Salvation

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"Lord, save us, we perish!"

Mt 8, 25

"Lord, save me!"

Mt 14, 30

Painting of Françoise Emmanuel
Nun of the Monastery in Venière (France)

Only the drowning man wants someone to save him. Only the one who can't take it anymore realizes he needs help. However, if we are calm and satisfied, if we feel strong and secure, why would we want salvation?

Christianity is a religion of salvation. Faith tells us that we are limited, that we are damaged, that we sin again and again, that we are stuck in a hole from which we are unable to get out. Only God's love redeems us, forgives us, repairs us, saves us.

The most devastating criticisms of the faith are directed precisely at this view that some may consider anthropologically pessimistic. As Nietzsche accused, Christianity needs human beings to feel weak, miserable and guilty, in order to implore the salvation that God brings them. It is a religion of slaves, unable to emancipate themselves. A religion that does not accept that a human being can be strong and fight effectively for freedom, dignity and development. A religion that encloses the human being in a shameful dependence. Why would anyone come to save us? Save us from what?

Save me!

Nietzsche's right. If I feel strong, satisfied with myself, and convinced that I have the capacity to achieve the goals I set myself in life, the proclamation of a "salvation" will be

superfluous or ridiculous. If I do not recognize myself as a sinner, in need of forgiveness, God will go missing from the practical horizon of my existence. In short, if I do not realize that I am sinking, I will never cry out to Jesus who is the one who can save me.

In Matthew's Gospel, we find twice a cry of this kind. First there is a collective cry from the disciples in the boat, frightened in the face of the storm: "Lord, save us, we perish! (Mt 8:25). Jesus is with them, but he sleeps. The boat is headed for the land of the Gerasenes, the land of the heathen, outside the confines of Israel.

Later, on a new crossing of the lake, the cry becomes individual. This time the boat is going to Gennesaret, a land familiar to the disciples. In the midst of the storm, Jesus approaches the disciples, who take him for a ghost. Peter tests Jesus by asking him to make him walk on water. But as he sinks, he cries out, "Lord, save me!" (Mt 14:39). And then, in Jesus, the beautiful image with which Psalm 18 (v. 17) describes God's saving action is fulfilled: "He reached down from on high and seized me; drew me out of the deep waters."

Do you not feel such cries in our community, or in the hearts of each of us?

"Happy guilt, who merited us such a Redeemer!" exclaims the Easter night song. Blessed is the weakness of the disciples, which makes them turn to their sleeping Lord. Blessed is Peter's sinking, who, drowning, raises his hands toward the one Savior.

Blessed are we, when true humility makes us recognize that we are small, that we cannot overcome our limits, that we are not as good as we thought, that the weight of life is greater than our strength, that we are clumsy, incoherent, petty and always sinful... Blessed are we, because only then can we begin to understand the love that flows from the Heart of Christ, which covers all our sins and redeems us from all our miseries.

If we do not recognize that we are drowning, we will not know Jesus. Pride kills us. Vanity blinds us. Confession of our sin, however, opens us to salvation. Even if Nietzsche gets annoyed!

Save them!

There is another cry for salvation, but not for me or my community. It is the cry of intercessory prayer for those who suffer and are lost.

We can feel that cry in the uncluttered supplication that the royal official addresses to Jesus: "Lord, come down before my son dies" (Jn 4:49). He who cries out here for salvation is not one who sinks, but one who feels the sinking of another as a pain in his own flesh.

For us religious, it can be difficult to understand this second type of cry. We don't have any children who die on us. But we can come to love in such a way that the suffering of others

becomes our suffering. That is the way of true love. When what hurts others hurts us, then we begin to understand that Jesus saves.

The prophet Isaiah (chapter 65) describes salvation as a new land in which children will not die, and in which the fruit of their labour can be enjoyed in peace (they will live in the houses they build, they will harvest the fields they plant)... "They will not labor in vain, nor have children for a catastrophe" (Is 65:23). How different from what most of humanity lives, especially in situations of war, misery and persecution!

In our ministry of intercession (cf. Const 5), we see the catastrophe in which so many of our brothers and sisters sink, and we ask for their salvation. Our cry is no longer just "save me!" or "save us!" but, forgetting our concern for ourselves, we implore the Lord, "Save them!"

If in our prayer we only ask for our troubles, or take excessive pity on our (often trivial) problems, we will hardly understand how God desires to save us. If, on the contrary, our prayer and our action are centered on the pain of others, our heart will be getting a little closer to that of the Master.

The work of Salvation

Our consecration calls us to live the dynamism of saving love" (Const 2). And reparation "sends us to proclaim the Good News of salvation" (Const 4).

Jesus is the one who saves. His name is Jesus, "for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). His name is also "Emmanuel, which means God-with-us" (Mt 1:13), because he does his saving work by making God himself our companion on the journey.

The work of Jesus is accomplished "for us", for our salvation. The New Testament never tires of repeating that "Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8), just as his body is given up "for us" (cf. Lk 22:19) and his blood is shed "for us" (cf. Lk 22:20).

The Congregation exists because of that saving love. And it exists so that we may know, savor and announce that, it is true, we are sinners, but that we should not despair of this, because Jesus always draws us out of the waters in which we -and all- sink.