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Retreat. At Lauds

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**"To you silence is praise"**

*Gentleness and severity of the synodal path*

*"If you love the truth,  
be a lover of silence  
and God grant you to  
experience  
that which is generated by  
silence'.  
(Isaac the Syrian)*

We open ourselves, together, to the new day: praising God is, faithfully, the threshold of light. The day will lead us - this evening - to the penitential liturgy, the fulfilment of the retreat.

And for this, we allow ourselves to be traversed and filled by the words of the Psalm we have sung; by the Gospel we have heard: an interweaving that generates beams of light on the synodal path, albeit precisely in the dialectic between events and the Word.

I would like to stay on that one verse, the opening of Ps 64 'To you silence is praise.' *Tibi silentium laus*. What does it mean? Perhaps that - with such a saying - one takes away the value of the songs, or debases



their meaning? Or does it deprive intercessions, homilies, commentaries of force? And is the synodal dialogue that is meant to be 'celebration', living glory of God, diminished in meaning?

Far from it. I think the foundation of every liturgy - ritual, and **of life** - is expressed in this verse: **at the root of every prayer, of every 'work for God' vibrates the silent Breath of God. It is a matter of perceiving it.** This breath precedes, and goes beyond, the word of "flesh". It is that Presence that Elijah (1 Kings 19:12) perceived in the Voice of a 'still silence'. And his plaintive words melted away like snow in the sun. And the new narrative of history was born. Otherwise disappointing, despairing. It is the silence of Jesus before the human tribunal. It is the silence of Jesus following the utterance of his last breath: the glory of God and the proclamation of resurrection.

"He who has understood the words of the Lord, understands his silence, for the Lord is known in his silence" (*Ignatius of Antioch to the Ephesians*, XV, 2).

And those who allow themselves to be seized with wonder before the stillness of God's silence, fully revealed in Jesus, understand how **silence is the constitutive dimension of true human speech**, which as such sings the praise of the Most High. Every human word is preceded - in its always partial truth - and is sustained, and is surpassed, by the silence that praises God.

Powerful, explanatory, is the immediately following cascade of "Thou" addressed to God, which articulates the silence solemnly proclaimed at the opening. The silence-praise is not pneumatic emptiness, but it is wonder before the coming of God among his own.

"*To you* who hear our prayers"

"*To you* all flesh will come" (v. 3).

"Too heavy for us; our offences: but *you* wipe them away".

It seems important, today, to pause on this verse of the psalm, to prepare for the dialogue workshops, the discussion tables; but even before that, to



prepare ourselves for the penitential celebration. Let us allow ourselves to be filled by this silence.

In the beginning then, and at the depths, lies silence as the highest praise. There one can only admire the work of God: "For you silence is praise!". This positions us in the penitential celebration. And it also prompts us to assess the full weight of the pauses of silence introduced in the synod dialogue. They are not a diversion: it is of substantial value that the exchanges from time to time sink into the silence that precedes and follows. Listening in awe to the unheard.

Everything, every human, formed from earth, is carefully cultivated by God, who in the psalm is seen present - as well as in the restless history of humanity - in creation, as the "great farmer". Thus springs forth the praise of cosmic silence, and within us the joy that defeats the darkness. "They shout for joy, yes they sing." (64:14).

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"To you silence is praise". Do we know that generative silence, which precedes the word, which guards it, which ceaselessly generates it? Under what conditions is silence praise? So many hypocritical - extraneous - silences lurk in our words....

**Psalm 64 seems to have been written to give voice to our innermost being that feels the weight of the evil that is in the world, of sins, and yearns for deliverance.** To give voice to our heart that is often sclerotized by the anxieties and frustrations that slow its beating, but which yearns for a fullness of life and a steadfastness that no longer fears storms and turmoil. And the heart finds breath in tuning in to that silence in which the Word was heard in the beginning (Gen 1:1).

**Silence is perhaps the most difficult element to live in our lives, even in the synodal path.** This is why our words are so uncommunicative. Immersed in chaos, or in the emphasis of our concepts, we do not have the time to touch it, and often not even the desire, because **it frightens us**. When we are silent, in fact, it is not immediately silence: we are overwhelmed by a whirlwind of thoughts - by the aftermath of a past that



is often unprocessed in the memory of the heart; by the boredom of a present that looms - impelling or amorphous, still - and by the anguish of an uncertain and meaningless future. This is not the silence that praises God and that is the root of any constructive dialogue, of any synodal journey.

Instead, the silence that praises God is **the precious silence of those who know how to remove themselves from the stage, and live a kind of fruitful solitude open to otherness, listening to the word of God, the cry of the poor and the groans of creation.**

Silence is a struggle against banality, it is a search for truth, it is welcoming the mystery hidden in every person and every living being. It does not explain suffering but traverses through it. Silence can help us rediscover the true and authentic rhythm of synodal dialogue.

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Well, precisely this silence is evoked today in the Gospel: the beginning of the 'great journey'. A Gospel steeped in silence, with that face of Jesus who - orienting himself towards Golgotha - in his firm decision becomes hard as stone. The liturgy that we will celebrate this evening at the conclusion of the retreat draws meaning and breath from the silent light of that Face.

The 'synodal' art of Jesus offered to the synodal assembly: in order to walk, in addition to learning the gaze that discovers the new measures of the world - the silent narration - it is also necessary to learn the art of gratuitous relationships, without giving the Divider anything to grip.

The group of disciples is by birth 'itinerant'. But what is the way?

The "hardened" face of Jesus does not find consistent resonance in the impetuosity of John: the beloved disciple, the son of thunder must allow himself to be transformed. Yet he himself had recently received the great gift of being present at the transfiguration where the exodus of Jesus was discussed; he had already twice received the announcement of the passion of the Master and Lord. But he systematically let it slip away, overwhelmed by the inner noise of thoughts of supremacy.



And now that unique, beloved, longingly scrutinised face - that face to which angels are sent before - is misunderstood by the disciples themselves: it becomes a cause of stumbling. "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's lives, but to save them." This specific word also sets up a discernment process for the Synod Assembly, when the journey is already well underway, as it did for the disciples.

This trait, today, closely concerns us. I think it concerns this Synodal Assembly embedded in an epochal turning point in history and in the church, the contours of which we confusingly sense but do not see clearly.

Jesus does not give in to the disciples' incomprehension, he patiently, lovingly pushes them forward. And a silence of conversion is preparing in them for the irruption of the paschal novelty that follows.

And it is from this first stumbling block - the rejection in Samaria - that Jesus undertakes, and understands, and the path to Jerusalem is configured in his heart with decisive, hard proof. This is the style of the Gospel: walking opens the way, through obstacles. Thus, perhaps, will be the synodal path. Every Samaria is the place of surprising encounters.

That very human and divine Face, carved in stone, is revealing. "He turned and rebuked them": light on the penitential celebration. Free your gaze from all impatience and entrepreneurial activism, from demands, from resentment and lament. From "many" words. To accommodate the passion of desire that silently draws one towards the fulfilment of the Father's will. Until the *kenosis* of Gethsemane and the cenacle: "This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me".

**The gaze fixed on Jesus**, the human face of God. Without escape routes, without safe exits. A gaze that, illuminated by the meek and humble of heart, restores contours to the vision of others, of history, of the world. The gaze on Jesus opens up well-founded hope. This makes us sing the psalm - "To you silence is praise": splendid praise.