

11th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for MFC - 09.05.2014

Just one glance captivates the heart of Christ. It is something that is too great to neglect, too great not to devote one's whole life, one's heart, one's energies, to at least begin again from there to live all that we live, do, say, that we need to be. Simply because this gives us the grace to live it all with the Heart of Christ. We think of St. Paul's hymn to charity and try to read it with the understanding that charity is the essence of the Heart of Christ, to live everything with Christ as the Subject of our hearts, therefore, with Christ who loves in us. What is the gift of the Holy Spirit if not this? How does the Spirit cry within us "Abba - Father!", if not through the ability he gives us to live our relationship with God with the Heart of the Son (cf. Mk 14:36; Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15)?

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I give away all I have and deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." (1 Cor 13:1-8)

St. Paul describes the person devoid of charity as a person who has no subjectivity, who is empty, who is not the subject of what he or she does, of what he says, of what he believes, or even of the extreme sacrifices that he is capable of making. He or she is a person whose heart is not a center, free, unique and unrepeatable; it is not an expression of the self.

As Jesus himself explained in John 15: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

But we will return to these words. Let us focus now on "just a glance", since that is the only condition to be able to live this incredible experience with the Heart of Christ, which is more ours than our own heart, for our own heart was made by Him, through Him and in Him.

Literally, this verse of the Song of Songs does not speak about "glance", but about the "eye" which is due to the concreteness of the Hebrew language. For example, in order to say "step," one would say "foot". But it is also useful, especially for us who are children of many abstract thoughts, to bring back the sense of the relationship with God to a certain physicality, because it allows us to understand that God is not satisfied with just good feelings, because he wants us totally: body, soul and spirit. We are reminded of the words of Paul: "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And this life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal 2:20). Only if you live this life in the flesh with faith, then faith is incarnated.

Therefore, "just one eye." In John's Gospel there is much talk of "seeing", "looking", but the term "eye" appears only 14 times, and practically only when referring to the man born blind who regains his sight. And in John's Gospel, chapter 9, the eyes are almost always referred to as "open." Only twice are they said to be "spread" with mud (9:6,11). However, it all begins with Jesus seeing: "Passing by, *he saw* a man blind from birth" (9:1). And it all concludes with the gaze of the blind man on Jesus who reveals Himself to him: "'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'. He replied, 'Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him.' Jesus replies: 'You have seen him: it is he who speaks with you.' And he said: 'I believe, Lord.' And he prostrated himself before him." (9:35-38)

The climax is the former blind man's gaze on Jesus who speaks to him, and it is a gaze that immediately joins faith and adoration: "'I believe, Lord.' And he bowed down before him." And we know that for St. Paul and St. Peter faith and worship are what allow Christ, the love of Christ, the Heart of Christ to dwell in our hearts: "That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts, and so, being rooted and grounded in love, you may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge that you may be filled with the fullness of God" (Eph 3:17-19). "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to respond to anyone who calls on you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pt 3:15).

But from the glance of Jesus, who sees the blind man, loves him, and seeks him, always as the dove, in the darkness in which he was hidden, in which he was born, and to the glance of the blind man who recognizes Jesus, there is a path, an opening and growth in seeing, which is useful to meditate on.

For the man born blind, his journey of seeing begins with the gaze of Christ who sees him, loves him, and who does not look for justifications and guilt - "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" (9:2). For Jesus, this blindness from birth is a consequence and symbol of Adam's hiding from the light of God's Face. Thus, Jesus makes mud, as if to restore to him the original ability to see, to give him the ability to see the light, not only of the sun, but of the presence of God. Jesus first sends him to wash himself; he does not "impose" on the man that he see Him immediately.

He lets the man make a journey, he lets him live through a whole trial, in every sense of the word, so that not only his eyes, but his freedom will be able to recognize Jesus and give witness to him as the Lord and the true Light of his life.

Perhaps that man might not see Jesus again; that adoring glance towards Him was perhaps the first and the last of his life; just that "one glance towards" Jesus which, nonetheless, had seized the Lord's Heart.

We understand from this episode in John's Gospel that this "one glance" that captures God's Heart is a work of God himself. He forms it, with mud, as he formed Adam. And thus we understand that Adam, the first human, is created for this, in the image of God's gaze, of God's Face, of God's Heart. The work of Redemption, the work of the Son, is precisely to recreate and re-educate, even through the hostile and adverse circumstances in which a person finds him or herself, the response of the person's gaze to His merciful and creative glance, that precedes us, that sees us even before we glance at Him, even when we are in darkness. No darkness hides us from God. The darkness hides God from us, it hides Him from our eyes, but not us from His eyes.

The temptation is to believe that the darkness that hides God from us makes us invisible to Him. He cannot see us, notice us, be attentive to us. The temptation is to believe that God is hiding because we ourselves are hiding. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (Jn 9:2). The disciples are reasoning this way: if he does not see, it is because God does not look at him anymore, He no longer loves him, rather He punishes him. Instead Jesus points out that: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (Jn 9:3-5).

The work of God is his light, and the light of God is his gaze upon each human person. The light of Christ in the world, the light of Christ in the darkness is a gaze that seeks the person, as one who has a lantern to search for those dispersed in the night. But he searches for him or her as His image, as the image of His Face. He searches in this person a gaze that responds to His own, and therefore, as a heart responding to His Heart.