Listening with the Heart

I hear in my heart:

"Seek my face."

I will seek your face, Lord.

Do not hide your face from

Me (Psalm 27 (26): 7-8).

Were not our hearts burning

within us while he spoke to

us on the road and opened the

Scriptures to us? (Luke 24:32).

Introduction: The Human Being in Constant Exile in His Own Home

Today's human beings are becoming anxious, fearful of any ties, and for whom only speed and the number of contacts seem to offer some security. Their lives are mired in constant precariousness and uncertainty; in obsolescence. *They come from a commodified existence, from so-called liquid life: a devouring life that assigns the world, people, and everything else the role of consumer objects, which lose their usefulness in the very act of being used* (Zigmut Bauman).

The media offer us a fragmented, discontinuous, detailed, and timely view of reality that makes synthesis very difficult. This type of information tends to dissolve the inner strength of convictions, luring people into a life of external concern. It injects information, images, and demands into our consciousness, obscuring our inward focus and increasingly preventing us from living our lives from their roots

The superficial person can't stand emptiness. They seek inner noise to avoid hearing their own emptiness: words, images, music, noise... this way, it's easier to live without listening to any inner voice: to be preoccupied with something so as not to find themselves. Noise dissolves interiority; superficiality nullifies it. Deprived of silence, the person lives from the outside, in the core of themselves. Their entire life becomes external. They prefer to continue living an inconsequential existence where the important thing is to be entertained, to function without a soul, to remain numb inside.

Consumerism, noise, superficiality, haste… prevent us from living from an inner core. Existence becomes increasingly unstable and hectic. Inner consistency is no longer possible. The individual no longer has goals or basic references. His life is becoming a labyrinth. Occupied with a thousand attractions that drag him along, he moves and stirs incessantly, but he doesn't know where he's going. He no longer finds a guiding thread to guide his life, a profound reason to sustain and give breath to his existence. This *liquid* man survives in the midst of society without knowing what it means to live from his roots; he feels increasingly lost in the face of the great questions of existence. The question of God hardly attracts or disturbs: it simply leaves an increasing number of people indifferent. The idea of God is

no longer rejected, as it was at the beginning of modernity: it is simply ignored.

The human world has relegated to oblivion the joy offered by the silence and peace of solitude, which is necessary, to a certain extent, for each person to reach their full potential... Human beings cannot be happy for long unless they are in touch with the source of spiritual life hidden in the depths of their own soul. If a human being is constantly exiled in their own home, locked away from their spiritual solitude, they cease to be true human being. (Thomas Merton).

I will seduce her, I will take her into the desert and speak to her heart (Hos 2, 16)

In the midst of the dramatic scenario described above, we must rejoice that many of us are discovering the importance of the interior life, the depth of silence, and detachment, to the point of experiencing a true inner transformation that helps us give new meaning to existence. This involves a process that consists of putting our lives in order, order in love, centering our hearts on God, allowing God to become and remain the center of gravity of our lives.

I've often been asked how silence appeared in my life; why I decided to live this adventure. The answer, suddenly, is quite simple. Out of weakness, out of necessity. As if it were my weak spot. There's nothing extraordinary or astonishing in all this. And it's like a wound that has no healing... Likewise, it can be recognized that silence has a profound social impact. He who is imbued with silence exerts a benevolent influence almost without intending to. Silence is not

experienced for itself. Just as the sun does not shine for itself, nor does rain fall for itself. Silence is communion with all (José Fernández Moratiel)

We all need to find a home for ourselves, a place to connect with the springs of life within us. Hence the inestimable value of silence. In a certain sense, silence is God. God is in my house. He always waits in my heart. Man is a house inhabited by God. Sometimes we don't realize it and don't want to enter the house because entering empty spaces is shuddery. All this explains why we rush frantically into action and why external movement exerts such a powerful attraction.

It's only when you leave everything behind and enter your home that you know someone is there waiting for you. We forget that returning home means returning to the warmth, to the hugs of those who love us and care for us (José Fernández Moratiel).

