

## Greater than our heart

### The soul and the harp/28 - From our inhabited intimacy we learn that the whole universe is inhabited by God

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*"If there is an Other, whoever he is, wherever he is, and whatever his relations with me are, even if he does not act with regards to me in any other way than with the simple appearance of his being, I have an outside, a nature; my original sin is the existence of the other".*

**Jean Paul Sartre**, Being and Nothingness

**Psalm 139 is a great poetic message on the essence of faith and on the mystery of the person, who when discovering itself being watched comes to understand a deeper and greater kind of beauty.**

There is a secret and very deep place within the soul where a subtle and delicate melancholy lives. It is what emerges when we realize that even communion with those who love us stops at the door of a secret intimacy, the one where the most beautiful and true part of us is found. We know that our friends, parents, wife, children, really love us and really know us, but the loving knowledge they have of us cannot reach the inner wine cellar of our heart. Only if they managed to reach it would they truly know us, because they would then see an unknown beauty, if someone could reach us in that depth they would understand that we are better than we appear, that we are even more beautiful than the person they have known so far. If it is true that the other is "the one who looks at me" (J.P. Sartre), it is even more so that the other never looks at us enough, and does not see the best part of us. Others know something, some even know what is essential, but what is essential is not enough for us, when it comes to these things, the essential is not enough.

This is also where our innocence lives. In those depths of the depth of our soul there is an invisible purity, the one that we lost while growing up but was never truly erased even by the greatest of errors, the one that believes in us when no one believes in us anymore (starting with ourselves). It is the garden of the *Adam* that we still are, it is the Indians' hut, which we built as children and where we took refuge when escaping from ghosts, it is our dollhouse. And we return to that small house, which has been growing smaller and smaller while we were growing up, during the dark days of our life, when we feel chased and condemned by everyone but we know that there is a better corner of the universe than man and woman that others can see. This invisible refuge is what makes life possible while in exile, in prison, in great sin. Then one day we understand that this gap between what we really are and what others recognize will always remain unbridgeable, and that that most intimate beauty will be the secret and the gift that we will bring to our very last appointment. Hence, a new kind of peace is born, a new reconciliation with life and with others, and we stop complaining for never being loved enough. Because we understand that it is the very existence of this core of beauty, protected by the gaze of others, that makes the experience of reciprocity and recognition always insufficient. We must always ask a *lot* of the reciprocity in our life, but we must not ask *too much*.

The Bible did not know about the unconscious or about psychoanalysis, and it did not know, unlike us, that a great variety of different things is accumulated in that hidden corner. It knew men and women,

however, and it knew God. And so, it told us something important, which remains true even now that we have come to know the other invisible "inhabitants" of our intimacy. It told us and continues to tell us that that unexplored land is inhabited by a good guest, who has always lived there, who knows it better than we think that we know it. It tells us that that certainty of being better than we have become is all love, it is God's first gift to us, the device with which he continues to save us every day: «You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain» (Psalm 139,1-6).

The knowledge mentioned in this Psalm, one of the highest and most poetic of the Psalter, does not concern an abstract knowledge or omniscience of God. The "wonderful" knowledge that interests the psalmist here is *the knowledge that God has of us*, that he has of the author of the psalm himself, that he has of me, and of you. It is the experience of being known by a friend, a deeper gaze than that of any other, friendlier and deeper than our own gaze: "inaccessible to me". A deep root of biblical faith is being given to us here. Faith is first of all the experience of being seen from within, of being at the centre of a good kind of *intelligence*. I am loved because I am looked at, loved while I am looked into that depth where my mystery resides. Hence, before being a set of norms and truths in which to believe, biblical faith is the personal experience of that profound gaze. Religion can begin with worship and with the law, but faith begins when one feels looked upon, seen and called upon by name.

Man has always sensed that he was watched by God and his spirits, that he lived under an invisible gaze from above. Generally, however, it was a distressing experience. Ancient man was afraid of the gaze of the gods. He hid himself, wanting to escape it, because being seen was also the experience of the unveiling of his sins and therefore of guilt. It was the gaze of a judge, the eyes of those who want to see us in order to condemn us. "God sees you" was an instrument of fear and terror. The Bible also brings about a revolution here. God's gaze is first of all a gaze of love, it is liberation and joy. God also sees sins, but first of all he sees that we are children; he sees the gesture of Cain, but first he sees the gesture of Elohim who created Adam in his image and likeness. Here lies the biblical anthropology of Adam's primacy over Cain, because Adam lives in a corner of the heart that is more intimate than the one where his fratricidal son resides. Starting from this inhabited intimacy, we learn that the entire universe is supported and inhabited by God, as well: the starry sky inside me enables me to see the starry sky above me. An experience that immediately turns into song: «If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you» (Psalm 139,8-12). Amazing!

If the encounter with God is being seen inside, from within, then that gaze was there even before we knew about it. It was there, invisible, but always present: «For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be» (Psalm 139,13-16). Verses that closely recall those of Job, but also the "bones" of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20,9) and the story of his prophetic vocation. Faith begins in just one day, but it has really always been there. One day you become aware of something that pre-existed that consciousness that emerges at a precise moment, when you understand that the sentence we are writing on that day is part of a "book". One of the greatest gifts that the gift of faith brings with it, in the dimension explained by Psalm 139, faith is truly and authentically a gift, even before being a virtue (if only to protect it), is that admirable exercise that follows the beginning of faith. When we go back in our history and, as with an old photo album, we leaf through page after page of our past and finally understand it; we understand the same photos of yesterday that now light up with immensity, differently. Those who believe have always believed, they just did not know it.

And so, in these verses we also find a splendid synthesis of what a *vocation* truly is. In the beginning there is a gaze, feeling seen by an eye that looks at me and sees me as no one has ever seen me before. A gaze that immediately becomes a *voice*, because while he looks at us he pronounces our name, reveals our mission and our place in the world, makes us glimpse and see that the episodes that

have marked our life have a meaning; they are the chapters of the "book" that we were already writing, but we did not know it. It is at this intimate and deep level that the destiny of a vocation is at stake. It is not a matter of happiness or unhappiness, (the Bible and life itself are filled with unhappy and yet immense vocations). Nor of cost-benefit calculations (which currency should we use?), nor much less, of being in the subjective and objective conditions of being able to succeed in the task, (most authentic vocations are not "successful", they are stories of failure). In these vocations, a person does *only and simply what he or she is*, what he or she saw while being seen, what he or she discovers he or she has always been and will be: «Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there» (Psalm 139,8). This is not a fatalistic or static view, as it would be if the role of the person were only to interpret an already written and ready score - without even the executive freedom of a jazz score. A vocation moves between maximum freedom - because there is no greater freedom than those who obey the truest and most beautiful part of themselves - and maximum non-freedom, because that gaze follows us everywhere and reminds us every moment who and what we really are. You can leave a community or leave a wife, but you cannot leave the action of that gaze.

The impossibility of getting out of the scope of God's pupils offers no guarantee that we will not make bad, sometimes dreadful choices. The good news of the Bible is another: even if you make "your bed in the depths" to escape from yourself, there too you continue to be watched and seen. And every time you "arise on the wings of the dawn" to flee far away, wherever that crazy flight may take you, when you touch your most intimate intimacy there will be someone there waiting for you and reminding you that you too are greater than your heart.