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“HUMBLE AND HIGHEST CREATURE”

Walking with Mary, Mistress of Integral ecology

9. Woman of Discernment

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If Luke's infancy gospel particularly emphasises the aptitude for discernment as a typical characteristic of the young Mary's personality, John's gospel presents Mary to us as a woman of discernment in the episode of the wedding at Cana, where the first sign performed by Jesus in his public ministry is recounted. To discern, in a sense, means to recognise in the present moment the shoots of the future. Translated into Salesian language, to discern means to identify that point accessible to the good from which it becomes possible to collaborate with God so that the people entrusted to us and the reality in which we live can flourish and bear fruit.

‘Discernment’ is a key word in the magisterium of Pope Francis. First of all because the Pope is a Jesuit and it is the Jesuits' charism to practise and teach discernment. Discernment as such, however, is not something that belongs only to the Ignatian charism! Discernment, in fact, is a gift of the Spirit that every believer receives together with baptism. To be put into action, however, it requires an apprenticeship, a continuous exercise of the believer's freedom and will. Secondly because, in an age of uncertainty and great change such as ours, discernment is the safest path, even if not without risk. The opposite of discernment, in fact, is the slavish application of rules and models. It is the Church/museum where there is much order, but little life. The Church that discerns, on the other hand, is the garden, where it is not possible to avoid *a priori* some chaos, some weeds, some trunks a little crooked, yet there is life and there are the fruits of life: joy, peace, benevolence, self-control, love, magnanimity, fidelity to the action of the Spirit in hearts and in history (Gal 5:22). Finally, the Church that discerns is aware that proclaiming the Gospel in the contemporary world is not so much a matter of occupying spaces as of activating processes.

It is precisely for this reason that the capacity for discernment is fundamental in order to walk together towards the realisation of what Francis calls ‘ecological conversion’. Integral ecology, in fact, is not a magic formula, but rather a process that begins with the conversion of the gaze. What is required is first of all to learn to contemplate the beauty of Creation and the dignity of all creatures, each of which bears within itself the imprint of God's creative action. All that is created, in its beauty, comes from God, but is entrusted to our hands so that we may guard it and foster its development on behalf of the Creator. From this awareness arises the need for discernment: what is to be done to foster life, in the small and big choices of everyday life?

Contemplation of reality in its concreteness also allows us to recognise the limit of what is created. Nothing, in fact, remains forever: every form of life completes a cycle from birth to death. The human being, however extraordinarily similar to the Creator through his intelligence, his capacity for relationship, speech and creativity, can only remain on earth forever to the extent that he is able to pass on what he is and what he has to future generations. Discernment, therefore, also means learning



to move from the criterion of maximum profit to that of sustainability, in the interest not only of ourselves, but also of those who will come after us.

At the wedding feast of Cana, Mary is a woman of discernment because she is concerned about the future of the bride and groom and asks herself what can favour or hinder the full development of their life together. The sign of wine, in fact, goes far beyond the need to satiate the thirst of the moment. Wine represents passion for life, the ability to celebrate its goodness and beauty, the typically human need for joy and celebration. Mary, moreover, sees in her Son what is still hidden from everyone's eyes: the Saviour of the world, the One who can give life in abundance. Mary, finally, acts in such a way as to activate the resources of all those invited. She weaves a web, among the guests at the feast, that makes everyone participate in the prodigy: the servants; the table master; the bride and groom; the Son; the disciples.

At Cana, Mary does not occupy a space, she does not act as a protagonist on the scene, even though she is the one who sets in motion the process that will begin the disciples' adventure of faith. Mary activates the process of faith by facilitating the encounter and communication between the people present at the feast. In our daily lives, we can activate the process of ecological conversion from small possible choices, consciously implemented. They include the courage to speak up, to share with family, friends, neighbours, the concern for the Common Home. Instead of multiplying initiatives, it is also a sign of ecological conversion to be able to converge in common initiatives together with other associations and institutions in the area, even when what unites us is not faith, but care for nature and neighbour.

The care for relationships, the commitment to networking, belongs in its own right to integral ecology. Of course, it is always a matter of acting with respect for others, their positions and convictions, and in this too Mary is a teacher, in that she never imposes herself. Faced with Jesus' response, which at first seems contrary to her request to intervene, Mary does not show haste or disappointment. On the one hand, she draws the servants' attention to Jesus, disposing them to listen to her Son, on the other hand she leaves the Son the space he needs to elaborate his own response, without insisting or trying to impose herself. Jesus recognises the goodness of her intention and inspiration. Mary, at this point, steps aside and leaves the scene to Jesus, the servants, the table master and the bride and groom, offering to our eyes a model of action and service that aims at the essential without seeking recognition or applause, but is attentive to the concrete fabric of daily life with its relationships.

At Cana, there was a lack of wine and this lack threatened the failure of the feast. In the neighbourhood where I live, in the parish, in the school I attend, what is missing or is being missed, concretely, threatening the existential failure of the brothers and sisters who share this space with me? What can I do to foster a network of relationships capable of taking on this need before the competent authorities? It is important to remember that listening to the cry of the poor and the earth is being one with the proclamation of the resurrection of the Lord! In the name of his victory over death and in the power of his Spirit that we have received in baptism, we are called to do our best for the good of all, to make ourselves good Samaritans of our brothers and sisters, just as Jesus is the good Samaritan of each one of us. We ask Mary to help us, to share with us her capacity for discernment, so that through us God may renew the face of the earth.