Emptiness frightens and distresses. Carl G. Jung once said that *the worst enemy is within*. Deep within, in the heart, we feel anguish and sadness; we feel depression and anxiety; we feel apathy and indifference; we feel the desire to live or the hatred of life. When we leave unresolved tensions and conflicts in the hollow of our hearts, we have taken a step back on the path to our own hearts. When we don't give way to suffering, we clip the wings of our hearts. Familiarizing ourselves with our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and reactions paves the way for self-knowledge and trains us in the art of naming what happens in our minds and hearts. From the tabernacle of the heart, we contemplate how life is created and recreated in every moment as an astonishing gift of love.

Open the ear of your heart to this inner voice and listen attentively to God, who speaks in intimacy, not to me, who speaks to you from outside. The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is magnificent; it shakes the desert, shatters secrets, and makes dull souls leap (Bernard of Clairvaux).

The human heart is a musical instrument; it contains a magnificent music; dormant, but it's there, waiting for the right moment to be played, expressed, sung, danced. That moment comes through love. A person without love will never know what music they've been carrying within their heart. It's only through love that music begins to take life, awakens, and ceases to be a potential and becomes a reality.

I also ascended above myself, and there was the Word at the summit; I descended into my own depths as if in a curious survey, and there I found him; I looked outside myself and discovered that he was beyond everything around me; I looked within, and he was even deeper. Then I understood the truth of what I had read: in him we live, move, and have our being... Do you ask me then how I know his presence if his ways are utterly untraceable? He is alive and energetic, and as soon as he arrived within, he awakened my sleeping soul; he moved, softened, and wounded my heart, which was hard, stony, and unhealthy. He also began to uproot and destroy, to build and plant; to water the arid, illuminate the dark, open the closed, and set fire to the cold. He also set out to make straight the crooked, to make level the rough places so that my spirit might bless the Lord and my whole being might bless his holy name. Thus the Spouse of the Word entered many times, never once revealing to me the traces of his entrance: not in his voice, nor in his

figure, nor in his steps... I only knew of his presence by the movement of my heart (Bernard of Clairvaux).

The heart: the unifying inner force of the human being

For Cistercian monks, the knowledge that springs from experience is an integral knowledge, the fruit of the collaboration between reason and affection, truth and love... If the philosophers of the 12th century spoke of the need to study nature so that, by knowing it, man might discover himself... the Cistercians used the opposite method: 'to know oneself as best as possible' as a compendium of the universe in order, in a final impulse, to draw closer to the mystery of God. Attempts have been made on numerous occasions to establish a specific profile in accordance with the idea of the "macrocosm" and the "microcosm." In the allegorical figure that illustrates the works of the Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen, the macrocosm is represented by the symbol of eternity, the circle, placed in the hands of nature, which crowns divine wisdom. Within the circle, the human figure is centered. Man carries within himself heaven and earth, and contains all things (Juan María de la Torre).

The heart is the place where true human identity is reestablished. The heart is the center of the human being in which all other parts are unified. The totality of our being participates in the experience of God through the work of unification wrought by the heart. It is in the heart, that body installed in the deepest part of the body, that man has the full experience of God: *the heart directs the entire organism, and, when grace occupies the pastures of the heart, it reigns over all its thoughts and all its members, since it is there, in the heart, that*

the spirit and all the thoughts of the soul are found (Isaac the Syrian).

There is a difference between the heart and the spirit. The former would be the place, the space, the center, the organ, the inner unifying and integrating force of the entire human being. The spirit would be the organ of God's vision, a more limited part of man, focused on the function of spiritual knowledge. *It is the eyes of the spirit that open the doors of the heart*, says Patriarch Callistus. That is, the eyes belong to the spirit, while the heart has doors that open to an interior and hidden space, in which the eyes of the spirit see the Light of God. Gregory of Sinai affirms the same thing when he says that *the spirit receives and contemplates the divine signs that God inscribes in the heart*. In short: the spirit is the one who reads, because it is the one who has the consciousness of knowing, while the heart is the place, the canvas, the board where the divine light leaves its traces so that the spirit can contemplate and interpret them.

From the heart of man come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evils come from within and make a person unclean (Mark 7:21-23).

