

10. A totally new adoration

“Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him: [...] Follow me!” (Mk 10:21)

The whole gift of the treasure is in these words, in this event, in this experience, in this offering of Jesus to our life. The gift was so openly granted to the rich young man that he would have even needed to dig in the field anymore, and not even to buy the field to have the treasure. The treasure was a pearl that Jesus freely put into his hands. It was enough just to take it, enough to just accept it.

Why didn't he take it? Because he had no regard for it. He compared it to his goods and his heart made an erroneous evaluation. The rich young man disregarded the treasure, disregarded Christ. And this meant that he did not prefer him, he preferred something else. And this is a question into which joy enters. For one prefers that in which one places one's joy. The young man decided to place his joy in his riches. But is it possible to find true joy in that which is not Christ, in that which opposes itself to Christ, when we have already encountered Christ in his self-revelation as the absolute treasure of our heart, of our life? This is the saddest thing in the episode of the rich young man, and in all the analogous episodes, even those which we occasionally experience in ourselves or see in others: that by choosing to place his joy in his riches, this young man loses it entirely, and also loses the joy of his riches.

What, then, should we work on in order not to choose sadness instead of joy? What should we do to avoid resigning ourselves to sadness? We should not work on the joy itself, in us, because that would be like wanting to see beauty by concerning ourselves only with our eyes, or expecting to maintain the good functioning of our legs by massaging them rather than by walking or running. We should work on our regard for Christ, on our preferring Christ, that is, on adoration. We must cultivate adoration. To cultivate joy, to choose it ever anew, to not find ourselves slipping off into sadness, we must cultivate, must choose adoration.

How? What does it mean to adore? What does it mean to prefer? To adore Christ means to recognize, to affirm, that Jesus is the absolute treasure of our life. But, put that way, it means nothing, we do not understand what we should do, and perhaps we limit ourselves to some pious definitions or practices of adoration, where adoring God in Christ no longer depends on a religious yearning but on a scruple full of fear.

It is important to understand that the adoration of Christ, and hence the joy that comes to us from Him, is by now dictated by the way in which God presents himself to us, offers himself to us. And it is a new thing, totally new with respect to all the manifestations of God and hence to all the forms of worship that have been expressed in every religion, even in the Jewish religion. When God manifested himself in the burning bush, or on Sinai, Moses and the people did not know how to behave in front of such theophanies. The first reaction was an adoration in terror, it was like man felt crushed by the divine manifestation. It was like the theophany was a death threat to man. Indeed, when Moses asks God: “Show me your glory!” (Ex

33:18), God answers him: "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But [...] you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" (Ex 33:19-20).

What a complete inversion when, as the letter to the Hebrews begins, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb 1:1-2). What a complete inversion when the terrifying God of Sinai comes to reveal himself in a Baby and has himself worshiped by simple shepherds!

The Magi had prepared themselves to worship a terrifying God and to ingratiate themselves with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And now look, they find themselves before a defenseless baby, who certainly evokes no terror, no sacred fear. They fall down and worship him, but it is no longer a gesture dictated by their deep experience and religious wisdom. It is a new gesture, a new liturgy, *dictated by the form in which God manifests himself, in which God makes himself present*. It is a gesture that the shepherds also certainly made, they too in the school not of a grand religious and sapiential tradition like the Magi, but in the school of the Child himself, of the presence with which God came to manifest himself, directly to them, to them personally.

A God who makes himself present in this way, in a human being truly as such, from conception, to birth, to the stages of life, up to death, what adoration can he ask for? What recognition of his divinity can he require? What is the temple of adoration for Jesus Christ?

Let's think back to the first meeting between Him and John and Andrew.

"Where are you staying?" He said to them, 'Come and you will see.' So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour." (Jn 1:38-39)

The new form of adoration of God in the Word made flesh is this *staying*, this *remaining with Him*. The new temple is the relationship with Him, looking at him and listening to him, letting oneself be looked at by Him and spoken to. *The new temple is friendship with Jesus*.

This is precisely the *habitare secum* of St. Benedict. Benedict "dwelt with himself so that, always attentive to watch over himself, seeing himself always under the gaze of the Creator and submitting himself always to the examination of conscience, he did not let the eye of his spirit wander outside himself." (Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* 2.3)

"Seeing himself always under the gaze of the Creator – *ante oculos Conditoris se semper aspiciens*." This means that St. Benedict's recollection was a relationship, a standing in the presence of God, an exchange of gazes, the contemplation of God's gaze upon him, feeling himself defined more by the gaze of God than by his own.

Benedict made God's gaze on him his own, he looked upon himself in the light of God, which is the most profound truth of self that one can have, since no gaze sees us as we are and as we are called to be more and better than the gaze of Him who made us, who loves us, creates us, calls us, sends us.

Benedict's was not a moralistic custody of self. It was not a protection of his own perfection, his purity, his recollectedness, his silence, his virtue. Rather, it was keeping himself in the humble and trusting position of one who lets God himself be the one in every moment to mold our perfection, our purity of heart, our purity of thought, of word, of body; the position that lets God himself create our recollection, our virtue, our prayer.

No wonder if Andrew and John experienced this when staying that day with Jesus! For this reason they never separated from Him, in spite of everything in them that needed to be formed, corrected, restored, pardoned.

The adoration that recognizes the treasure that Christ is for us, and so also the secret of joy in Him, for the very reason that he became man, that he lived and lives in our midst as man, this is the *staying with Him*, this relationship, this looking upon Him who looks upon us, that is, this face-to-face, this friendship that He came to live with us.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Rev 3:20)