

17th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for MFC – 12.09.2014

"Twenty-one monks departed together with the abbot of the monastery, Robert. (...) After many labors and exceedingly great difficulties, which all who will to live devoutly in Christ must needs suffer, they at length attained their desire and arrived at Citeaux." (*Exordium*, chap. 1).

Therefore, the Cistercian Fathers wanted "to live devoutly in Christ" (2 Tm 3:12).

The *Exordium* mentions this phrase almost *in passing*, because it is a choice that everyone has to make, that everyone has to renew personally and freely in following their vocation, and yet it is essential. If one forgets this, then the charism, the gift of the Spirit, immediately becomes just a human effort, a search for human interests, a human project. It all becomes very fragile, without roots, without a deep source. If many "foundations" are going to end badly today, or are barely scraping by for decades without truly living, it is because they are more a human project than an expression of the desire to go to the source of the grace of living in Christ. In fact, St. Paul wrote this to Timothy in order to explain the reasons for persevering in his mission despite the difficulties and persecutions that he had to endure: "The things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Indeed, all who want to live a devout life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Tim 3:11-12)

Only if we follow the Lord in order to live in Him, with the desire to live in Him, will we experience an inner, as well as an outer, liberation stronger than anything that can happen to us, stronger than all hostilities and tribulations which we can pass through. It is always maintaining the right direction, the right sense of what we live, of the path we take, even if we find obstacles or fall because of our frailty.

By *living in Christ* we are given the fulfillment of every mystical journey of the people of Israel. How many times in the Psalms we recall that the one who is faithful seeks and finds refuge, hope, salvation *in God!* How many times the Psalms invite us to rejoice *in God*, in the Lord! How many times the Psalms help us to trust *in Him!* It would be enough to be attentive to these passages to pray the Psalms well, to find in the Divine Office an ambient that puts our lives, our hearts, our feelings back in the right order.

Recently, during a meeting of the Order, I was inwardly agitated over the usual problems that arise or that we saw coming. Then, during the Office of Vigils, we prayed Psalm 61:

"Only in God is my soul at rest: from him comes my hope.
He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress: I stand firm.
In God is my salvation and my glory; my safe haven, my refuge is in God.
Trust in him, O people, at all times; before him, open your heart: God is our refuge." (Ps 61:6-9)

"In God." What a mystery this grace is, this ability to have God himself as the dwelling, as a mysterious place where we find rest, salvation, glory, shelter, refuge! The psalmist does not know what words to use in order to explain everything that we find in God. But the main thing is the awareness that we are meant to find "in God" everything we need, everything our soul wants, everything that is good for our lives, everything that saves us. In God we find salvation not only from what threatens us, but also from our own evil, from our sins, from our misery and infidelity. In God, there is mercy and forgiveness. As expressed, for example, in Psalm 32: "In him our heart rejoices, in his holy name we trust. May your mercy be on us, O Lord, even as we hope in you" (Ps 32:21-22). Or Psalm 84: "Will you be angry with us forever, will you pour out your wrath from generation to generation? Will you not restore our life, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us, Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation" (Ps 84:6-8). Or Psalm 142: "In the morning let me hear of your mercy, for in you I trust" (Psalm 142:8a). But many other Psalms speak of this grace of being able to always find refuge in the Lord. Psalm 30, Psalm 36, Psalm 83, and many others which we will never meditate on enough.

I was saying that in a time of anxiety and discouragement the verse in Psalm 61 that refocused and calmed me said: "In God is my salvation and my glory; my safe haven, my refuge is in God." (Ps 61:8). I realized in that moment that peace can be found in the midst of life and in any circumstances to the degree that one's heart remains "in God," and that one finds there the grace of peace and serenity, in faith and trust in him. And I realized that this is what mysticism is: to live in God as the solace of a life which is stronger and deeper than anything that can disturb it. This is not an escape, but rather where everything is put in its right place, where one lives and deals with everything within the globality, within the totality of the reality and the circumstances that is the mystery of God in whom all things hold together and have meaning, in whom everything is good, loved, wanted, redeemed, saved. Above all, that creation that God wanted to put in the universe as a point of awareness and responsibility with respect to him and to all his creatures: our heart. To fully realize that "In God is my salvation and my glory; my safe haven, my refuge is in God" (Ps 61:8), is a real liberation of the heart, a liberation that faith produces.

If we do not have this "safe refuge," which is interior as a choice of one's heart, but that ontologically contains the whole universe and history, we can not face life with joy, because we are abandoned to all that really or apparently threatens us, opposes us, contradicts us. With one's heart in God, through the trust we put in him, it is like entering a space where nothing is lost, because it is in the hands and in the heart of the Lord who loves everything and wants to lead all to fullness in Him. Praying the Psalms means to continue to cultivate and deepen this awareness, in order to consent to this experience of being actually able to live in God, to live in the mystery of a God who welcomes us into Himself, that keeps us in

Himself, even if we turn away from Him. And this allows us a new life, a life in which God himself acts in us, as Psalm 36 expresses it so well:

"Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.
Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.
Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret – it leads only to evil.
For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.
Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
But the meek shall inherit the land,
and delight themselves in abundant prosperity." (Ps 36:3-11)

The Psalms promise us this new life, they make us yearn for it and ask God for it. But this life, this newness, this fullness is only possible and truly accomplished "in Christ".