

12th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for MFC – 09.06.2014

When there is the exchange of looks and hearts with Christ, the human being becomes himself, he becomes aware of who he is. It is interesting to read the gossip regarding the healed blind man: "His neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?". Some said: "It is he"; others said, "No, but it is someone who looks like him." And he said, 'I am the man!'" (Jn 9:8-9).

How distracted these people are! They have seen him every day, and yet they wonder: is he or is he not the same man? Precisely because he was a beggar they never looked him in the face, they fled from him. We normally look at beggars from a distance, in order to avoid them, not from a distance that could expose us to the request of their voice, of their face, of their outstretched hand, and therefore to a responsibility towards them.

They say right in front of him, "It is someone who looks like him!", as if to say: 'You do not have the right to be yourself, and especially to be created in the image of God'.

But now he is certain of his identity: "I am the man." He does not only mean to say: I'm the blind man who now can see, because, maybe, he never said before "I" in this way. Before he would have said, "Give alms to a poor blind man." Now he can say, "I am the man." And he says it because he knows that he has been the object of attention and care on the part of God, of being looked after by God. And now if he has his eyesight, even if he does not know who Jesus is, if he has not yet seen him, he knows that he has his eyesight to see him, to know him. It is for this reason that during the whole trial that the Pharisees put him through, he defends Jesus at any price, even to the point of being excluded from the synagogue.

Let us note that the accused person in the trial is Jesus, not the healed blind man. But now there seems to be an overlapping of the witness and the Witnessed, as will happen for all the Christian martyrs. When one has at least sensed that God gave him the light to see the Light, and a heart in order to unite his heart to His Heart, the person can no longer have another place, role and destiny than that of the Lord. We are the image of God not as "one who looks like him," because one who looks similar is not united with the one whom he or she resembles. Instead the one who corresponds to the image of Christ, becomes one heart with Him, one Spirit, and thus they share a common destiny.

"Father, I desire that those whom you have given me may also be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." (Jn 17:24)

It's the same thing that happened on Calvary with the good thief. Even there, there was a dispute, a trial around Jesus and the good thief accepts and asks to become a witness to the Lord identifiable with the Lord himself. He really deserves the cross, yet Jesus has taken his place, and he affirms that he remains there in this

conformation, this coincidence of life and destiny with the Lord. A conjunction of life and destiny that Jesus ratifies for all eternity: "The people stood by, watching [from afar, as with the beggars with whom one does not want to become involved]; the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others, let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, and saying, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.' Above him there was an inscription: 'This is the King of the Jews.' One of the criminals hanging there on the cross, insulted him: 'If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.' But the other, instead, rebuked him, saying, 'Have you no fear God, you who are condemned to the same punishment? We, justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom' [Let us imagine the look he gives to Jesus, perhaps it was the only, the first and the last glance of his life that he gave Christ]. Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.'" (Lk 22:35-45)

"You have seized my heart ...", and by seizing His Heart, the thief seized everything.

The thief as he was about to die received the grace to gaze on Christ. However, we have been evangelized, and we can contemplate this scene, and many others in the Gospel, well before we die. And we have met Christ much earlier than just before death. And this means that what for the thief was , above all, grace (accompanied by terribly suffering), for us it is a grace and a duty. That one single glance is a grace and a duty. The meeting and the relationship with Christ are a grace and a duty. They are the grace, the vocation and the duty of our lives, first and foremost, of our human lives, then lived in the form of the vocation that God has chosen for us.

To remain there with this grace and this duty is the same as the determined and risky "I am the man!" of the healed blind man. In the light of Christ he found himself, he found the possibility to affirm himself as "I," but an "I" that affirms a "You", as a witness to an Other. For him, to say "I can see" could not be dissociated from witnessing to Christ: "He is a prophet!" (Jn 9:17); "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (9:33). He knows nothing about Jesus, but he knows that he is now connected to Him, I would say, ontologically connected, and he does not want to deny Him. It would mean denying himself.

For this reason, that one glance that allows the Heart of Christ to become the source of new life in us, is not just prayer, mercy, pity, good feelings. It is, as it was for the healed blind man, an expression of ourselves that should kick into action every time we say "I", every time we are subjects of our life, and we always are, although extremely distracted. One is the subject of his life even when sleeping. We are created in this way. The one glance means that the truth of our saying "I am" is the affirmation of a "you" who creates us. Every blink of the eye of the healed blind man, every single glance, even a distracted one, which was aimed at

persons and things, was affirming that Another had given him the light, that Another had formed his sight. "I see," for the healed blind man meant, "I have received my sight and now I receive the light and everything I see from Jesus."

The most fascinating aspect of the healings that Christ did is that He has transformed into a witness of God the whole human person in his or her normal everyday operation: the limbs, the organs, the skin all are valued.

But the miracle shows us what should be normal. Because there is no need to be a person born blind and then healed to recognize and testify that God gives us eyes, the light. What we get used to living and taking for granted as normal, in fact, is always a miracle, it is always the work of God.

The work that is asked of us is to recover our gaze of Christ, the encounter with Christ, as the constant expression of our "I", without losing the awareness that it is always a miraculous expression, as indeed our "I" which is always a miracle, even if we forget it. As Psalm 138 exclaims: "I give you thanks, you made me so wonderfully!" (Ps 138:14).