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Fondata nel 1927
Organo di informazione delle Pontificie Opere Missionarie
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VATICAN - AVE MARIA "Mary, the force of witness"
Rev Luciano Alimandi

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "The next day as John stood there again with two of his disciples, Jesus went past, and John looked towards him and said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God!'. And the two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus." (Jn 1, 35-37). In this Gospel passage contains the secret of the priestly vocation of Andrew and John, until that day disciples of John the Baptist; then, from the moment they start to follow the Lord, nothing will ever be the same.

The reason for the first decisive movement of the soul towards Jesus is hidden in the words they "heard what he said"! Where had the Precursor learned to speak in this manner? Certainly from the Love present in him since the handmaid of the Lord, having become the Mother of God, entered his life when she made her visit to his mother Elizabeth. "Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy" Elizabeth said to Mary. (Lk 1, 44)

It was at this moment that John was filled with love for Jesus as St Ambrose writes in his splendid comment on Luke: "Elisabeth was the first to hear the voice, but John was the first to perceive the grace; she heard in keeping with the order of nature, he exulted by virtue of the mystery; she heard the arrival of Mary, he heard the arrival of the Lord; the woman the arrival of the woman, the child the arrival of the child."

The way we speak about a person depends on how much we love them, and same is true for the Lord: the more we love Him, the more our words are attractive and draw others to Him.

The son of Elizabeth experienced this attraction from the day of the Visitation together with his mother. With Mary's visit the soul of John the Baptist began to know the Lord more and more so that he was able to point Him out to others. If they had not 'heard' what John the Baptist said, if his love had not been "a lamp lit and shining" (Jn 5, 35), probably Andrew and John, and the other disciples of the Precursor, would not have followed the Lord.

In the light of this mystery it is clear that Christians are responsible for evangelisation. A flame of love and gratitude for God can be easily lit in our neighbour but it can also easily extinguished. Without witness Christianity is destined to disappear even where in the past it flourished. Without witness Christians only in name are destined to garbage as Jesus warns: "'You are salt for the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled under people's feet." (Mt 5, 13).

This is why the Mother of God continues to visit us many times and in many ways in our life: perhaps through a holy picture we have had on our night table for years and seeing it we are inspired to think thoughts which become prayers and seeds of hope; or perhaps through the person who taught us to pray the rosary and gave us our first rosary beads, now so precious, which gives strength in times of need; or, during a pilgrimage to a Marian Shrine when we decide at last to let God take over our lives …

Blessed Virgin of the Visitation, how the many paths you walk are interwoven with our existence and wherever you are welcomed you rekindle the fire of witness which warms hearts and illuminates minds, giving rise to love for Christ your Son! With the whole Church, guided by the Supreme Pontiff, we ask you to continue to visit us, to awaken us to the incomparable attraction of becoming a follower of your Son! Help us to recognise you always, and to rejoice in your presence. (Agenzia Fides 10/1/2007; righe 43, parole 658)

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