

CONVOKED BY THE WORD

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Were the disciples, that handful of men and women who followed Jesus and were convoked by his person and his Word aware they were going to become icons upon whom we were going to fix our gaze? What would they have thought knowing that we were going to recognize ourselves in them, in the adventure of their journey, in their hesitations and enthusiasm, in the joys and fears of their discipleship?

If they had known it, perhaps they would not have argued among themselves about who was the most important; perhaps they would have felt ashamed of fleeing and would have remained near the Master in the garden; perhaps Thomas would never have said "*if I do not put my finger into the hole of the nails, I will not believe*".

But, luckily for us, they did argue, take flight, hesitate and were rightly reproached by Jesus: "*People of little faith, foolish and slow of heart to believe...*" And, luckily for us they were able to tell him one day: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...*"

But, today, we are not going to fix our attention on them but on other important persons created by Jesus and his powerful imagination who appear in the Gospel. While Peter, Mary Magdalene, Levi, Zaccheus or Bartimaeus had their own life before encountering him, the men and women of the parables only came into being through his Word and were shaped by this

Word. None of them, except Lazarus, has a proper name, as if they were waiting to take on our names and become icons to be contemplated and learned from. And this is precisely what I propose to do with five of them:

The doorkeeper in Mk 13, 34

The peaceful sower in Mk 4, 27-29

The wasteful steward in Lk 16, 1-8

The laborers of the last hour in Mt 20, 1-32

The children who play in the square in Lk 7, 31-35

Every single one of them can reveal something about what it means to live CONVOKED BY THE WORD and something that Jesus tried to communicate by means of these stories that attracted the attention of his listeners.

From these narratives we can learn how to be and live in Consecrated Life today as:

Experts in attention

Dazzled by God's gratuity

Trusting that the Word realizes its work

Shrewd in order to win friends

Dancing to the Gospel rhythm.

1. Like the Doorkeeper charged with keeping vigil

EXPERTS IN ATTENTION

The same thing will happen as it happened to that man who went out of his house and entrusted a task to each one of his servants and charged the doorkeeper to be alert (Mk 13, 34).

The parable makes an interesting distinction between persons: before leaving, the owner of the house hands out two types of responsibilities according to the category of those remaining in the house: he entrusts a task to each one of the "servants", while to the doorkeeper, he confides something different: to be alert.

The doorkeeper is both a man of "within" and of "outside" and his mission is on the border and consequently liminal. On the one hand, he belongs to the "house" and even though he is not the owner, he knows its riches well. His responsibility is to guard and defend them. While the other servants carry out their tasks inside, he remains in his place which borders on the outside, attending to what is beyond, over and above the walls of the house, intensifying his attention to protect it and also to recognize by sight

and hearing the expected return of his absent master or the news about him that others may bring. His master has entrusted to him a task of responsibility, delegating to him the important task of opening and closing the door, of allowing or denying entry into the house. He has given him “the power of the keys”.

Can we not feel, like him, convoked by the Word to be “*men and women of the door*”— situated between the inside and the outside, entrusted with the task of being attention experts?

Attention to the interior life and expectant waiting are uncommon traits in our culture (I refer above all to the countries of the North). We are inclined to distraction and lack of transcendence, habits which, almost imperceptibly, model or shape our “centrifugal” lives because of haste, noise and stress thereby creating a generation of sleepwalkers, persons, deaf, blind and dumb, lost in something, and lifeless, deprived of significant orientation, prisoners in the empty nets of trivial matters, and rendered dull to interiority and compassion.

As Eduardo Galeano says: “the privileged minorities, condemned to perpetual fear, step on the accelerator to flee from reality, and reality is a very dangerous thing which lies in wait or threatens on the other side of the closed windows of the automobile”.