Through vigilant listening to the heart, the spirit will be able to receive the revelation of the divine Light and achieve the divinization of the entire human being. Occasional contemplation is not enough. One must reach a permanent state of prayer that leads the spirit naked before God, without any distraction. In order to receive the divine Light, the heart must be emptied of all thought. *He who has*

long known divine illumination has become entirely luminous, writes Maximus the Confessor. This burst of love in the poor human heart elevates him above all creatures. But this elevation does not imply exclusion, but rather the opposite: such an elevation of love is an ineffable inclusion of all creation; it is a capacity and power of love for all men and all things.

A good person out of the goodness stored up in his heart brings forth good, and an evil person out of evil brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45).

Attentive Listening

That night the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, "Ask me for whatever you wish." Solomon replied, "Give your servant a listening mind to judge your people and to discern between good and evil…" (1 Kings 3:5-6a, 9).

We know ourselves only by listening to our constant desires. We continually live in a state of "I have this, I need that." We find ourselves in constant turmoil, and we are the ones who fuel it. When we listen, it's important not to want to direct or reject, but only to acknowledge. It's like a swing that you don't push and eventually stops. To find the heart, there's nothing to change; that's who you are, and there's nothing to appropriate.

Through willpower, there can be no welcoming attention. Therefore, it is important to notice the moments when listening is intentional. Attention is natural, and everything that is not welcoming is an element we have superimposed. Everything one is requires no effort

because that is what one is. We are like an immense receptive organ open to all solicitations.

In everyday life, we are always in a process of becoming. We want to achieve something, to accomplish something. We constantly live in anticipation of a result, and in this constant anticipation, our cellular, muscular, and chemical structure is in tension. When the body is relaxed, distended, it lets things come; one listens not only with the ears, but with the whole body. If we listen to something only with the ear, we hear fragmentarily, but when we listen with the whole body, we hear totally.

Attentive listening is multidirectional, while concentration is a restriction of attention; in a sense, it's a reaction. In concentration, there is already a direction, a goal to achieve. In attentive listening, there is no intention. When listening is intentionless, it is completely receptive. In unoriented listening, there is no one listening; there is only listening. Just as in creative thinking, there is no thinker.

When there is listening, where is the notion of someone listening? Two activities cannot exist simultaneously. At the moment of listening, there is no one; only afterward do we say there was someone listening. When listening reaches its total expansion, we can say there is only emptiness. There is neither center nor periphery.

Listening cannot be thought. When there is no intention in listening, it is free from all thought. In listening, there is no representation; the emphasis is not on what we hear, but on listening. Everything that is heard, everything that can be thought, comes from Silence, and if

there is no intentional intervention, it is reabsorbed into Silence. If we could speak of movement, it is a movement of Being toward Being.

To listen attentively is to surrender, to submit, to accept what is presented at the moment. Then there is no identification with what one submits to. To surrender is to submit and not intervene with our qualifications, with our tastes; it is to surrender without choice. The moment the will to intervene is abandoned, there is submission, but it is not a passive submission; the will is abandoned but attention remains alert. It is an active submission, and in this remaining attention lies affection.

Loving attention has a magnificent expression in prayer before an icon. It is the icon that lovingly gazes upon me, it is the Spirit that lovingly contemplates me from my true identity, from my transfigured heart, unifying all the stories with which I identify.

This is what the Lord says, who created you, Jacob, who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine… for you are precious in my sight, of great price, and I love you" (Isaiah 43:1,4).

Practicing Listening to the Heart

Out of a person's heart come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, covetousness, malice, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and frivolity. All these evils come from within and make a person unclean (Mark 7:21-23).

When you begin this discipline of listening to your heart, you need to start building the house from the bottom up, not from the roof up. Therefore, it is essential to implement measures, from the most external to the most internal, that will help you build the house on rock.

1. Create a climate of silence:

Silence is necessary. It's the most external way to address the problem of verbosity, superficial words, and the many uncontrolled and compulsive reactions we have due to a lack of silence and reflection. We're accustomed to being thoughtless, to not pausing for a moment before saying a word.

But this doesn't mean we make silence an absolute; silence is merely a means. It would be a shame to think that silence is merely muteness, shutting the mouth. If we shut our mouths, it's not out of misanthropy, but to make way for listening, for reflection; to help sort out our own noises, to express ourselves from the inner Christ that dwells within us. It's practically impossible to begin to intuit what inner silence is without first knowing how to remain silent.

