

9th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for the MFC – 03.09.2014

If one did a complete search in the Rule of St. Benedict to see what for Benedict was the monk's real fault, his real negligence, his real sin, it would always be, as I said the other day, his hiding from the Lord, like Adam after his sin. The real sin is not that we are sinners, but that we hide from the merciful Father who seeks us in order to forgive us and to love us. You yourselves can do this research in the Rule, not so much in the text, but in examining how you live in your community. How many times and in how many ways we hide ourselves, we do not let ourselves be found by the Lord. We can think of all those negative, unreal and proud hidden thoughts, the inner murmurings that St. Benedict condemns so strongly. We can think of how often we remove ourselves from what the community, or an individual brother, an individual sister, or a guest, or a sick person is asking of us. In short, we remove ourselves from Christ who in our neighbor is asking us for love and attention. We can think of how we hide ourselves from the presence of God during the Divine Office, the Eucharist, with so many distractions. We can think of how we hide ourselves from God's Word with our negligence in listening to and meditating on it. We can think of how we hide ourselves with our closed attitude, our character, our activity or cherished laziness, from everything that the superiors or the community wants from us....

To think of this as "hiding from the Lord" is a great help. It helps us to justly judge how we live, and it also helps us to understand what could be our salvation, what path we have to take to get out of our hiding place and let ourselves be found by the Lord. When we allow ourselves to be found by God, just as we are, even if we are ugly and dirty, He will change us. Hiding ourselves has prevented the Lord from transforming us with the light of His Face, with the gift of His Heart.

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

While praying Matins on Calvary in Jerusalem, within myself I heard this phrase of the Song of Songs said by Christ crucified, I felt a great silence and a profound sense of mystery rise up in me. It was like finding oneself suddenly at the heart, at the center of life, at the center of humanity, at the center of God, at the center of everything.

The Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher is an incredible place, where in a certain sense, any and everything goes. Having been able to live in that Franciscan community for about ten days, it seemed to me that that place was the point where everything that happened in the world came together in a tense unity, like after an operation when all the body tissues pull on the wound which has been stitched up, yet is still open at the same time.

There is a healthy tension between the Christian denominations in the Holy Sepulcher. It is healthy because if we hear it, it means that we are present, it means that we "touch" each other; and like it or not, we are there together; and the center of the world and of the faith cannot be moved, it cannot be divided, as a place, as a point. Even if they carry away lots of the rocks from Calvary and the Holy Sepulcher, the place, what happened there, stays there. Perhaps only symbolically, but it remains there. You can move all the rocks you want, but the place of the event does not move. And if we all want to be there, at this precise and actual point, we are obliged, willingly or not, to stay together. This holy place is quarreled over, it is fought over, even to punches, in order to conquer space, or rather time in that space. But there one must be, and remain there next to the others, exposed to meeting, and at times to conflict, with the others. On the other hand, I experienced in those days that there was a lot more harmony and fraternity among the Christian denominations than what we are made to believe. When that verse of the Song of Songs struck me, among other things, I had not realized I was sitting in a chair reserved for an Orthodox monk, a real bear, physically and temperamentally, but he had kindly left me in peace. Nearby, the Catholic Masses feverishly followed one after another; these are the Masses that various groups of Catholics pilgrims can and should celebrate in those hours. In the midst of all this religious "confusion," that verse of the Song of Songs sort of refocused the center, and also personalized it. It was no longer about places, locations, stones, or chairs, or even altars. **At the center of the world there is Someone who lives, dies and rises again to give us His Heart.**

And immediately I said to myself: But how little I ask of Christ! How little I allow myself to give to Christ! I pray, I work, I meditate, I read, I meet people, I celebrate the Eucharist every day, I faithfully recite or chant the monastic Office; I was baptized, confirmed; I became a monk, a priest, an abbot; I have lived in the community for almost 36 years, first as a lay person and then in the monastery... And in all this, how little I have asked of Christ, how little I have let Him give to me; how little I have allowed Him to give Himself to me!

Who knows how many times I have read and even meditated on these words of the Song of Songs, and perhaps this time I would not have even been able to hear these words either, but then, all of a sudden, He tells me that His Heart is available, it is at my fingertips, rather, just one glance is enough to "seize it". These are all images, including that of the heart, but they express the essence of the Christian experience, the Christian event, and they express the wellspring of all the rest. This is a point that it is urgent to recover, which is increasingly urgent to recover. I realize this visiting monasteries, meeting monks and nuns from different countries and cultures, many of the laity, and even priests and bishops.

It is often said that there is a need for spirituality. I prefer to say, as I have said before, that there is a need for *mysticism* in the Church, that is, *we need to find again a level and dimension of the experience of God and of faith, and of ourselves,*

which draw from the gratuitous source and spring of God's communicating Himself to humanity, in Christ who died and rose for us. There is need of mysticism in living the sacraments, in living in fraternal communion in community, in living the mission, the ministry, in living the *lectio divina*, in living one's witness, and in living all aspects of the human condition that Christ has come to save, to transfigure into the possibility of eternal life in this life. There needs to be something that turns on all of this, that focuses on the point of ignition which can enflame everything. In other words, we need to meet Jesus Christ and to live a life of communion with Him in such a way that we permit his life to become ours, his love to become ours, his prayer to become our own.

Obviously, I am not talking about new things. St. John, St. Paul, St. Peter, the Gospels have been reminding us of this for 2000 years, not to mention the Psalms and the Prophets. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And this life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. So I do not nullify the grace of God" (Gal 2:19-21). Perhaps one has this experience especially in the sacraments, instead others have it, above all, while meditating on the Word of God, others experience it in fraternal love; instead, others experience it while going through the trial of illness, of frailty, of sin forgiven...

But when Jesus tells us: "You have seized my heart with one glance of your eyes," I think we can see in these words something of the description of the *fundamental mystical experience* that underlies all the dimensions and forms of the meeting and the relationship with Christ who lives in us. For this reason, I think, it is worth trying to deepen it.