No one of us is free from this environmental pressure and the discipline of vigilance, and attention has become a difficult art, besieged and bothered, as we are by thousands of calls to extraversion, distracted by so many noises that come from outside or that resound within us. Sometimes, that bewilderment or thoughtlessness and that distraction seem to emerge with a “good purpose”: instead of being vigilant “doorkeepers” attentive to accept the Word, we abandon our guard post to run diligently from one course to another, or from one conference to another; we insatiably buy one book after another, accumulate notes and photocopies that we will never read again; feverishly or dutifully we record cassettes and CDs which will later sleep silently in the closet ... The words are then accumulated on the shelves of our heart, the ideas, discourses, reasoning, opinions and comments gradually occupy every corner, and eat up the space of desert and silence to which God always wants to attract us, and His Word remains on the threshold of our house, because the door is closed and nobody answers its call.

If we lose the habit of being attentive and the paths of desire atrophy, we will read texts but the Word will not surprise us, we will grow in learning but not in wisdom, we will be consulted as experts, but our answers will lack the profundity that allows others to intuit that they are the product of an enlightened heart.

What will the doorkeeper of the parable tell us, a man accustomed to wait and to watch?

Perhaps he would begin by inviting us to open the door which connects with our interiority, to discover once again that we are both aware of and live in contact with our heart.

“When you pray go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen...” recommended Jesus (Mt 6, 5-6). The text is marked by imperatives: *“go to..”, close, pray...* And that means that the initiative does not come from us but from another who is the one who calls, invites and attracts: *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him to me”* (Jn 6, 44). We secretly resist believing that we are desired by God and that it is God who looks for our presence. Nonetheless this is what the Biblical authors, beginning from Genesis to Revelation want to convince us about: *“They heard the Lord God walking in the garden, and they hid from him among the trees. But the Lord God called the man, ‘Where are you?’* (Gen 3, 8-9)

“Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house and eat with him, and he will eat with me” (Rev. 3, 20).

In this text as well as in that of Matthew there is a door separating two spaces: outside and inside. In the Book of Revelation it is the *“Amen, the faithful witness”* who speaks and who is “outside” and calls to “open” that door which separates him from the one who is “inside” (the Church of Laodicea), while in Matthew, Jesus invites to *“close”* the door. In both cases, the encounter takes place in the interior space and the images to express the intimacy are those of eating supper together, or that of an exchange of looks or of words.

The experience of attraction results in the discovery of being inhabited, and when we enter into contact with our heart, someone is waiting there for us. *“My daughters, do not be hollow”*, Saint Teresa used to say.¹ We are “inhabited”, not empty; we are not the first ones to get there, neither are we ever alone: *“My Father and I will come to him and we will live in him”* (Jn 14, 23). This is why we have the same experience as Jacob in Betel: *“Truly, the Lord was in this place and I did not know it”...* (Gen 28, 16).

Beginning from that conviction of faith, we can lose the fear of contacting everything which is darkness, disorder, disturbance within us: *“For what you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, Abba, Father (...)* The Spirit too comes to help ² us in our weakness, for when we do not know how to pray properly, then the Spirit personally makes our petitions for us in groans that

cannon be put into words” (Rm 8, 15.26).

The Spirit “*poured out*” in us makes it possible for us to accept our fragile and limited condition in a positive way, because “taking it into account” we are able not to consider it as an obstacle between God and ourselves. And we can even rejoice that we are not “just simply spirits” nor “pure spirits”, but something much better: children of the Father capable of having the same experience which made Ignatius of Antioch feel and be aware of “a source of living water which murmurs within my interior self and repeats to me: Come to the Father...”.³

Would it not be a mission of Consecrated Life today to offer paths and means to have access to interiority which are different from those of the New Age which saturate us with their sweet spirituality but which lack any kind of commitment? The mission of “*doorkeepers*” invites us to look outside to detect and perceive all those anonymous searches of unsatisfied and anxious or restless people, to open the door of our communities and offer them company to penetrate into the reality and “*pierce*” its apparent triviality.

Experience tells us that, when we open the door, many people enter, those wounded by experiences of failure, solitude, fragility and lack of love. That world apparently satisfied and saturated by consumerism, is inhabited by many men and women possessed by fears of madness, sickness, suffering, old age, death or silence.

