

## 5. Does salvation interest us?

I was saying that, since the interests of Christ, the interests of God, are the salvation of the world, the redemption of sinners, our salvation, no one can better pursue their own interests than by pursuing those of Jesus Christ.

But here a question arises, that I put to myself or when I see how many effectively live in a monastery or in other forms of Christian life: Does salvation truly interest us? Does it truly interest us that Christ save us? Do we truly live out the renunciation of our own interests to pursue the great interest of Christ, which is our salvation?

Let's think of St. Peter, when he opposed himself to Jesus's going to Jerusalem to suffer, to be put to death, and to rise (cf. Mt 16:21–23). Jesus harshly reproves him: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Mt 16:23). Does it not seem like here we sense an echo of the phrase of St. Paul to the Philippians: "For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:21). The verb used in Jesus's reproof of Peter, *phroneo*, means "sense," "judge," "have a feeling." Basically you could also translate it with be interested in, be drawn to, be aiming at, and in this the phrase of St. Paul and that of Jesus would coincide. It is enough to think of the discourse that Jesus gives right after reproving Peter, a discourse on the renunciation of self for Christ, which the disciples will understand and above all live out only after the death and resurrection of the Lord: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" (Mt 16:24–26).

Peter, and all the disciples with him, had not yet understood that, if they were honest with their hearts, if they went to the depth of what they experienced in encountering Jesus and following him for three years, they would understand that it was their highest interest and profit to lose everything, even life, because only Christ saves life. It is not the world that saves life, stirring in us interests of concupiscence, of thirst for power and riches, of power and success; it is not the world that saves our life, the true destiny of our life, the eternal value of our life. Only Christ is the Savior of life. But, like Peter, we do not understand this enough, and we need the Holy Spirit of Pentecost in order to be filled with this awareness, with these feelings, with this interest that is totally abandoned to Jesus Christ. We need to pass through a trial in which our worldly interests would collapse so that we might remain attached to Christ as the unique interest that frees and saves us. We need to understand truly that only by pursuing the interests of Jesus Christ do we pursue our true and unique interest, which is that of letting him save our life by grasping it closely to Himself.

Peter had already understood this, with his head and perhaps always with the feelings of his heart, such that when almost everyone abandoned Jesus after his discourse in the synagogue of Capernaum, he says to him: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). But he was saying this without being

truly disposed to lose his life so Christ could save it. During the Last Supper also he will say: "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (Jn 13:37).

Why did this readiness to lay down his life for Jesus fall through? Was Peter's desire not perhaps disinterested? What was there that was not right, that was not true, in this impulse of Peter's to lay down his life for Christ?

Perhaps it is the very verb he used that was wrong: Peter wanted to "lay down" his life for Christ and not "lose it" for Him, as Jesus had asked in Matthew 16:25 after having corrected Peter: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." When Peter says that he wants to lay down his life for Jesus, it is as if he were saying: "I will lay down my life to save you!" But he who loses his life for Christ abandons it entirely to the salvation of Christ, offers it to him so that He can save it, rather than asking the world for the salvation of his life, gaining the whole world. Peter, presuming to know how to give his own life for Christ, still held his life in his hands to give it to Christ, as he thought he knew how to do it, for example by using the sword to defend him. Christ does not need this. Christ needs to save us, and thus he needs us to renounce all the other salvations that we presume to grant ourselves or that we seek in the world.

But often we, like Peter, need to pass through a total failure of our proud interests, to abandon ourselves to the single interest of Christ, which is to save us. We need to drown in the sea, like Peter, to truly cry out to Jesus: "Lord, save me!" (Mt 14:30). Imagine how much more intense this cry was in the heart of Peter after the denial, even if Jesus was dying on the Cross, not to drown completely in desperation, like Judas drowned. We cannot follow Christ, we cannot be faithful to any vocation, to any effort made for Christ, unless our heart cries out continually, in a thousand ways, "Lord, save me!" It is by crying out thus that our heart, our freedom, slowly, or perhaps also suddenly, pass from our own interests to those of Christ, realizing, when Jesus saves us, that this is truly our interest, what we need, and nothing else.