

2nd Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for the MFC - 26.08.2014

In my Lenten letter, I quoted a passage of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*:

"We need to pause in prayer to ask Him to come back to fascinate us. (...) How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life! (...) We need to recover a *contemplative* spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others." (§ 264)

It is this "contemplative spirit" that I call "mysticism." The Holy Father says that this dimension is something precious that "humanizes" us, that "helps us to lead a new life." And it is precisely this which all of us always need, that is, the heart of the Christian experience that helps us to be more human, to live a new life which is always renewed in Christ, and which, in renewing us, renews the world, humanizes the world, beginning with our communities. St. Paul summarizes this in a sentence in the Second Letter to the Corinthians that we will reflect on: "If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Cor 5:17).

Christian mysticism is this being "in Christ" that constantly renews the person and renews everything starting with the person.

"You have seized my heart, my sister, my bride, you have seized my heart with just your glance!" (Song 4:9)

To come to understand how much the Lord calls us to an interior union of hearts with Him, it is important that we first of all focus on the divisions and multiplicities that we carry within ourselves. We often feel restless, afraid, sad and unsatisfied. And we do not know why. It is as if we were lost in the night, and heard a lot of noise, constant coming and going, as if a hidden army was surrounding us, and we could not see it. According to the Rule, every morning the Office of Vigils according to St. Benedict begins with Psalm 3. And every morning I am profoundly grateful to San Benedict for throwing this bucket of icy water into my face; for this psalm immediately tells us where the problem and the needs are; and therefore, the question with which we must conclude the night and start the day:

"Lord, how many are my foes!

Many are rising up against me.

Many are saying to me:

'There is no help for you in God.'

But you are my shield, O Lord,

you are my glory

and you are the one who keep my head high.

I cry aloud to the Lord,

and he answers me from his holy mountain.
I lie down and sleep; and I wake up again
for the Lord sustains me.
I do not fear the large crowd
who, all around me, have set themselves against me.
Arise, O Lord! Rescue me, O my God!
You have struck all my enemies on their jaw,
you have broken the teeth of the wicked.
Salvation comes from the Lord:
may your blessing be upon your people. "
(Ps 3:2-9)

"How many are my foes," "many are rising up against me," "many are saying that in God there is no salvation," "a large crowd," "all my enemies"... Every morning a variety of temptations beset us; they tempt us to see our daily reality as an enemy, as negative, as a snare, a curse. And instead of being like a birth or a beautiful start to a new day, the morning can seem like Adam, or Cain, waking up after his sin. We thus need to rediscover a unity, and Psalm 3 quickly helps us to understand that this unity consists of a relationship, a relationship with the Lord. In order to live, it is necessary to go from a dissipated and hostile multiplicity (that of the many enemies in the night) to a unity which consists in a relationship with the Lord: "How many foes... there are many ... many ... **But there is you, Lord!**" This is the path to follow in order to live, to always grow. In the midst of all the distractions we can be tempted to live with, or that we suffer, from within them or out of the depths of them, we can always recover the "But there is you, Lord! You, Adonai! You, Kyrie! You are my salvation!"

"There is no help [no salvation] for you in God!", say the enemies of the psalmist. What a terrible judgment! How spiteful! But, how many times have we thought this of others! For him, there is nothing more to be done, there is nothing more to hope for. For him, for this situation, for this community, there is no future, no change is possible. Perhaps the devil had this verse of Psalm 3 in mind when he tempted Jesus in the desert and especially in Gethsemane: "It's useless to make the effort, to offer yourself, to speak, and even to suffer and die on the cross. For them, there is no help, no salvation in God!"

San Benedict concludes his list of all the good works and virtues to be observed and practiced in order to achieve holiness with one point that seems to respond to this temptation, and which can, in some way, repair the failure of all the other 73 works and virtues: "*Et de Dei misericordia nunquam desperare* – And never despair of God's mercy"(RB 4:74).

It is precisely this jolt of hope that resonates in Psalm 3: "But you are my shield, O Lord, you are my glory and you hold up my head" (Ps 3,4).

But how can this unfailing hope in the mercy of God be born in us, without being born from us? If this hope came from us, it would not be certain; we would have no peace. No one can truthfully guarantee their own peace without censoring something. A peace that censors is not hope: it is a retreat into one's own shell like a snail. This does not mean that someone will not walk over you with his boots, or that a car will not run over you and reduce you to a shapeless pulp on the pavement, as if you were spit.

In St. Benedict's last advice to attain eternal life, "*Et de Dei misericordia nunquam desperare*", as well as in the Psalms, I think it is important to understand that hope in mercy is not just hope in a final or future good outcome, in spite of everything. Rather, this is the hope for an original, total, eternal good outcome. It is the refrain that is continually repeated in Psalm 135: "...His mercy endures forever." Anything can happen in life and in history, but in the end, it is God's mercy that encompasses everything, whether things, events, or lives, in the eternal space of his hands. Mercy is not before or after: it is the eternal nature of Being, of God, and all creation, our lives, and history, have their origin, destiny, meaning, and consistency in this good paternal eternity.

For this reason, every time we say "You" to God, "But You, O Lord, are my shield!" (Ps 3.4), even if it seems that this "You" is met in our prayer, in our need, in our loneliness; in reality with this "You" we say to God, we become aware of a presence that precedes us, because it "contains" us, it embraces our whole lives, and everything that moves in life. Again in Psalm 3 we pray: "I lie down, I fall asleep and I wake up, for it is the Lord who sustains me." (Ps 3.6). This is the knowledge that St. Paul wanted to announce to the Athenians: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).