

10th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for the MFC – 4.09.2014

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

On the evening of the day when these words had grasped me, so to speak, on Calvary, I found myself spending a night in a hermitage in the Garden of Gethsemane. In a way, I was doing the Stations of the Cross backwards, indeed I was following the whole life of Jesus backwards, because from Gethsemane I then went to Bethlehem, then on to Nazareth. However, now, I was retracing the life of Christ from within this most recent confession of his Heart to my heart, which is basically a confession of extreme vulnerability, not only physical, as we shall see, but I would also say affective. This divine Heart is so vulnerable that it lets itself be captured by a single glance! And it is just the glance, let's not forget, that he begged from the dove hidden in the cleft of the rock. Christ begs from us that which captures his Heart, that which seizes from Him the source of his life. What Adam lost by not immediately coming out from behind the bushes to face the Lord who sought him! What we lose by hiding behind closed doors, behind Martha's pots, behind the riches of all kinds to which we attach ourselves!

As Psalm 61 expressed so well:

"Only in God is my soul at rest:
from him comes my hope.
He alone is my rock and my salvation;
my fortress: I shall never be shaken.
In God is my salvation and my glory;
my safe haven, my refuge is in God.

[When we discover that God is the refuge for our souls, it no longer makes sense to hide from him, to distrust him, for he is infinitely more secure than our hiding places, than our clefts in the rock]

Trust in him at all times, O people;
before him, open your heart:
God is a refuge for us.

[Let us open the door of our hearts to Christ who knocks on them! When Christ enters our hearts, we are in God, we enter the refuge that God is for us. The one who allows Christ to remain in him or her, also finds a dwelling in Christ].

Yes, the sons of Adam are a mere breath,
all men are a delusion

[All are hidden, like our father Adam, behind something; they are not all really remaining in the presence of God, nor responding to the God who comes, who seeks us]

placed in the balance, they rise
all together they are lighter than a breath.

Do not trust in extortion,
in plunder, put no empty hope;
on wealth that increases,
do not set your heart."

[What betrays poverty is not riches, but setting our hearts, which were made only for the Lord, on wealth, that is, to seek our refuge, what protects and saves us in wealth, or violence, or robbery] (Ps 62:6-11)

It is this very experience that Jesus proposes and offers us to make our lives true.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, I was in a hermitage in the midst of olive trees, and in front of me was Jerusalem, in all its splendor. Before sunset, then during the night and finally at sunrise. I could follow with my eyes the way that Jesus took from the Upper Room until the Garden, and then, once he had been betrayed and arrested, from the Garden to the house of the high priest. I also had before me the whole drama of Jerusalem today, the tensions and hostilities between religions, faiths, among peoples and cultures... The prayers of Muslims and Jews, powered by amplifiers, the ringing of bells, the sirens of ambulances and police vehicles, the noise of cars, motorcycles, planes – reached me...

I had prepared myself to pray, to meditate, especially on the Passion.... And I had so many people to pray for, many "agonies" to unite to those of Christ's. But I could not get those words out of my head and heart: "You have seized my heart, my sister, my bride, you have seized my heart with just a glance of your eyes."

The Bridegroom in the Song of Songs twice repeats, "You have taken my heart," as if he were reciting a continuous refrain. And that was what I felt in myself, together with all the tenderness that the Bridegroom expresses "My sister, bride" all the levels of familiarity, of friendship, of kinship, whether of blood or affection. And then, perhaps, the thing that most resonated within me was: "with just one glance of your eyes." With only one glance! It just takes one, a mere glance, maybe even a distracted, elusive glance, from a beast ready to flee, from a dove who sticks out its little head through the crack in the rock only to withdraw it immediately if it feels threatened. Just one glance at Christ is enough for him to give us his Heart, that is everything! He gives us himself completely and everything that his heart has in communion with the Father in the Spirit!

One glance is enough for Him, and during that night I realized that it has to be enough for me as well, I must not ask myself for more nor better. Just a simple moment of attention is enough for Him, an instant completely focused on Him, and He responds with the gift of His Heart. He leaves it with me, he gives it to me, and what can I do with the Heart of Christ if not to live with it, that is, allow him to live in me, love in me, pray in me, but also rejoice or suffer in me.

I realized then that this one glance is and should be the duty and the witness of the monastic life in the Church. The oneness which the word "monk" etymologically recalls must refer to the consecration of a life lived in the search for and the exercise of that "one glance" that seizes the Heart of Christ.

Just one glance does not only mean that just a quick glance is enough for Christ. It must also mean that, if this is the condition of the gift of the Heart of God to humanity, all life should express this one glance; that for something so big and precious it is worth sacrificing one's whole life for; that one's whole life should be dedicated to the search for and application of this one glance. And I am increasingly aware that the real crisis in the monastic world today is not so much that of vocations, of observances, of asceticism, but rather that it is the neglect of this essential, contemplative task of offering to Christ the glance that is enough for Him, and of offering so to the Church, to humanity, to the world the Heart of God that saves, loves, prays, rejoices and suffers in all and for all.

It is in this sense that I said that today it is urgent to rediscover the mysticism of St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Lutgard, St. Gertrude, etc.. etc., – just to give some examples from our "monastic family", but you could wander in all the charisms – it was truly the center of their vocation, attention, desire, not only when they prayed in solitude, but also in all areas of community life, and even when they were busily inserted in the world for years, as St. Bernard, occupied with everyone and everything, even politics.