The Repentant Thief

At the moment of the crucifixion, the figure of the “good” thief is very enigmatic. Matthew and Mark tell us that the two crucified with Jesus insulted Him. Only Luke paints for us a different attitude in one of them.

His pain on the Cross was atrocious, like that of His companions. But the destruction of His body had not reached His soul. He had it sufficiently alive and awake to discover an entire series of values which astound us in a highwayman.

How did he have the courage to forget himself, to make an opening amidst his pains to discover the dignity of Jesus and the objective values of justice.

He had lived violating the law, but he was a just man because he had not lost the sense of justice. He distinguished right from wrong, he measured the value of faults and had the bravery to acknowledge his own: taking the word – St. Luke says – he reprimanded him saying: “don’t you fear God, you who are experiencing the same torture? We deserve it, that is why we pay for our crimes. But He has done nothing wrong.”

For this man, pain had been truly fruitful. The nearness of death had awakened in him the voice of God. And in that light he had understood the justice of his sentence. Amidst his horrible pain he had known how to forget his body in order to arrive at the conclusion that he was guilty.

But he had even gone further. Ordinarily, pain closes up our soul. The one who suffers ends up convinced that he is the only one who suffers. He becomes incapable of understanding other pain.

It had not been this way with this man. From the same Cross, he knew how to get out of his tragedy to examine, to know and to understand Jesus.

Did he know something beforehand? Did he at least learn of his dignified silence on his way to Calvary?

Did he also hear how, by all the responses to the insults, He would ask forgiveness for those who offended Him and He tried to pardon them before a Father who for this thief could not be anyone else but God.

Probably at the beginning, as Mark and Matthew indicate, he also joined those who insulted Jesus. But the silence and dignity of Jesus were a big blow to him.

And if this man were truly a king? He went over and over this idea in his head. A king dying this way? But then, when he heard those who insulted Him speak about the Messiah, something from his infancy reappeared in his interior. He remembered his parents, the teachings in the synagogue; there they spoke of a Messiah and a kingdom, even though they did not make it clear if it was of this world or another world.

And if it were true? And if there was another life after this one, another kingdom in which this man would triumph? What at the beginning was a suspicion became a doubt, later a possibility, finally the beginning of a certainty.

The security he saw in Jesus was not of this world. He had not blasphemed God, He did not grumble about life. He was serene and tranquil. He was, evidently, a good man, a just man. But then, he still had more reasons to rebel.

Amidst his pains, the thief explored his soul searching for the truth. And, little by little, he noticed that his heart calmed down. Perhaps the death of a just man, of only one just man, was enough to make the world turn.

Who knows, even if a new dawn was at the point of sprouting, a world where everything would be different. He felt poor and childlike, and in his weakness, he discovered that he needed a hand to hold him up, like his mother had done in his infancy.

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