**2023 October, 2**

Translation. Text original in Italian

**Vespertine Eucharist**

**“… et tu, puer…”. The Church Jesus dreamed of.**

The Gospel proclaimed daily in the Eucharist regenerates and accompanies the days of the church. And, therefore, also of the Synod. Enthroning the Gospel will be the solemn inaugural rite. So, in the daily expectation of hearing and openness to the Word, we give flesh to that act, in its truth that is not purely ritual.

It is not by chance, it is a happy coincidence that today we are met with the very passage in Luke's Gospel in which Jesus concludes the first phase of his missionary itinerary, to begin the journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51-56). It is a decisive turning point in Jesus’ life, in the arduous process of preparing the disciples for the road that leads to his “exodus”. It is a turning point that also casts a very bright light on a crucial day in the journey of the church in synod. The disciples’ spiritual vision is always slow, but Jesus patiently pushes ahead.

In Luke's narrative, the first part of Jesus’ itinerant mission, the proclamation of the Kingdom in Galilee, comes to an end (4.14-9.50). It began in Nazareth with the preaching in the synagogue and - already there - the rejection of his own (Lk 4:14-30). We are therefore at a turning point: Jesus leaves Galilee. A revealing choice. Decisive, performative for the maturation of a discipular (and synodal) style. It represents a sort of “new departure” for Jesus, uphill, after the impact with the rejection of the leaders, and with the slowness of the disciples.

A tension had already been created, a kind of communicative gap, not only with the leaders but between Jesus and his own disciples, at the descent from the mount of transfiguration (9:37-43). And a father in the crowd had felt this discrepancy, complaining that the disciples, weak in belief, had been unable to free his epileptic son. And yet, the crowd admires Jesus in amazement and acclaims him, unaware of the profound meaning of Jesus’ lordship, yet invincibly attracted (9:43).

And so, he is faced with the confused astonishment of the crowds at his wonders. And to the embarrassment of his own, Jesus has just forcefully announced to the disciples – and it is the second time – the goal towards which they are heading: “Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men.” (Lk 9:44). But those ears remain closed to the mystery of this delivery; they do not grasp the proclamation, it remains obscure to them, and they are afraid to ask questions (9:45). So much so that, as the only response, they try to close ranks, to unite among themselves, they stand as candidates to lead the redemption: they argue about who is the greatest (9:46).

Thus, in the heart, and among themselves, there arises – paradox! – a *dialogismòs*, a discussion, a conversation (not really spiritual...). A bit like the disciples of Emmaus, when the dense “talking to each other” is fragmented, it leads nowhere. We are familiar with this communicative fatigue....

But Jesus, however, does not retreat: master of a “different” kind of authority, all the patient divine pedagogy is revealed in him. Decisive, with a marvellous as well as simple symbolic action, he unveils the thoughts of the heart: by drawing a little child - *paidìon* - to himself he displaces them and reverses their direction. To open their minds to the mystery of the Kingdom, of God and of humans, he takes a child close to him, as if to say: “The true order is another. And the way of following me is another. Service to the Kingdom is another. The command is another. The priority is another: to welcome me, in the same way as one welcomes a little one. God, the Father, is like this!”.

“Jesus," writes Fr Bonhoeffer, “is a discoverer of the child (...) he sees in the child the light of God. God belongs to children, and to them belongs the joy of the good news” (*Writings*, p. 40). The “little one”, for Jesus, echoes all the history of God's revelation, the incessant wonder, the horizon most charged with the future, the soul of the mission, the purification from twisted thoughts. The point of light of Jesus’ parables and teachings. He receives this vision from the whole of God’s revelation: from the little, last-born King David chosen by God for his kingdom (1 Sam 16:1-15), to the younger son of the parable (Mt 21:28-32). Welcoming God’s elect, and God who sends, in the *child* (Mt 25:31-46). This will be the roadmap to Jerusalem, and to the final judgement. It is not at all taken for granted. The unfolding of the Gospel narration shows this. And not only.

There is a profound link between how the Christian community relates to the irrelevant, the poor, the invisible – even sometimes the importunate - from a worldly point of view, and the acceptance of God's plan. And this vision cannot fail to inform the entire synod process. Beyond all rhetoric and babble. It is a reversal of criteria, starting with what is stirring in the heart. And the tone of the spiritual conversation will also do well to allow itself to be evangelized by it.

Jesus makes one think, in the beginning and even more so today. That exorcist does not belong to the circle of intimates, yet he performs the same good works as the disciples, he had the good of others at heart. And Jesus recognises him, protects him, makes it clear that for God’s freedom there is another unstructured election - it is the bond that unites Jesus with those “outside”. Think of the Samaritan (Lk 10:33). The outsider accomplished what the disciples, shortly before, had not been able to accomplish - exorcism. There is a seed of the Word in every human being touched by the freedom of grace that is recognized by his being anonymously, freely, “for you”.

This freedom of Jesus, now firmly resolute in his direction towards the Cross, evangelizes the mission of the church: the freedom and swiftness of his steps in the midst of a humanity marked by a thousand contradictions, must indeed evangelize the synodal process.

Jesus, then, before setting his face towards Jerusalem, with a highly revealing gesture takes a child beside him and points him out as the way. This Gospel is a powerful beacon for synodal meetings. It tells of a method, an unceasing conversion to be made, a way of walking on the path of the Gospel, following in the footsteps of Jesus. It tells of a synodal style, discipleship, in the face of unusual events and insidious differences, the same conflicts – interpersonal or of conscience. Let us therefore welcome with awe and gratitude – as a “motherly” church, sent to care rather than to assert her own superior *potestas* – this style of the disciple: in the grace of the Lord Jesus, the *paidion* of the Father, the “delivered into our hands”.

How can one discern and welcome the small, the poor, in today’s Church?

“*Et tu puer propheta*...”. Strangers and pilgrims in the midst of a humanity in turmoil, we are called to new vigilance on the thoughts of the heart and to discern, and welcome the prophecy of the “little one” – the unpredictable. A sort of losing and finding oneself in the eyes of the child. This is indeed the fulcrum; this is where the path of conversion “towards Jerusalem”, the prototype of the synodal path, can find a new beginning.

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