

20. Ways of closing off hope: murmuring

If hope is all this, if it is this gift of living in expectation of all from the Father with confidence, why do we often lack hope, why do we not always live from it? Faith can be hard to accept; love can be difficult to live out. But hope – why is it difficult for us to accept it as a breath of life, as horizon, as relationship with God? What in us is opposed to hope? What betrays hope in us? From what must we always be converted, be purified?

I want to emphasize some attitudes that are opposed in us to hope.

The first is complaining, murmuring. St. Benedict constantly warns us against murmuring (cf. RB 4:39; 5:17–19; 34:6; 35:13; 40:9; 41:5; 53:18). Complaining, even if it is often justified, forgets that we are following a vocation, we live in community, we have superiors, etc., not by virtue of some project, but out of hope. Projects, even spiritual projects, even evangelical projects, sooner or later become power projects, out of a desire to acquire some power, and hence out of the disappointment of not possessing it as we would want to. A project often becomes a claim over oneself or over others that sooner or later gets disappointed. Basically, we are disappointed because we are full of expectations from ourselves or from others, or from circumstances, and for this reason we no longer hope in God. As I have already highlighted: we expect the infinite from what is finite, instead of from the Lord and in the Lord.

It is like when, while they were crossing the lake on a boat, the Apostles notice that they have not brought a sufficient store of bread with them (cf. Mk 8:14–21). Surely this makes them worry, they fear not having enough, suffering a little hunger. Maybe they brought all the rest, but since the rest is food that is eaten with the bread, like oil and salt, it is like they are missing everything.

I know from experience that one always forgets something when one leaves on a trip, but there are things you forget that make everything else you remembered to bring useless. For example, if you forget your passport. Then you start to complain, to murmur. It is likely that one of the disciples was given the task that day of providing the bread, and maybe then they start grumbling against this brother. Maybe they are saying: “That guy there you can never trust for anything. The Master should give the job to something else, someone more alert and less distracted!”, and hence maybe grumbling against Jesus too.

I am not making a caricature of what the disciples thought or said to themselves, because these are things that are constantly happening again among us, in the life of each community, of each family, of each group of friends or colleagues. We complain because we do not obtain right away, from ourselves, from others, from reality, and deep down from God, what we demand, something that satisfies us and reassures us immediately, like the bread that we want to eat today.

Jesus gets irritated with the disciples because of this concern of theirs, this fear of lacking something. He helps them remember: “And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears

do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?' They said to him, 'Twelve.' 'And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?' And they said to him, 'Seven.' And he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'" (Mk 8:17-21).

Deep down, we are capricious like little kids. Not always and immediately indulging the whims of little kids is an education toward hope. Man is instinctively capricious, but if he learns to face up to a lack, his heart matures, his freedom grows, his relationship with himself, with others, reality, and God becomes ever more free, mature, capable of waiting, of patience. Patience is the most characteristic virtue of human and Christian maturity. The patient man waits without demanding, and especially without complaining. The patient man keeps himself always ready to receive as a gift all that which everyone would like to grasp as something owed to them.

On the boat that day, the disciples basically feel that the bread is owed to them, because they are wearing themselves out following Jesus, rowing from one shore of the lake to the other according to his orders, and then standing hours and hours amid the crowd that followed and listened to the Lord. They did not have time to eat, sleep, concern themselves with anything other than Jesus and the crowd. It is like they had said on that day: "OK, we deserve at least a little bread! We have left everything for Him; he at least shouldn't let us die of hunger!"

This impatience, like Jesus says, hardened their heart and closed their eyes and ears. For they closed their thoughts and feelings off into themselves. They no longer thought even of Jesus, or such miracles, like the multiplication of the loaves and the fish. They no longer defined their life within their relationship with the Father.

Christian patience is not a Stoic virtue, for strong and tough people. It is rather the virtue of the meek and humble of heart who, even at moments of lacking something, even at moments of truly unjust lacks, know that we can expect a lot more from life than an immediate and immanent satisfaction. In the space that patience refuses to fill up with complaining and accusing others, an expectation is created that only God manages to fulfill, that only God in Christ came to fulfill without measure with the gift of himself, with the sacrifice of himself that makes him living Bread for us, his Body offered and Blood poured out, the Eucharist.