

2. “Simon, do you love me?”. An overwhelming sympathy

by Julián Carrón*

“The disciples were on their way back, at dawn, after a terrible night’s fishing on the lake, in which they had caught nothing. As they approach the shore, they see a figure on the beach preparing a fire. Later they would notice that there were some fish on the fire collected for them, for their early morning hunger. All of a sudden, John says to Peter, ‘That’s the Lord!’ They all open their eyes and Peter throws himself into the water, just as he is, and reaches the shore first. The others follow suit. They sit down in a circle in silence; no one speaks, because they all know it is the Lord. Sitting down to eat, they exchange a few words, but they are all fearful at the exceptional presence of Jesus, the Risen Jesus, who had already appeared to them at other times. Simon, whose many errors had made him humbler than all the others, sat down, too, before the food prepared by the Master. He looks to see who is next to him and is terrified to see that it is Jesus Himself. He turns his gaze away from Him and sits there, all embarrassed. But Jesus speaks to him. Peter thinks in his heart, ‘My God, My God, what a dressing-down I deserve! Now He is going to ask me, ‘Why did you betray Me?’ The betrayal had been the last great error he had made.” But, as each of us knows, when we commit a big mistake, all our mistakes from the past appear before our eyes. It was the same for Peter, because all his life “had been a stormy one, because of his impetuous character, his instinctive stubbornness, his tendency to act on impulse. He now saw himself in the light of all his defects. That betrayal had made him more aware of all his other errors, of the fact that he was worthless, weak, miserably weak. ‘Simon.’—who knows how he must have trembled as that word sounded in his ears and touched his heart?—‘Simon’—here he would have begun to turn his face towards Jesus—‘do you love Me?’ Who on earth would have expected that question? Who would have expected those words? Peter was a forty- or fifty-year-old man, with a wife and children, and yet he was such a child before the mystery of that companion he had met by chance! Imagine how he felt transfixed by that look that knew him through and through. ‘You will be called *Kefas*.’ His tough character was described by that word ‘rock,’ and the last thing he had in mind was to imagine what the mystery of God and the mystery of that Man—the Son of God—had to do with that rock, to that rock. From the first encounter, He filled his whole mind, his whole heart.” How powerful was Peter’s first encounter with Jesus! It decided his whole life. “With that presence in his heart, with the continuous memory of Him, he [Peter] looked at his wife and children, his work-mates, friends and strangers, individuals and crowds, he thought, and he fell asleep. That Man had become for him like an immense revelation, still to be clarified.”¹ »

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© 2016 Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione for the texts by J. Carrón “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have had pity on your nothingness”.

» Fr. Giussani continues to relive the scene. "“Simon, do you love Me?” ‘Yes, Lord, I love You.’” How is it possible? “How could he say such a thing after all he had done,” with all the mistakes that came to mind? “That *yes* was an affirmation acknowledging a supreme excellence, an undeniable excellence, a sympathy that overwhelmed all others. Everything remained inscribed in that look. Coherence or incoherence seemed to fall into second place behind the faithfulness that felt like flesh of his flesh, behind the form of life which that encounter had moulded.”² This “sympathy” is not a word we would expect to find in discussions of morality, especially if this word puts the problem that so afflicts us, that of coherence or incoherence, in second place. But those who have experienced it can understand: a presence like that of Jesus, an instinctive attraction like that evoked by Jesus prevails over all the misdeeds we may have committed.

¹ Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2010, p. 60.

² *Ibid.*