christ can achieve, since he is the origin of all things.