2. The withdrawal of the senses.

The senses are the bodily receptors through which we perceive the world around us: that which can be captured by sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The stimuli we receive from the outside and that are captured by the senses generate sensations—pleasant, unpleasant, pleasurable, painful, etc.—which are filtered by the accumulation of recordings residing in our memory. Sensations do

not fall into a *tabula rasa*, but are instead selected and manipulated by the filter of our programmed memory, from which we will automatically repeat *more of the same*, based on programmed interpretations: condemnatory judgments, projections, prejudices, etc.

Therefore, if what we intend is to modify the filter—modify the programmed memory—we will have to start by not giving it fuel so that it won't work, because if we do, it will produce the only thing it knows, what it has done all its life. Our psychological insecurity is such that it forces us to be constantly alert to the outside world, rather like having a radar on in search of daily nourishment, as if our antennas were ready to hunt for any movement. We are like sponges that absorb everything, anxious, out of insecurity, to remain soaked in everything that happens in the environment. And the truth is that this extroversion does more harm than good, due to what was said about the conditioned filter of unhealthy memory.

Therefore, it is advisable not to give our automatic player a hard time. Fasting from the senses is necessary: not seeing, not hearing, not smelling, not tasting, and not touching. Do not seek opportunities to provoke aggravation and prostration of conditioned memory. At some point in our life, a radical fasting from the senses is essential; it is an indispensable shock therapy. A recollection of the senses is done from the perspective of what we seek, of our fundamental desire, and it is essential to never lose sight of this; fasting from the senses as a means to help achieve the end we long for: inner silence as necessary nourishment for listening to the heart.

Saint Teresa of Ávila said that *the mill grinds what you put into it*. If I feed my mill, my head, my memory too many external sensations, then what I'm going to grind is dissipation, distraction, and external dependence. Since memory is also biased, it will produce negativity and an old mentality, tirelessly repeating the same patterns. Furthermore, this would be the right time to discern which readings, relationships, occupations, tasks, etc., are best for each person in their process of unification through listening to the heart.

3. Focus on the Inner World.

When we practice silence and the withdrawal of our senses, we facilitate focus on the inner world and become more aware of the noises that surround us. If we are focused on the outer world, we are more likely to ignore what is happening inside us.

Contrary to what we might suppose, when we pay attention to our interior, we find ourselves with the unpleasant surprise of many more noises than we expected. We look inside our house and discover many things we absolutely dislike. It seems as if these things are multiplying, and they can even provoke a profound revulsion due to how unbearable so many unpleasant surprises can be. It's time to bring a new truth to our lives. We are offered the opportunity to become aware of what is within us, to see and suffer without defense as our masters and owners come out of the closet—those deep feelings of shame, guilt, emptiness, fear, lack of love… that suffocate and condition us, and that hunger and thirst to be redeemed, loved, and accepted unconditionally.

Ultimately, silence puts us in a listening position, so we can understand what sounds are inhabiting us and what lies within us. It helps us fundamentally shift our focus, which now turns inward. This, on the one hand, predisposes us to not depend on the outside world and, on the other, motivates a strong passion for what is within.

If, in addition, attentive listening is accompanied by the *memoria Dei*, by the invocation of the name of Jesus, then all the energy is gathered deep within oneself and allowed to slowly open the most intimate, most secret, and purest place in the heart. *From the moment that the thought ceaselessly calls forth the name of Jesus, and the spirit is totally attentive to the invocation of the divine name, the light of the knowledge of God covers the entire soul with its shadow like a cloud aflame*, says Theolepto of Philadelphia.

With attention to the interior, we enter a new and unknown world, a truly fascinating world; but we walk right into the lion's den. With the *memoria Dei* and attention to the interior, we make the pilgrimage to the heart, to the original face, to the intimate place where the most authentic truth resides, where the Holy Spirit dwells. It is a rough and difficult path, like the journey through the desert. It rests on listening to and ruminating on the Word of God as on two crutches that lead to the encounter with the inner Master, the Crucified and Risen One.

