

But the choice of God's freedom, which chooses One, hidden like a tiny flower in Our Lady's womb, is for the whole world. So the humble echo of preference, full of fear and trembling, does not exist unless out of love for the world, for the benefit to be brought to the world, out of passion for the world. And how wonderful is this supreme paradox of a preference that chooses and elects so as to embrace the world, so as to draw the world along with itself. In making this preference, choice and election coincide with a love that fixes itself on every living person, on all flesh. "He has given him power over all flesh."⁶⁴ With the man He chooses and elects, Christ shares His power over all flesh.

3 BAPTISM: CONCEPTION AND BIRTH OF A NEW CREATURE

An objective fact

"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, because all of you who have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ."⁶⁵ Christ's encounter with our life, in which He began to be a real event for us, His impact with our life, in which He moved towards us and, like a *vir pugnator*,⁶⁶ set off an "invasion" of our existence, is called Baptism. It is an objective fact: a man who is taken and passes through the water of a well, or of a fountain, as if he were passing through a sea, the sea of life. With this objective fact – that calls man to understand and accept to be part of the Event of Christ, for faith is part of the Event – a new man is born, a new people. Paul VI spoke of an ethnic entity *sui generis*:⁶⁷ this is the People that make history. The promise of which the Hebrew people, in their prophetic intuition, felt themselves to be the custodians, comes true here. With Baptism new people who make history are born.

In the hierarchy of values and interests that governs our life, there is normally nothing stranger than Baptism; yet nothing is more radically decisive for human existence than this fact called Baptism – a fact so real that its external effect can be wholly described: it has a precise date; it physically took hold of us in a given

moment. Like any fact, it may appear to be something very fragile. Even Jesus walking through the fields or speaking in a town square could have seemed to be something very commonplace. But with that Event called Baptism, something irreducibly new began in us. It is a real Event that enters a situation and changes it, that determines it in a new way. This beginning, set in time, could eventually be buried under a thick blanket of earth or in a tomb of forgetfulness and ignorance. But every step of our journey to Destiny is anchored to that fact and must necessarily come back to it.

One with Christ

What does Baptism imply? You begin to understand it in a living Christian companionship, since in this companionship a memory is aroused that gives peace to the heart, satisfaction to the soul, and, at the same time, makes life combative, makes you realize that life is a battle for affirming Christ. So what does Baptism imply for me, what does it bring about? Baptism implies the participation of my person in the Mystery of Christ's person – my person is incorporated into the Mystery of Christ's person. The most relevant passage in this regard is from the *Letter to the Galatians*, "You who are baptized have become one with Christ."⁶⁸ Let's think about the meaning of the term "to become one with" when it is the case of one person who loves another person. A person who loves another and seeks to identify with that other has a terrible experience of being unable to penetrate into the other, of being ultimately a stranger. Not in the case of Christ! "Whoever is baptized has put on Christ, so there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave or freeman, no male nor female, but you are all one, *eis*, one single person in Christ Jesus,"⁶⁹ the person of Christ Jesus. In the *Letter to the Romans* and in the letter to the Ephesians, St Paul goes as far as to say, "Don't you know that you are members one of another?"⁷⁰ This is the height which Christ has reached as Lord of history. In His Resurrection, He has set the terms of this assimilation to Himself, of this glory, of this making explicit that in Him all things consist, everything belongs to Him.⁷¹ The assimilation to Christ brought about by Baptism is

the Resurrection of Christ that penetrates history; it is the Body of the risen Christ that grows ever more according to the times of the Mystery of the Father. And the gesture that makes the journey of the new creature possible, the one re-made by the power of God and therefore capable of new things, is the Eucharist, *viaticum*, food for the journey, true nourishment for the person and for his hope. In this gesture, in giving Himself, Christ continues to bring man to perfection in Himself. Under the sign of matter, what the sign indicates really happens – Christ becomes one with me. An unimaginably profound ontological relationship is truly communicated to our life in a sign.⁷²

The birth of a new creature

Baptism is the beginning of a new personality, of a “new creature”⁷³ in the world. If we think of the evident natural hierarchy of beings, in which a plant is more than a stone, an animal is more than a plant, and man is the summit of the hierarchy (as awareness of the need for happiness of which he, along with the whole world, is constituted), then Baptism creates a being that is greater, more human. It gives rise to a new creature.

The expression “new creature” is like a continuous refrain in the New Testament. For example in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, “So if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things have passed away, and new things are here”;⁷⁴ in the *Letter to the Galatians*, “What counts is not being circumcised or not being circumcised, but being a new creature”;⁷⁵ in the *Letter to the Colossians*, “You have been stripped of the old man with his actions and have put on the new”;⁷⁶ in the moving fourth chapter of the *Letter to the Ephesians*, “You must be renewed in the spirit of your minds and put on the new man.”⁷⁷ St James speaks of Baptism as the beginning of a “new creation,”⁷⁸ and St Peter of a new generation, “not from a corruptible, but from an immortal seed.”⁷⁹

A novelty that contradicts the world

The new creature that is born with Baptism is contrary to what Christ defined as “the world.” Of this He said, “Father, I pray

You for them, I do not pray for the world.”⁸⁰ We are immersed in a “worldly” reality opposed to what has happened to us. This worldly reality needs the event of Christ, it needs it to be witnessed and lived, but as awareness and affection; it is radically foreign and opposed to the new personality, to the “new creature” to which Christ gives origin. “The time will come,” says St Anthony of the desert, “in which men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will turn against him and say, ‘you are mad,’ because he is not like them.”⁸¹

Even those who are chosen can drown in the muddy ocean of the world, yielding to forgetfulness, not living the memory that is the awareness of Christ’s presence, a real Event in the life of man. “This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith,”⁸² and our faith is the acknowledgment and the memory of that real Event that determines our life.

Now, the difference between being called in the objective gesture of Baptism and realizing what has happened (not in the sense of understanding but of perceiving the Mystery that reverberates in that moment and in that gesture), is marked by an “encounter.” It is through an encounter that what we have been called to, what we have looked at respectfully, rather afraid and confused, begins to become clear, like the dawn that tinges the horizon with light. The encounter begins to shed a halo of light, a ray of light on something that has happened before. In this sense, the encounter is a source of memory, it awakens a memory that gives peace to your soul, like a hunger satisfied by food and a thirst quenched by a drink, and makes the whole body and the whole personality combative, in a present that changes.

4 THE COMPANIONSHIP GUIDED TOWARDS DESTINY IS A DIMENSION OF THE “I.” – BELONGING

Recognizing being joined together in a companionship because Christ is there develops the sense of a belonging that constitutes the person himself. This kind of companionship is something substantial for the definition of our self. A person is not complete if not in companionship: a person generates companionship and