

14. The Opposite of Anxiety: Peace, the War to Reaffirm What is True

by Luigi Giussani*

Thus the Christian – *homo viator*, the wayfaring man, to use that beautiful expression of mediaeval Christianity – is conscious of the fact that life is a journey, a travelling towards a goal, where at the end of all problems lies the total solution – not our work, but God’s. We are powerless in the face of our unquenchable thirsting for our destiny and our goal, and only the power of God can make us whole. But the search for ever greater completeness, the search for the best, – as far as possible – characterizes a Christian’s greatness at every moment; and this, at every moment, is the characteristic of the Church’s invitation to us, and with it is the measure of our being Christian. It is a boundless commitment, without end.

Let us recall Jesus’ parable comparing two moral attitudes: that of a Pharisee and that of a publican. Remember that the Pharisees considered themselves the faithful custodians of the divine laws, while the publicans, who collected taxes for the Roman Empire, were generally publicly exposed as sinners. It is Luke who reports this well-known story: “Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, ‘I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like everyone else, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here...’ The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner.’”¹ We know that Jesus condemns the moral attitude of the Pharisee. And why? Because the Pharisee is proud of himself. He evades and repudiates the tension of his life. However, if we look carefully at the publican, he expresses himself in a most basic formula – a sorrowful uneasiness with himself, a tension which incorporates the moral concept the Church indicates for man. Nothing more starkly contrasts to this than a person who is complacently self-satisfied or hopes for a possible contingent happiness.

This constant searching by the Christian for self-truth and, therefore, for the truth of the world, bears an experienceable mark. Jesus indicated it with the word “peace,” and one of the most moving commentaries on this aspect of Christian anthropology is the prayer which the priest says at Mass after the assembly has recited the Lord’s prayer together: “Deliver us, Lord, from every evil and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy, keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus »

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» Christ.” All of the elements of a moral tension are contained in those lines: acknowledged dependence on God who created me, in whose hands I fearlessly remain; an affirmation that because the substance of life is Another, so my hope and my destiny is Another; and the need to live life as expectancy and therefore, searching – as a journey in which an emptiness is ever to be filled.

Thus the tension to affirm reality, as did Christ’s gaze, is the foundation of peace. This peace cannot last if it does not rest on the ultimate substance of reality, on the Mystery, which makes all things, on God, the Father.

Without this final context, peace will be fragile and brittle. It will crumble into anxiety. The effort of faithfulness in following the truth is very different. It is a struggle, which is not the opposite to peace. And although it might be painful or weigh heavily upon us, it is not anxiety. Anxiety is a lie which continuously reemerges and nests in us to impede our adherence to all that in our conscience has emerged as truth. Peace is a war, but it is with ourselves.

¹ Lk 18:10-11,13.