Today, more than ever, the Word convokes us to open the doors and to offer attentiveness, acceptance, warmth and company to a world stiff with cold. From past times we can inherit the unhealthy idea that Consecrated Life can lose its charism if it opens itself too much and mixes up with groups or persons who have different lifestyles, and we forget that it is much more important to inherit the Biblical tradition of a People who learnt from the exile to dialogue with the non Jews as a necessary condition for their faith to become universal. Israel was always a culture of dialogue with others: Canaanites, Greeks, Romans... It never maintained itself “pure”; it opened itself and became universal, at the same time that it kept its sensitivity for God’s project.

The doorkeeper responsible for watching could tell us:

“Stay awake and expecting, do not allow your attention to die out: only in doing that is the immense and silent work of God in our own heart and in the world revealed.

And leave the door half way open so that those who live out in the open may enter: the Lord whom you are waiting for will enter hidden among them”.

2. Like the peaceful sower,

TRUSTING THAT THE WORD DOES ITS WORK

“This is what the Kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, at once he starts to reap because the harvest has come (Mk 4, 27-29).

Since the interpretation of the parables changes very much according to the title that we give them, I propose to call it that of “*the peaceful sower*” to put the text we usually call that of “the seed which grows by itself” in another light (Mk 4, 26-29).

Jesus seems to say, “Look at that man, he acts and decides to intervene just at the moment which corresponds to him: “*he sows*” the seed and, at the end, “*he reaps*” when the time of the harvest arrives. But he knows that there is a period of time during which he has nothing to do, but it is the earth “*which on its own accord produces*”, makes the seed germinate, grow and bear fruit. And all that takes place “*without his knowing how*”, while he “*sleeps and when he is awake*”, peacefully, without insisting on directing some rhythms which are beyond his control”.

This balance is difficult in a culture of efficiency, planning and immediate achievement. It is a difficult challenge for Consecrated Life in which the concern to measure and control everything continues to persecute us. In our work we are usually serious, disciplined and responsible people and it is difficult for us to manage to alternate between action and quietness, between effort and abandonment. The majority of us has been formed in a certain “hero logic” and in a overvaluing of work and of pastoral effort, accompanied by something which we could qualify as “apostolic anxiety” which makes us confuse “zeal” with accounting, efficacy with short-term success.

We continue to have an on-going lesson: to discern when we should be active and diligent in the tasks of the Kingdom and when to be patient and passive; when it is the moment to get involved and help and when others will be grateful if we get out of the way; when the situation requires us to be vigilant and to intervene and when the only thing that we can do is to go to bed; when we are to analyze and discover causes and when we have to fit together incapacities and ignorance and recognize that we do not know everything and that there are many *whys and hows* which will continue to escape us. The disciple who “approves” or passes the examination in that subject is the one who, after doing everything in his power, remains peaceful knowing that the process which God himself has initiated, will make the seed

continue to grow during the night, while he sleeps.

Also, at the moment when we live listening to the Word and convoked by it, we need to have the same disposition of the “peaceful sower.” “Do not push the river, it flows by itself”, the Oriental wisdom advises. Do not insist on controlling the dynamism of the Word, it knows its work well; and it will carry it out if you do not hinder it too much. The Lord tells us in the Deutero Isaiah:

*For, as the rain and the snow come down from the sky
And do not return before having watered the earth,
Fertilizing it and making it germinate (...)
So it is with the word that goes from my mouth:
It will not return to me unfulfilled
or before having carried out my good pleasure
and having achieved what it was sent to do (Is 55, 10-11).*

Tasks are not to be confused: ours is to make room for the Word, reread it, study it, meditate it, accept it with an open, free and needy heart, whisper it like the person reciting Psalm 1. Its task is to nourish, challenge, lead, enlighten, transform.

To allow oneself to be convoked by the Word requires a basic receptivity, the same which is given by a mirror, or a crystal, or the peaceful water of a lake which reflect the light of the sun or moon; they “do” nothing so the light may reflect on them; they only remain there quietly, just like the earth, which neither does anything so that the seed will grow in its depth.

To go frequently to the Word, to penetrate it and honor it, to familiarize ourselves with it, to keep in our memory, as a treasure, those brief phrases of the Psalms or of the Gospel which at a given moment have enkindled our heart: “*Your love is worth more than life*” (Ps 63, 4); “*The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want*” (Ps 23, 1); “*Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened*” (Mt 11, 28); “*You have words of eternal life*” (Jn 6, 68); “*Blessed are the merciful*” (Mt 5, 7); “*Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me*” (Mk 10, 48); “*Treat me with tenderness and I shall live*” (Ps 119, 77).