A story: *One day, God was tired of people. They were always bothering him, asking him for things. So he said, "I'm going to go away and hide for a while."*

Then he gathered his advisors and said, "Where should I hide?"

Some said, "Hide on top of the highest mountain on earth."

Others: "No, hide at the bottom of the sea. They'll never find him there." Others:

"No, hide on the far side of the moon; that's the best place. How would they find him there?"

Then God turned to the most intelligent of his angels and asked, "Where do you advise me to hide?"

The intelligent angel, smiling, replied, "Hide in the human heart!

It's the only place they never go!"

It can be truly difficult and painful to make contact with the noises that deafen us: thoughts, feelings, attitudes, fears, addictions, judgments, hang-ups... everything that constitutes our shadow, everything we dislike about ourselves and reject outright. We could not enter the desert without being led by the Holy Spirit. The signs that certify that it is *He* who leads and guides us are the need and longing to heal the turmoil, to find stillness, and enter into God's rest.

Resting from everything, they enter the Sabbath of spiritual life. They rejoice in God alone, filled with divine delights, and, overflowing with grace, are incapable of reciting the psalms or meditating on anything else. Sometimes they enter into ecstasies and, in this way, enjoy for a few moments, as a first fruit, the summit they so desired (Theolept of Philadelphia).

Attention to the interior requires certain conditions without which the adventure we embark on would be doomed to failure.

a) To begin with, attention to the interior requires a basic attitude of being totally willing and open to see and observe everything that happens. For this, attention must necessarily be marked by the cross, in the sense of being open to encountering many things I dislike and that provoke rejection. Such an attitude can only be understood as a gift of God's grace. Otherwise, why would I be willing to contemplate such ugly and unpleasant things?

If, through the exercise of attention, I seek only consolation, then the shadow will become even more unbearable. However, if I am willing to see the ugly, the unpleasant, what repels me, I may discover within myself an unknown capacity: that the shadow has less power than I initially thought. We usually suffer because we don't want to suffer, so much so that when we organize ourselves to avoid suffering, we suffer because of the fear of suffering. In other words, we must embrace the cross of Christ, conqueror of evil and death. *If you like things, they are as they are; and if you don't like them, they are as they are* (Tony de Mello).

The human being is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a sadness, an evil, comes like an unexpected visitor. Welcome and receive them all! Even if they are a chorus of hardships that violently empty your house. Treat each guest honorably; they may be creating space for a new delight. Dark thoughts, shame, malice— greet them at the door with a smile and invite them in. Thank whoever comes, for each has been sent as a guide from the beyond (Rumi).

b) We also need times and places dedicated exclusively to listening to and observing noise. It is necessary to pay attention at all times: in silence, at work, in prayer, on mission, in fraternal, family, and social relationships, etc. But it will be very difficult to acquire this skill at all times throughout the day if we do not first cultivate attention at specific moments when we focus solely on this.

This time dedicated specifically to the exercise of attention will help us become aware that the noises we hear belong to the past or the future. We will see how we never, or almost never, live what we are meant to live, the here and now, because thoughts always belong to the past or the future. Memories and imagination distract us from the present moment, from the flow of life, from the manifestation of God's Today, from moment to moment.

The past and the future clog us up, paralyze us, prevent us from walking light, from soaring, from attending to the Lord who makes all things new. It's about being present to what we think, feel, or do in each moment.

A short story: *A famous guru became enlightened. His disciples asked him, "Master, what did you gain as a result of your enlightenment? What did enlightenment give you?"*

The man replied, "Well, I'll tell you what she gave me: when I eat, I eat; when I look, I look; when I listen, I listen. That's what she gave me."

The disciples replied, "But everyone does that!"

And the master laughed out loud: "Does everyone do that? Then everyone must be enlightened!"

c) Listen to and observe the noises. Inquire about the origin of thoughts, feelings, emotions, jealousy, fears, prejudices, etc. See how they are generated and how they take shape. Observe: without rejecting them, without judging them, without condemning them, without selecting them, because, if we don't do so, we are expressing our unwillingness to know what dwells within us, the wound that hurts us so much and prevents us from flowing with the freedom of the children of God.

