

A God who is discreet

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As a truth of love, it is not one that can be imposed by force; it is not a truth that stifles the individual. Since it is born of love, it can penetrate to the heart, to the personal core of each man and woman. Clearly, then, faith is not intransigent, but grows in respectful coexistence with others. One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all.

Lumen Fidei, 34



PHOTO: Ordination in Indonesia (August 15, 2013)
The mothers bless those to be ordained.

The Year of Faith is coming to an end. Recent months saw the publication of the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, the first of Francis and the last of Benedict. We also witnessed the incredible event of World Youth Day in Brazil, where thousands of young people publically proclaimed their Christian faith. Now we are preparing for the upcoming beatification of the Spanish martyrs. So allow me to reflect a bit more on the idea of faith.

Faith is a response to the love of God experienced, recognized and accepted. The General Chapter encourages us “to be witnesses of the faith at a time when many people, including ourselves struggle to believe...” (Mission 20) and “to recover that essential element of our SSCC mission which is to make known the love of God manifested in Jesus...” (Mission 25). Clearly it is because of faith that we are evangelizers. The evangelizer sows but it is another that gives the growth, and this growth is inevitably mysterious. This is what I would like to speak of now.

With faith of course comes the question of God and our relationship with him, which is the most precious treasure of our life. However this faith, which for us is light for the journey, joy for our heart and a sought-after companion, is at the same time unknown, irrelevant, unaccepted and even considered harmful by great multitudes of human beings. We have to accept the stark reality: the great majority of people have no interest in Jesus and his God. Just consider the phenomenon of unbelief in western cultures, the adherents of the great religions of Asia, the practical atheists that we meet everywhere, the indifferent or the multitudes that know almost nothing of Jesus...

How is it possible that God has created us, but the majority of his sons and daughters do not recognize his revelation in Jesus, nor turn to him in faith?

I have to confess that this question disturbs me, even though it's not something very present in our reflection. The majority of us live in a context where people believe, where it would be unusual to radically question faith. For example, when I am at a celebration of profession or ordination, and I see the strength and enthusiasm with which our loved ones surround us, and the people of God appreciate us, I could think that faith is something tangible and evident, when in reality it's just the opposite. On the other hand, we have to recognize that many of the things we do (education, social service, helping the needy, leading groups, counseling, promotion of culture, solidarity projects etc.) can be done without faith or at least without ever raising the religious question of a relationship with God.

The majority of humanity does not have faith

In spite of everything, the fact that the majority of humanity does not have faith is obvious. What can we do given such a confusing situation? Some blame themselves, claiming that we Christians are ourselves the cause, with our division and inconsistency. Others feel called to double attempts to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth in season and out of season. Some see themselves privileged to have access to the "supreme truth" of which others are unaware, and they set themselves up as "saviors" in a hostile environment that does not understand them. Others just become discouraged and wallow in a sea of doubt as regards their own experience of belief.

It's true that it is impossible to believe in Jesus if one has not heard the Gospel proclaimed. However there are many other reasons for a lack of faith: scandal, not accepting what really are distortions of the Gospel, cultural conditioning that makes it impossible to accept faith honestly, the inability to delve into spiritual experience, emotional wounds, pride, conflicts with the Church, a conscious personal choice against what the Gospel entails etc. Who are we to judge what takes place in a person's heart when it involves one's relationship with the Mystery of God? We are in the world of grace, where it is God who builds the house...

I'll not go any further in this analysis of the act of faith or the lack of faith. I would just like to raise a question that may help us see things from another perspective. What if this massive absence of explicit faith were really "normal", and not something sinful or negative? What if this is something that would allow us to go deeper into the mystery of God? And what if in his acting in the world, God's "tactic" was to include both forms of belief and unbelief?

You are a
God
who hides
himself

"Truly you are a God who hides himself ..." says Isaiah (45,15). God, the Father of Jesus, is a God who is discreet, shy, who lets himself be seen only with difficulty. In Jesus God has passed among us practically incognito. A poor Galilean in first century Palestine does not really stand out. No one is more discreet than the Risen One, who shows himself to a very restricted group, and even then does it in disguise or at least in a way that makes him difficult to be recognized. Images of the Kingdom speak of seeds, the smallest of seeds, a bit of salt, some yeast, a lost coin, a narrow door that is hardly visible...when it all comes down to it, small daily kinds of things.

Could it be that God is doing this on purpose, that his intention all along is to be discreet, to be recognized and believed in by just a handful of people?

I believe two aspects of our SSCC charism can help us enter into this discretion of God.

One is the **consecration to the Sacred Hearts**. The heart is something hidden. Love is discreet by nature; *it does not impose itself with violence, it does not crush the other*. Love coming from the heart is vulnerable; it can be wounded and ignored; and it always loves more than it is loved in return. If God is love, it's only natural that the response of faith is not a massive phenomenon.

To enter into
the discretion
of God

The other SSCC element is **Eucharistic Adoration**. The exercise of adoration is an expression of the discretion recommended by Jesus, "when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret..." (Mt. 6:6) The Congregation's tradition sees adoration as simple, unspectacular, with the tabernacle closed and at the beginning concealed in the wall, adoration that is silent and hidden. Adoration involves the mystery of intercession and reparation and a loving gaze toward all of humanity, without taking into account the division of beliefs or borders.

To enter into the discretion of God is to reverence his mystery and venerate his truth. This is a truth that we do not possess, but *rather one that embraces and possesses us*.

Double
invitation

I see a double invitation here:

1. Let us care for our **life in community** and enjoy it. We are together because we believe that God calls us. In community we can speak openly of our faith, we can share about it, pray and celebrate it. Let us encourage one another in the Lord who brings us together. Let us encourage one another in the confession of faith and in witnessing by works of faith. Who, otherwise, would support us in this Way of the Martyrs?
2. Let us have great **respect for every human being**. God is working in every person. His action goes far beyond the explicit confession of faith. The salvation of God affects and reaches all men and women, even though many are unaware of it. We are witnesses of faith; not its master.

Walking humbly with our God (Mic. 6:8) means accepting his discretion and sharing in it like Mary whose littleness was the very thing that attracted the gaze of the Lord. (Lk. 1:48)