It seems that this sowing is useless and unproductive, but, sometimes, unexpectedly, we are given the experience to verify that this seed has grown “*by its own impulse*” (Mk 4, 28), and we feel that those words have begun to form part of ourselves and have become our breathing. “*You cannot serve God and mammon*” (Mt 6, 24), we suddenly remember these words with greater strength or intensity than the calls to comfort and consumerism. “*Do not*

worry about your life and about the future” (Lk 12, 22), and our anxiety, our fear and obsession will flee. “Do not fear, I have conquered the world” (Jn 16, 33), and we feel the strength to courageously face life. “I was a stranger and you made me welcome” (Mt 25, 35), and we cordially place ourselves at the side of the immigrants and are concerned about their problems.

If we are ready to leave behind the old ground which supported our “I”, we find ourselves anchored in another center and breathing another air.

“My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior

Because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant”

Mary sings in the Magnificat (Lk 1, 48), recognizing that it is in God’s gaze where she finds the source of her joy. But without stopping there, she turns her eyes to where God has fixed his look, and contemplates the history with the same look in which she has felt that she was enveloped. The Word listened to so many times from the lattices of the Synagogue of Nazareth, has done its work and makes her see the reality with new eyes. This is why, together with a conscious realism of the precariousness of things and of the harshness of life (there are people who are hungry, poor, humiliated and ambitions and oppressing powers which are the cause), she does not allow herself to be deceived by appearances, she is able to pierce through reality and sees persons, things and relationships, just as God sees them. And this is why she advances to contemplate the hungry who have been satisfied, the humble and oppressed who are exalted and the rich and powerful sent away with empty hands.

Like her, and “without knowing how”, we can find ourselves reacting according to criteria, desires and inclinations which do not proceed from us, but from the One who has been engraving his Word as a seal on our heart and our arm. And with amazement we become aware that, even though fleetingly, we have been in tune with Him, we have shared His sentiments, we have experienced what happens when the Spirit breathes in the sails of our ship.

3. Like the laborers of the last hour

DAZZLED BY GOD’S GRATUITY

Let us imagine that, after listening to the parable of the laborers in the vineyard and being alone with the master, the disciples asked him to explain it. Perhaps one of them reminded him that in the version of that story circulating among the rabbinic circles, when those of the first hour protested in receiving the same salary as those of the last hour, they received this answer from the Master: “In an hour, these have worked more than you did during the

whole day”. That was a just and satisfactory ending showing reward for work, merit and effort. While in Jesus’ unusual version, all that is barely taken into account and the Master, in whom God appears in a veiled way, offered no other justification than: “*Have I not the right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?*” (Mt 20, 15).

Let us venture the Master’s response. “Imagine that you belong to the group of those contracted by the Master of the vineyard at the last hour, and that you received the same salary as those who spent the whole day working. On the following day, would you not arrive earlier than the rest, not to gain merit, but just out of pure gratitude, because the Master’s goodness had captured you in a spiral of gratitude?”

What is new in this reaction is that it made the interior murmurings of the others (and probably ours as well) appear measly in their thinking: “If I had been one of those who earned one denarius by working only one hour, on the following day and because my salary was assured and the Master is so generous, I would arrive the latest possible...”

The same as for them, the Word tries to push us beyond the limits which we have imposed upon ourselves and it overwhelms us with its novelty. When we read the Gospel, what is extraordinary touches our existence like a comet enlightening another dark planet with its orbit of light, and what is “reasonable” remains challenged by strange proposals which, like an epiphany, break through our narrow horizon and give us a glimpse of passionate and unheard of possibilities. We could compare it to bait that tries to “catch us like fish” and take us to breathe different air, because the previous environment in which we were moving is now unbreathable for us.