Dare to see that the wound is there, name it with courage, and invoke the redeeming name of Jesus, imploring his mercy, so that he may come to the aid of our weakness. Trust absolutely in that beautiful passage from the Letter to the Romans: who can separate us from the love of Christ? Difficulties, anguish, persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger, sword? Scripture says: "For you we are all day long to die; we are considered sheep to *be slaughtered" (Ps. 43:23). But we more than overcome all this thanks to him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor sovereignties, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, nor heights nor depths, nor any other creature will be able to deprive us of that love of God, present in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom. 8:35-39). Jesus is the one who came to heal the sick; The Lord of glory who descended into hell: *Scripture says: "He ascended on high, leading captives, and gave gifts to men" (Ps. 67:19). What does this "ascended" mean, if not that he has also descended to that lower earth?* (Eph. 4:8-9). But the Lord can only heal that which we present to him for healing.

d) Pay attention at all times, especially in interpersonal relationships. Learn to understand ourselves in our relationships with others. Others are like mirrors in which I can see myself reflected. Learn why I react this way or that, how this problem arises, where this outburst of anger comes from, why I am sad, why I feel jealous, etc. The beginning of wisdom is knowing oneself. Knowing oneself in the presence of God's unconditional love; that is why it is so important to cry out in the name of the Lord at all times and in all circumstances.

The object of attention is oneself. We're not interested in others, their defects, or faults. The important thing is to know ourselves in relation to others. In this sense, I'm interested in knowing why I make a problem out of this or that person's reaction, attitude, or behavior. Why does so-and-so have so much power over me? Why does so-and-so allow so-and-so into my most intimate spaces?

Saint Gregory the Great, in the second book of his Dialogues, tells us that *there was a man of venerable life, blessed by grace and by the name of Benedict, endowed from his youth with the prudence of an old man, who, preferring to suffer the insults of the world rather than its praises… went to live in solitude.* In that solitude, he lived alone with the Alone for three years. The expression he uses is *habitare secum*, that is, *"to dwell with oneself."* When one learns to dwell with oneself, one also learns to dwell with others, becoming, without even intending to, an evangelizing and transforming agent of reality, a "mystic with open eyes."

A true sanctuary even before the future life: such is the thoughtless heart in which the Spirit acts, since everything that is done and said in it is the work of the Spirit, writes Gregory of Sinai.

The Unified Heart

And what is knowledge... if not enlightenment? Knowledge is not so much a new contribution as a serene experience of all that one is and has within one's reach. Ultimately, what man aspires to is not to attain what he does not have, but to discover in an orderly manner what one is and what is already given. Enlightenment is order and tranquility (Juan María de la Torre).

This is the paradox of the heart: withdrawn into the depths of itself, it encompasses and embraces all reality. To the greatest interiority corresponds the greatest exteriority. It is the same paradox we experience regarding humility: to the lowest of places corresponds the highest.

In light of dynamic psychology, it could be argued that, through listening to the heart, a model of holiness is configured through the strategy of integration, which follows paths distinct from the strategy of the perfect saint, which follows the channeling model and can become rigid, harsh, and at times heartless. The strategy of integration involves embracing the full complexity of *Eros* and *Pathos*. It consists of enucleating—from a living center, a basic intuition—all the other forces of human passion. The goal is not to repress anything, but to make all the impulses of life revolve, like

satellites around a center. This effort affects balance. Passions are not feared, but rather faced naturally; they are worked on both poles, positive and negative, without repressing anything. The assumed negative loses its virulence and behaves like a tamed beast. The released energy reinforces the positive pole, the object of the saint's intention. The result is the image of a saint who is an integrated man, master of his energies, because he holds the reins of all of them; he is capable of tenderness and deeply humanitarian gestures, because he has not allowed himself to be stiffened by rationality and control.

Being able to feel and live the capacity for tender love requires a confrontation with the demonic. The two seem opposed, but if one is denied, the other is also lost. To achieve this integration, which is not the fruit of a theoretical synthesis, it is necessary to know and experience the angels and demons that inhabit life. Integration results from multiple comings and goings, ascents and falls, renunciations and reconquests, until reaching the crystallization of a powerful center that attracts and harmonizes everything. When the saint considers himself an abject sinner and unworthy of God's salvation, he is speaking the truth, because he speaks of the dimension of shadows, of those sinister basements where our demons reign. By virtue of the project of holiness, these demons are bound, but not dead, and require constant integration so that their power does not destabilize us, but rather helps us grow and advance toward the promised land of ourselves.

