

7th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for the MFC – 01.09.2014

Besides the Samaritan woman, the Gospel offers us other examples of people who are hiding. We think of the rich young man, whose heart Jesus yearned for, hidden behind the attachment to his wealth (cf. Mk. 10:17-27). The meeting with the young man has been commented on “ad infinitum”. I will limit myself to a few comments that will help us meditate on the main theme we are following.

The first thing to notice is the verb that Mark uses to describe the rich young man’s immediate reaction to Jesus’ call to leave everything to follow Him. The verb “*stygnazō*” which means cloud over, become sad, darken. Mark says: "But at these words his face clouded over and he went away sorrowful" (Mk 10:22). He is returning to hide in the cave, in the cleft of the rock, in the cliff; he is removing himself from the light of the gaze and the love of Christ. And the words "he possessed great wealth" explain his reaction, it is here as a description of the opaque barrier, the wall, behind which the young man goes to hide from the light. What prevents us from following Christ is when we hide ourselves from him in the night, in the darkness. We prefer the darkness rather than meeting and responding to his gaze, to his look of love.

The second thing I want to point out is how Mark describes Jesus’ gaze after the departure of the rich young man. At first, he looks around: «Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God"» (Mk 10:23).

It is as if, after the departure of his friend and unsuccessful disciple, Jesus would quickly begin again to search for, to yearn for the face and voice of the hidden dove. He looks around as if lost. For a moment Jesus could hope and believe that his dove had finally been able to succeed in fearlessly and confidently showing him his face, in letting him hear his voice. But as soon as Jesus approached nearer and looked at him with greater love and desire, his dove fled back into the dark crevice of the rock where he was even more hidden and inaccessible than before. What sorrow! What sadness! Jesus had lost a friendship before it could blossom. Jesus had just desired and granted this friendship forever, and yet, this person had left him, hid himself, fled from his friendship, perhaps forever.

But Jesus does not lower his eyes in self-pity, crying over his delusion and loneliness. He restarts immediately and continues to seek the face and the voice of the dove around him, wherever it may be.

"How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God." What then is the kingdom of God if not this relationship with Christ, this exchange of the human person’s gaze with the loving gaze of God. But how hard it is for humans to leave certain hiding places, to not hide behind some opaque walls of possessions which make us turn in on ourselves! The disciples then said to one another, "Who can be saved?" (Mk 10,26).

And now Jesus seems to have been startled, not only in his heart or in his words, but in his gaze. His eyes, which had for a moment sadly wandered around as if lost, who knows, maybe clouded with tears, have been jolted to attention, they have refocused. His lost gaze has now returned to look directly at his disciples: «Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."» (Mk 10:27).

The jolt in his gaze would seem as if it coincided with a jolt in his heart that had recovered confidence and trust in the work of his Father. For his Father everything is possible, even allowing the Son to find in the depths of every ravine of hiding the darkened and hidden face of the human person, and to meet him once again face-to-face. The spousal and passionate desire of Christ with regards to the soul is converted immediately into a consent to his Passion and Death. In fact, it is immediately after this unsuccessful meeting with the rich young man that Jesus starts walking quickly towards Jerusalem and he announces his Passion, filling the disciples with anguish (cf. Mk. 10:32-34).

Jesus knows that, in a certain sense, he has to go to the underworld, to the extreme hiding place of Adam, beyond death, beyond sin, in search of his friend, the rich young man, who has refused his love.

I have always thought, and probably many others have thought the same thing before and in a better way, that the rich young man was Mark the Evangelist himself, because Mark is the only evangelist who speaks of the loving gaze of Christ, that gaze that only the rich young man could have seen. Mark, the same young man who, though he was rich, will even be stripped of his last sheet that was his wearing, and who, although he will still flee, it will be after all the others (cf. Mk. 14:50-52), a little like the last Carmelite to mount the scaffold in the masterpieces of Gertrud von le Fort and Bernanos.

The young Mark, who is discovered in the Garden of Olives and flees naked, seems to symbolize Adam who can no longer hide himself, who comes out from hiding, in order to finally come face-to-face again, but now with the paschal Christ, conqueror of all darkness, that darkness in which man always tends to hide himself and which darkens his face.

I say this because, following, say, the stages of Jesus' gaze in this episode, it is as if we should understand that Jesus also asks his disciples for a reparatory, vicarious response, so to speak. The gaze and love he gave to the rich young man was not reciprocated, so Jesus immediately starts searching in his frightened group of disciples, an opportunity to gaze on them face-to-face, because Christ is never resigned to not being able to enter into communion with each human being. Certainly, the gaze he gave the rich young man, and which Jesus expected from him in return, was unique and very personal. The exchange that Jesus seeks with the disciples cannot substitute it nor replace it; but in a certain sense, perhaps it

might contain it, atone for it, atone for the going of the rich young man into hiding, for his removing himself from the face to loving face exchange with the Lord. And who knows, maybe the response of his disciples, at this time miserable and temporary and who will soon abandon Him, has perhaps mysteriously permitted the young man, at the last moment, to return and to offer Jesus a last gaze of love before he was arrested.

Whatever it was, it is important that we learn to let ourselves be penetrated by the passion of Christ for each human, for each heart. That we learn to hear within ourselves the passionate desire of Jesus to unite himself to each heart. Only in this way will our monastic life also become truly missionary, with a deep and wide-ranging universal love. But to have this awareness for everyone, we have to start by responding ourselves to God's desire to unite himself to us. The first "hidden dove" that Christ wants to meet is we ourselves.