Inexplicably, Jesus, who so many times expressed himself according to a lucid realism and sometimes even with a hint of pessimism (“*Jesus knew all people and did not trust himself to them*”)(Jn 2, 25), seemed, at the same time, to be possessed by a limitless confidence in the human heart’s reaction capability and, as if he had not lost the naiveté of a child, he dared to propose utopian behavior. His proposals contain a powerful transforming potentiality: “*To those who received him, we could say looking at the Prologue of John, he gave them the power to become disciples...*” In them lies the possibility of continually transforming our ideas about God in order to make them coincide with his, even though with difficulty.

If the Word had done its work, we can imagine that those laborers of the vineyard who worked only one hour and received a disproportionate or enormous salary, began to know the good heart of the Master. We let one of them speak so that he can help us to familiarize ourselves with the unusual

practices of God which appear in the parables:

“Allow yourselves to be surprised by that God deprived of the attributes proper to divinity (immutability, equidistance, impassibility...) and on the other hand, dominated by emotions which are proper to human beings: the same restlessness and anxiety of a greedy person, avid to keep what he possesses, what belongs to him (a sheep, a coin...), without tolerating even a small loss in his possessions and rejoicing depending on whether what was lost is found or not (Lk 15).

It is not strange to see him as a father who is disturbed, upset and restless, who neglects the affairs of the house and is always outside waiting or searching, as someone who is disorientated and unhinged. (Lk 15, 11-32)

Look at him as a king without power or authority, unable to convince his guests, greatly exposed to deception and failure before their rejection of his banquet, amazingly happy to have people from the road sit at his table (Mt 22, 2-14; Lk 14, 16-24).

Be amazed to know that he is a bold and hasty investor who runs the risk of distributing his property, his talents or his administration among those who do not offer sufficient guarantee of administering them well (Lk 15, 12; Mt 25, 14-30; Lk 16, 1-8). Or like a weak, excessively patient landowner fluctuating in his decisions, who at one moment refuses to listen to his servants who want to go and weed out the darnel (Mt 13, 24-30), but at another moment allows himself to be convinced by the gardener not to cut the fig tree which bore no fruit (Lk 13, 6-9).

Let us open ourselves to the consequences of the fact that God is a partial observer, with his eyes fixed where hardly anybody is looking: the ditches of the roads (Lk 10, 30); the threshold where Lazarus is lying (Lk 16, 20); the places where the weakest are battered by the strong ones...” (Mt 24, 49).

Possibly, just like Jesus with his clumsy and resisting disciples at the time of their adjusting to the novelty of that God, the laborer who experienced what absolute gratuity is will need much time and much patient insistence to get rid of the old ideas about God which we have in our imagination and to be able to accept that God is always far beyond what we think about him.

And if we allow Him to continue with His work, the Word that we listen to will reveal through him who we are for God:

Do not fix your eyes on your own merits, efforts or work: allow God to surprise you with his immeasurable love and fill you with a love which surpasses our merits.

You are earth sown with seeds destined to bear fruit (Mk 4, 3-9) and in

you there are shoots of life which the Father's gaze discovers (Mk 13, 28-29). What he has planted in your earth possesses the dynamism of growth, which germinates and grows beyond your control (Mk 4, 26-29). Do not be concerned about the mixture of the darnel which you find in your life, what is important for your Father is all the good which he has sown in your heart (Mk 13, 14-30).

It is true that you are small and insignificant like a mustard seed, but that smallness hides within it a force capable of transforming itself to become a great tree where the birds can make their nests (Mk 4, 30-32). Perhaps you will arrive at the banquet hall, ragged and dirty, but you are a guest and have been invited and desired, and the King who has invited you is waiting for you at the table that has been set (Mt 22, 1-14). Rejoice that you possess talents and resources to be invested (Mt 25, 14-30); you are on time to make friends with those who are going to open the eternal dwelling for you (Lk 16, 9), because you hold in your hands everything that is at stake: bread, water, a roof over your head, clothes, shared with those who lack these (Mt 25, 32-46). Your characteristic is to get lost (Lk 15, 3), go away, (Lk 15, 11-32), go to sleep (Mt 25, 1-13), harden your heart (Mt 18, 23-35), contract debts (Lk 7, 41-43)..., but there is Someone who believes in your capacity to allow yourself to be found and to return home, to watch, to be merciful, to transform your debts into love. And, if he desires you, pursues, searches and waits a long time, it is because you have value in his eyes”.