Carl Gustav Jung, speaking of the process of individuation, uses as a starting point Nietzsche's image of the tree, which, 'when its branches reach to heaven, its roots sink to hell': *in order for a tree*

to grow upward, toward the spiritual, the abstract, it must be firmly rooted in the earth, in the concrete, in matter. It is, like the human being, a being that unites heaven and earth. It is the bearer of the finished fruit, and at the same time, it is in the process of development. We, as human beings, are the highest expression of creation, and at the same time, we are still in the process of growth.

From the perspective of faith, one could say that by listening to our hearts, we discover that we are invited by the Spirit to live rooted in the earth to grow upward, to flow in life. That makes everything easier. Otherwise, everything is incredibly difficult. God permeates, sustains, and upholds everything. Being the highest expression of His creation, we are still in a process of growth, which consists of putting our lives in order, putting order in love. It is about centering our hearts on God. Allowing God to become the center of gravity of our lives and remain as such. God is Love and has plans for comfort, not affliction. But we will only experience this when we step out of our own perspective and into His.

Hear, O daughter, and see: incline your ear, forget your people and your father's house; the King is smitten with your beauty; bow down to him, for he is your Lord (Psalm 45 (44): 11-12).

Everything in life is within the Creative Presence of God to exist, coexist, flow, be maintained, evolve, and perpetuate itself… in His way, not ours. When we enter His Ways and allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit of Life, we flow; if we remain on the sidelines, we live burdened and suffer. We often feel as if possessed by a

fatigue that is the product of mental and emotional states that absorb more of our energy than anything else.

What is a compassionate heart? It is a heart that burns for all creation, for all men, for birds, for beasts, for demons, for every creature. When he thinks of them and when he sees them, his eyes fill with tears. So intense and violent is his compassion, so great is his constancy, that his heart shrinks and he cannot bear to hear or witness the slightest harm or sadness in the midst of creation. This is why, with tears, he unceasingly intercedes for irrational animals, for the enemies of truth, and for all who annoy him, so that they may be preserved from evil and forgiven. In the immense compassion that rises in his heart—a boundless compassion, in the image of God—he even goes so far as to pray for serpents (Isaac the Syrian).

We cannot forget that the Risen Lord has poured out upon all creation his Energy of New Life, which fills everything. The Paschal dynamic does not eliminate darkness or destroy negativity; it embraces and unifies everything, recapitulating it in a unified vision of reality, in which the Risen Lord reigns, immortal and glorious. The Risen Lord will forever bear the signs of the Crucified One, and the Crucified One will forever be the Risen One. Understanding this vitally, through pure Grace, is Paschal wisdom. We need to savor that every moment, whatever its content, is filled with the presence of God, with communion with Him.

In the abode of the heart, man sees God, who is the One and the Only, the Origin of all. And seeing the One, he sees all. In the words of Simeon the New Theologian: *He who sees the One is able*

to contemplate all. By abstaining from contemplating all, he enters into the contemplation of all. But he is outside of what he contemplates. Thus, from the moment he is in the One, he sees all. But when he is in the all, he sees nothing. He who looks at the One sees himself and sees everything and everyone through the One. Hidden in the One, he sees nothing of what is in the world.

He sees nothing of what is in the world, because it is a vision and a knowledge different from what we are used to. Purity of heart achieves another vision and another knowledge of the things of the world, because they are obtained from total self-denial, from total detachment. The vision of the One and the All is only possible from the love of God that dwells within us.

Jesus went down with them and went to Nazareth, where he was subject to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart (Luke 2:51).

I don't want to end without mentioning Saint Mary, the Mother of God, our teacher in listening to the heart. With her, we place ourselves in an attitude of openness, with our hearts kneeling before God: *Lord, whatever You want, whenever You want, and however You want.* And God always responds.

Friar Carlos Gutiérrez Cuartango, ocso

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