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VATICAN - AVE MARIA by Mgr Luciano Alimandi - Life is expectation

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - " I am the voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord." (Jn 1, 23). During Advent we hear once again the 'voice' of the Lord's precursor provoking and prodding us, in order to rekindle our longing, which may have subsided, for closeness with God. This "voice" reminds us, first of all, that nothing can be purified or 'straightened' without humility.
Haughtiness and pride, render the way to the Lord impossible. We know that haughtiness is like a " super I syndrome ", driving us to think we are better and more important than others. This "syndrome" can only be cured if, like children, we throw ourselves with all our might into the arms of God, humbly acknowledging that without Him man has no consistency. Pride is a leprosy of the soul, which must be cured in haste or it will spread and contaminate even the most pious and generous of deeds.
John the Baptist was well aware of this and in the desert he practised the best way of preparing a way for the Lord who comes: intense and continual exercise of humility, the virtue of virtues! He learned "to take a step backwards", he chose to be with the least of men, he learned not to exalt himself, but rather to humiliate himself, he learned not to appear but to hide himself, not to be one who "counts" but to be simply a "voice".
When the priests and Levites came from Jerusalem to ask who he was, "he declared, he did not deny but declared, 'I am not the Christ.' So they asked, 'Then are you Elijah?' He replied, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So he said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied: A voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord. Make his paths straight!' " (Jn 1, 20-23). Jesus loved him deeply, seeing in him God's true servant who sought nothing for himself, but only the glory of his Lord. John the Baptist lived in that state of beatitude of which the Lord was one day to preach: "blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of heaven is theirs … blessed are the pure in heart: they will see God…" (Mt 5, 3).
Happy are you John, because you did not sit at table to be served, you served always and then in the end, you disappeared. You wore a garment of camel-hair, but although you did not know it, you progressively put on Christ, taking off the old "I". This was your programme: "He must grow greater, I must grow less" (Jn 3, 30).
It was not difficult for the disciples of John the Baptist, like Andrew and John to follow Jesus, to be drawn by his "voice", because they had learned from another "voice", to recognise the Truth. John did not overshadow Jesus, he did not stand in front of him or at his side to be "seen" and "considered" with Him. He was always behind Jesus!
John gave everything to the Lord: himself, his disciples and followers, his mission… his very life, dying for the sake of Truth! He achieved to the full the words Jesus would say one day: "Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mk 8, 35).
Our "I", the eternal prisoner of our heart, can only be defeated with humility which brings us to lose ourselves. To decide to follow Jesus is not enough; if we want to be like Him, to be his true friends, we must "learn to lose ". Day after day we must practice the difficult 'art' of forgetting self, in order to contemplate Him, to look where He looks.
If we learn this art we will stop judging others, we will stop thinking we are better, we are right, we matter, we are seen, we will stop being envious, complaining …
The way of humility involves taking off the old person and becoming like a child, the child we once were. That "once" is not so far away, yet it takes much time and effort to return to it because a proud heart and mind, make the "I" swell and become heavy and cumbersome like a stone which refuses to move.
Only countless acts of humility, made from the depth of the heart, can move the heavy stone, and "loosen" the strings of pride which bind our will. Only humility of heart chases away the spirit of evil and shows us the joy of possessing nothing, of being truly free, as when we were children, when we knew nothing of the malice of the

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proud, that “intelligence” at the service of self-interest, which prevents us from entrusting ourselves to God. That “voice” continues to cry out: prepare the way for the Lord, become once again like children, or you will fall instead of running to meet the Lord who comes, he too as a Child, to visit the "little ones" of the earth! (Agenzia Fides 10/12/2008)

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