We are convoked to accept those new names which baptize us with their novelty and to believe that these are also ours. The Gospel continues to give them to us, like that little white stone in the Book of Revelation (2, 17) on which our true identity is engraved.

4. Like the spendthrift steward,

BEING ASTUTE TO WIN FRIENDS

He also said to his disciples: There was a rich man and he had a steward who was denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said: “What is this that I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer.”

Then the steward said to himself. “Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes” Then he called his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, how much do you owe my master? ‘One hundred measures of oil’, he said. The steward said, ‘Here take your bond, sit down and quickly write fifty.’ To

another he said, 'And you, sir, how much do you owe?' 'One hundred measures of wheat', he said. The steward said, 'Here take your bond and write eighty'. The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.

And so I tell you this: use money tainted as it is, to win you friends, and thus make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings (Lk 16, 1-9).

This is a peculiar story in which, contrary to the exemplary accounts so helpful in pious spheres, we are to learn from a person characterized by wastefulness and extravagance (Saint Jerome in the Vulgate qualifies him as *diffamatus*, leaving unresolved the truth of the accusation against him). Jesus shamelessly disregards any judgments about his conduct to pay attention only to something which he believes is worthy of admiration and imitation, his astuteness to *win friends*, even by using reproachable means. Here, Jesus does not encourage the simplicity of doves but the astuteness of serpents. Intelligence is shown precisely when one knows how to use goods, while foolishness is just the opposite.

Let us imagine that we offer the astute steward the place of “special counselor” in our government team: most certainly he will remind us that the good functioning of our Order or Congregation does not only depend on what we usually call “spiritual themes”, but also on the use that we make of our concrete resources. And to convince ourselves by means of the Word, he will give us a particular “*Lectio Divina*” of the parables: the “eternal dwellings” are opened by the friends whom we have won over through riches; the entrance to the nuptial banquet of the arriving bridegroom is conditioned by the provision of oil for the lamps which the virgins who are waiting have with them; entering into the joy of the Lord asking for talents depended on whether the servants had risked to negotiate with them (Mt 25, 14-30); the place at the right hand of the Judge will be reserved for those who shared their bread, water, home and dress with their poorest brothers and sisters (Mt 25, 31-45).

We will be reminded that we never find in the Gospel the call to disregard and have nothing to do with money, but rather to relate to it in a correct way. And the same thing must be said about any human resource, whether intelligence, culture, time or any available possibilities, whatever type they may be:

“Act with intelligence, he will certainly tell us, take responsibility for what you have received, use it intelligently, using both head and heart. Do not think that spirituality consists in being indifferent regarding material things or in escaping from the earthly things, to a separate sphere: the “house” of the

world has also been entrusted to our talents, ability, competence and work”

Perhaps when getting up from the meeting hall he will leave us thoughtful, wondering and asking ourselves what to do in order to “win friends”.

We have improved very much, but in Consecrated Life we still have some unpleasant aftertastes of ancient messianism, illuminist ideas and old habits of a secret superiority when relating with people. We usually seem to be more ready to give than to receive, to offer help than to ask for it, to teach rather than to learn. We are accustomed to look at others more as potential “sons and daughters” than as true brothers and sisters with whom to relate mutually. “To win over friends” is not usually a “specialty” of consecrated persons, who are more formed to be pastors, teachers, preachers or councilors (much more men than women, we have to acknowledge this...).

And nevertheless the Word gives us instructions to win friends: it convokes us to be co-disciples with others in the Christian community and to listen to it not like experts or those well-versed in it, but like men and women who have an open and humble heart.

The best initiation course to the reading of the Bible that we can have is offered to us, free of charge, by the Gospel which initiates us in Jesus’ “art of listening”, in his way of recognizing the “Father’s dialect” in the persons devoid of significance among his people. Listening to his silent voice, Jesus gradually familiarized himself with the “code signals” with which the Father communicated with him and tuned into his “frequency”: he heard his voice calling him through that woman who was bent and he responded by straightening her (Lk 13, 10-17); he felt his voice was calling out loud to him in the shame of the woman with the hemorrhage, and his response was to make the healing force he had received from the Father flow toward her (Mk 5, 21-34); he was filled with joy in hearing in the accounts of the disciples the preferences of his Father toward the little ones (Lk 10, 21-22); he discovered in the plea of the Syrian-Phoenician woman that His Will was sending him beyond the lost sheep of the house of Israel and he obeyed by curing the little girl (Mt 15, 21-28); he allowed himself to be attracted by the silent call of the small man who observed him hidden behind the branches of a sycamore tree and invited himself to go to his house (Lk 19, 1-10).

