

13th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for MFC – 08.09.2014

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

Blessed Mother Teresa said: "Often our prayers do not produce any results because we have not fixed our mind and heart on Jesus, through which our prayers can rise up to God. Often one deeply fervid glance towards Christ could make our prayer much more fervent. 'I gaze at him and he gazes at me, this is the perfect prayer.'"

The famous farmer of the Curé of Ars who entered the church only to swap gazes with the Lord had already understood this.

But what does it mean to "seize the heart of Christ"? Why is one glance enough to kidnap it, to possess it? What happens when we gaze at Christ? Why does it seem that there is an immediate connection between gazing at Him and the possession of His Heart? But really, when we speak of the Heart of Christ, what we are talking about, what is it all about?

If we study the term "heart" in a New Testament concordance, we find that this term refers only once to Jesus himself. It is in the famous passage of Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your life, for my yoke is sweet and my burden light."

Jesus himself only speaks here of his heart, and qualifies it as "meek and humble". Therefore, he defines it essentially as his relationship with others, a relationship that promises rest for life, above all for those who are "weary and burdened"; the relationship that Jesus offers, not only as rest, but also as a model to follow, to learn from, to make our own. The Heart of Christ, as I have said quoting St. Paul's hymn to charity, is a new relationship of Christ with us; it wants to become a new relationship in us with the others, the relationship of Christ to everyone. Without ever using the term "heart" with regards to Christ, John will transmit the same message of Jesus in terms of love, agape, charity: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. As I have loved you, so you should also love one another" (Jn 13:34). "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." (Jn 15:9-14)

For the reflection of His relationship with his Father, the relationship that Christ establishes with us and among us, is the true nature of His Heart, of His Love. The Heart of Christ is his Communion with his Father, a Communion which becomes our own, which we can seize with a glance that consents to the communion of Christ with us, to his love for us, to his friendship. For this reason, as I have said, it is the greatest gift, because Communion is the mysterious life of God in which the person participates through the gift of the Son and, thanks to Him, in Him, through Him, of the Holy Spirit who unites Him to the Father. The bridegroom who pleads with the dove to glance towards him and talk to him, asks the dove in reality to consent to a communion with Him in which the communion of Christ with the Father and his universal love rush into our heart. It changes the heart because our soul thus accepts the grace of a filial relationship with God and a fraternity with everyone. The heart is where every man, in the image of God, is capable of being the subject of relationships, of love and communion.

I was saying that there is only one occurrence of the term heart which refers to Christ, but it is like a drop of dew in which the whole Gospel is reflected, which serves to illustrate all of the deeds and the words of the Lord's life: the event of the Word who was made flesh and dwells among us (cf. Jn 1:14), that is, he has established a relationship with each of us.

St. John has lived totally seized by this fact, and in his first letter, now an elderly man, he still betrays a very lively astonishment before this gift to the human person of the Heart of God, of the communion with God, as if he still could not quite understand it: "What was at the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have contemplated and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life – in fact, that life was made manifest, we have seen and what we bear witness and we proclaim to you is the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things that our joy may be full." (1 Jn 1:1-4)

Perhaps it is this beginning of the first letter of the disciple whom Jesus loved, who listened to the beating of the Heart of Christ at the Last Supper, who saw the open side, maybe this is the best New Testament description of the verse of the Song of Songs that we are reflecting on. "What we have seen and heard": opening up to the relationship with Christ, showing his face and making him hear his voice, giving him that one glance so desired – the virgin glance of one who loved only Jesus - John has taken within himself the Heart of Christ, the Heart of communion of Christ, which becomes the complete proclamation and witness that the Apostle has wanted to give throughout his life: "... we proclaim him also to you, so you also may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

When Jesus, therefore, says: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart," he defines his heart as a relation, but as a relationship that has its own specific ontological quality. It is meek and humble. What does a meek and humble relationship mean? It essentially means a relationship in which the "you" is preferred to the "I," in which love for the other, the attention to the other, are more determinants than the affirmation of oneself.

Let us recall St. Paul: "Charity is magnanimous, charity is benevolent; it is not jealous, it does not boast, it is not puffed up with pride, it is not disrespectful, it does not seek its own interests, it does not get angry, it does not brood over received injuries, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It excuses all things, it believes all things, it hopes all things, it endures all things." (1 Cor 13:4-7). One can seek self-affirmation speaking "the language of men and of angels," in the use of the "gift of prophecy", in the knowledge of "all mysteries", "moving mountains" by the force of one's faith, and sacrificing one's body and life in martyrdom. Charity, instead, is that relationship with everyone and with everything that consists in not affirming oneself, but rather in affirming another, a "you." This is the Heart of Christ, in a relationship of obedient love to the Father, in relationship with people as a placing of one's own life at the service of others, in the service of everyone.