Contemplating each one of the encounters of Jesus with the people, we learn from him, little by little, what it means “to know the Scripture” and to “be nourished with his Word”. In each case, we see him behaving like a true “scribe”: his task consisted, not in scrutinizing ancient manuscripts, but in translating, understanding, discerning, having an intuition and in decoding the word of the Father which reached him encoded behind the silent screams, the pleas, the lack of hope, thanksgiving or complaints carried within those

who got near to him. His role was to be for them someone capable of understanding and of responding to them, to be the wise hermeneutist capable of interpreting what they were not even able to express.

If we want to be received into the “eternal dwellings” like the spendthrift steward, we can already begin to become experts in humanity, in listening, specialists in gazing and in selective attention to *win over friends* in those places where so many people without learning or fine appearance can teach us to babble the secret language of the Gospel.

They are the ones who will help us to listen to the Word, precisely because they are anonymous bearers of it. And this resonant version of Matthew 25 will resound within us: *Come blessed of my Father because you discovered me in the voiceless and you listened to me; because I spoke to you in those without the right to speak, in those without rights, and you responded to me*”.

5. Like the children who played in the square

DANCERS FOLLOWING THE GOSPEL RHYTHM

“What comparison, then, can I find for the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children shouting to one another while they sit in the market place: ‘We played the pipes for you, and you would not dance; we sang dirges, and you would not cry’” (Lk 7, 31-32).

This is how Jesus complained. By using a popular saying he was trying to shake off the incapacity of those who listened in order to get them out of their stagnant situation and begin to move in a different direction from what was paralyzing their minds. Madeleine Delbrel said:

*“Lord, I think that you must be tired
of people who always speak about serving you
with the air of captains;
to know you with the pretension of a professor;
to reach you through the rules of sports;
to love you as an old married couple loves one another.
And one day when you desired something else
you invented Saint Francis
and made him your jongleur.
And it is up to us to allow ourselves to invent
So as to be joyful people who will dance their life with you”.*

The ethical aspects of Christianity, together with the remains of “tendencies to perfection” and to a certain legalism which we believed we left behind, may

continue to be latent in secret corners of our lives and shaping us as rigid and joyless persons. Commenting on the consequences of fostering only the “imperatives” instead of the “indicatives,” says Klaus Berger: “it is probable that this “spirituality,” perhaps not necessarily blessed, will need the help that can come from the model of love and joy. Then, probably, this is why the mystics of the twelfth century speak so much of love, friendship, embracing and kissing, contagious joy and tenderheartedness: because the seriousness of an austere life is always in danger of failing the message of the Gospel. (...) Possibly, there are two fundamental expressions of Christian spirituality. One is directed to Good Friday, just to mention a common place that centers on sin, fault, guilt, the vicarious condemnation of Jesus and the verdict of innocence. The other one is oriented toward the Passover and focuses on joy, beatitude, transformation and laughter which has as its object death and the devil. And it is not a question of opposing one another but rather of recognizing them as complementary forms of piety”.⁴

The calls to be radical and to conversion in our Consecrated Life with an imperative tone can have an effect contrary to what is intended and we can become frustrated people because we do not attain the high goals of perfection or, following the metaphor of the children who did not dance, squeezed timidly together on the bench of the market place, with clumsy feet and deaf to the music that tries to seduce us with its rhythm, incapable to dare to enter in a dance that we do not know where it will lead us.

I have often done the test of beginning the narration of the parable of the treasure and having the group complete it. Everyone remembers how it begins: “*The Kingdom of Heaven is similar to a treasure hidden in a field...* ”, and also the man who finds it and goes running to sell everything he has to buy the field. When I say: “Something is lacking”, the details begin, some are real, others picturesque: he hid the treasure again, he was digging, and the treasure was in a chest or casket... Only as a very rare exception does someone remember the phrase on which the parable turns and which sets its whole dynamism moving: “*and because of the joy*”.

I wonder why, after twenty centuries of preaching and catechesis that we are really clear on the question of renunciation, of sacrifice, abstention, covering ourselves with ashes and imploring God “Do not be eternally angry with us...”, while joy remains on the sidelines like a minor, optional virtue.

We speak about letting ourselves be convoked by the Word but we have an abundance of written, preached, proclaimed, learnt, explained, commented and expressed words, and perhaps we need to go back to the simple melody of silent gestures which existed in its origin.

Many people (ourselves?) are saturated, fed up, skeptical and impervious to speeches, documents, exhortations and declarations and if our spiritual health depends on the right relationship between our spoken words and the real transformation of our lives along the lines of the Gospel, it will be necessary to recognize that our situation could be characterized as a “disaster zone”.

Let us imagine for a moment that we make the drastic decision of committing ourselves (one day?, one week?, one month?...) “to a treatment of silence.” This treatment would consist in substituting our spoken or written words for a given period of time with an attempt to be like Jesus of whom it was said that *he went about doing good* and that from that way of living he choreographed the dance with which he responded to the rhythm set by the Father. Each one of us would have to apply this “doing-good dance” to our concrete circumstances, and think and manage to do something so that our whole body, look, hands, feet, all our expressive ability would replace these words which, in turn, many other times in our life, have replaced the bare sincerity of love.

Let us imagine also that one of the children playing in the market square addresses himself to us, tired of seeing us, just like his companions, motionless, blank-faced and resistant to go out and dance:

“Do you not remember that in Jesus’ life everything began with the hymn he heard in Bethlehem: “*Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to people of good will, to those he loves*”?

That was the first sound he heard and it became a symphonic overture to his whole existence, the sound of the flute which gave the rhythm to the dance of his life. Your Master did not remain quiet, still nor rigid: the hymn of that night made him drunk, brought him out of his mind and now he only knew how to live enraptured and changed, unable to live at a rhythm that was not extravagant, generous, lavish, and capable of breaking down boundaries. The Word heard from the angels on that night which sang to God’s *Glory* and to humanity’s *peace* made Jesus so enthusiastic and invaded him so totally, that he lived de-centered and off kilter, because his center and his support were his Father and his brothers and sisters.

Recall what was said of him: “*He is out of his mind*” (Mk 3, 21) and probably they were right, because his love lacked all sense and all measure, he who began the formation of his disciples taking them to a wedding feast (not to a school of the Talmud, not to the desert...). What would he say to you seeing you so guarded, circumspect, so uptight because of your judicious caution, your reasonable transactions and your calculated equilibrium?

Get close to his Word, keep silent and listen to it because it is only when your ears have grasped the music that your feet can begin to dance. Allow the melody of his flute to reach you: “*Glory to God, peace to all people*”. Let yourselves be drawn along by this melody, croon it to yourself, whisper it in the silence of your heart.

And if you are able, begin to dance to its rhythm, even if this be madness”.

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- 1 “There is another precious thing, Teresa of Jesus used to say, within us, which is without comparison, from what we see from outside. Let us not imagine that we are hollow inside, in our interior, that, I think is impossible if we were careful to think that we have such a guest within us that we would be so much given over to vanity and things of the world, because we would see how low they are in regard to what we possess within. (*Camino* 48, 2).
 - 2 The verb used by Paul, *synantilambanein* is that which LXX uses in speaking of the words of the father-in-law of Moses when he recommends him: “*The task is very burdensome for your strength (...) Look for some capable men... and in this way you will share the burden...*” (Ex 18, 22). The preposition *syn* expresses proximity while *anti* has the sense of “instead of or in the place of”.
 - 3 Letter to the Romans, Ignacio of Antioch, VII, 2.
 - 4 ¿Qué es espiritualidad bíblica? Fuentes de la mística Cristiana. “*What is Biblical spirituality?. Sources of Christian mysticism*”. Sal Térrea, Santander 2001, 2002-204.