

Evangelized to Evangelize

Fr. Fernando Ventura, OFM Cap

Prologue

To be today the light at a time of shadows seems to be the 'destiny' for each of us -- at a time that is passing, a time that passes and hurts, and it is a pain that is based on impotence, impotence in the face of giant shadows that get bigger and that seem to want to assault everything that moves, everything that breathes, and everything that dreams.

The world, our countries and each one of us, lives times of hope and change, in which the new , emerges like a new frontier to conquer, but where fear or fears insist on forming a barrier before our eyes, (before) these eyes made for the light, made to confront the fear, made so that one does not have to see the sun reflected only in the puddles.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the fear of passing time , is precisely this, that we have been able to dare to lift our heads, dare to look beyond the immediacy of the now, at least toward the "immediate" not yet, but which is and lives in the tension of becoming, of the future, of projecting forward, a forward that finds utopia and makes it a dream, a dream that overcomes fear, a dream that opens to the light.

It's through here that the secret passes, this secret that we carry jealously within, without activating it; that we hide embarrassed and modestly and that we are not able to give birth to (bring to light) and that makes us groan, the groaning of labor pains when the birth is delayed, it shouts the cry of voices that are silenced.

Meanwhile, the pregnancy of time exists, labor pains afflict us, the birth is delayed, and my people are suffering, and my people shout, the hollow (muffled) cry that the hoarse voice is unable to silence, but that fear blunts and that despair does not allow one to find peace.

At this time when voices are shouting, shouting that there is no hope, shouting promises that are not (true), that outlines smiles that are only mocking, I stop and wonder, what a brutalized fool in front of the palace of shame, perched on a fairy tale of a thousand and one nights, of an aurora borealis which is just an illusion and nothing, a nothing that insists on being and of a being (an existence) that is no longer.

And I walk, oh yes! I walk at the same time toward the nothingness and toward the being, towards the other and myself, in the direction of the nothing and the everything, leaving behind or passing what was already happening, I walk to the encounter with the future that seems long in coming, in the present that whenever you stop it touches the future that becomes the past, but in the end, it doesn't exist.

And here begins my "crisis", the crisis of knowing who I am, where I am, how I am (what kind of person I am), who will I be, how will I be (what kind of person will I be), where will I be, how will I be! And here I find myself, of my littleness, but of a being that is, a being called into existence in this virtual space between the already and the not yet, from the abyss of all, and the depth of all (nothing), in a silence sometimes inhabited only by ghosts and voices, where I get confused, but that does not stop existing and doing. And to say CHRISTMAS!

Ghosts and voices of myself, of this being that inhabits me and that I'm looking for, of this being that is and that is eternity, an eternity that already is, which is this day of my being, that is both nothing and everything at the same time, because I am in a relationship with myself, in smiles and tears, in joys and despair, in dreams and fantasies, in "nothings" and in "everything" that lives in me, that "dwell" where I dwell, wherever it may be, because my "I" has no "place", it is simply, ready, with me, in me and beyond me myself, because it is infinite, because it is eternal, because that's all and it is nothing, because it is at the same time, simultaneously, eternity and time, immanence and transcendence, limits and infinite, *kairós* (the supreme moment) and *eskaton* (the end times), now and not yet.

-.-.-.-.-

Will we have the courage to tell our neighbor, "I love you"? Without joking and looking straight into his eyes ... could we tell the person next to us right now? It's not that easy, is it? Isn't it true that we're afraid of the words? Isn't it true that the words are dead? Isn't it true that we have killed the feelings? Words of this type frighten us! Because telling someone 'I love you', means that you're telling him 'I need from you in order to be happy.' We can go that far. But when it comes to telling someone '**I love you**', this is something else. We are saying to the other "**I cannot** be happy without you." Do you see where we are going? "I need you to be happy," is one thing. But tell someone "I cannot be happy without you", is another thing. This destroys us. This forces us out of our personal vanity; out of this mania that we carry inside, that **we are the center of the world**.

Evangelizing is this, brothers and sisters. If we can understand it, we will be able to understand everything we are doing here. If we fail to understand it, we'll continue being the most wretched sons of men. People living a matrimonial relationship with God, divorced from life. People that live married to God because there is no devil that will marry them. The bachelors and spinsters of history. Bitter people. People who live a power relationship with life. And here we have ruined everything. And we live in our fraternities ... and we live in our convents and live in our monasteries and live at all levels, under the oppression of people who only understand service as power. That about being (with) the other, they only understand vanity. People who have no one to support them. We are tired of bachelors and spinsters in history. We're tired of nice people. This is not the time for sympathy. This is the time of empathy. The nice person at best will smile at you. (And here I always remember Confucius, saying, "watch out, because behind the smile there are teeth.")

This is the time to go further. It is time to turn the tables (the omelet). It's time to feel that we don't have the right to say we have a religion, because this is the time to understand that we have a religion that possesses us. People of religion are unbearable. People living with a belly full of God and what comes from within, are nothing more than mystical breezes, which do not touch anyone's life. And we continue to follow the wrong signals. And we continue to bullshit one after another. I ask you, Secular Franciscans of the first, second, third and fourth world to explain to the bishops of your country, the priests of your countries, the friars of your countries, the nuns of your countries, that the habit cannot be a badge of power. That this thing about being community is more than anything and in the first place, a way of life. And in many places around the world we are assisting a church mounted with power from the top. A church that is losing its footing because it stopped being of service. Because it stopped being a sign. It was

sold to political power In many countries and in many places, sold to the power that distributes money. And I have seen this on every continent.

It's up to you to be a sign of contradiction. It is up to you to bring back to the world the Franciscan revolution. Francis goes back to look for it (his Church) on the outskirts of Assisi with the lepers (when) his Church is steeped in power, his Church is in the midst of power. And in many places, men and women of religion love going to bed with the lords of power. And the poor and the lepers are as alone as ever.

And so the adventure began, of this God who on one day decided to create the world. The Bible was born from the village that tried to respond to this Godly initiative. More than a book, the Bible is a library. More than a library, the Bible is a life made up of all with which life is made -- dreams, pain, hope, joy -- all that is our life experience. Everything with which we are intended to fill our existential gaps. And so it goes from Genesis to Revelation. But what could be the driving thread? What gives meaning to the work of the Scriptures? What is it that gives meaning to all this adventure of God's communication and God's intimacy with the people and the people with God? According to you, what is the key word of the Bible? It is **alliance (marriage/bond)**. This is what Francis -- the only one, up to now, was able to understand.

And we continue insisting on an error. We continue to insist in that which is our *Originating* sin. I'm not speaking of *original* sin, because with so many people who have sinned for so many years, it is very difficult to be original. I am speaking of the *Originating* sin, which is at the origin. It is in this desire to reach God. This desire to be God. This desire to control the knowledge of good and evil. This desire that we all have to be masters of life and death. These desires that we have, to come into God's world, to touch God's world. And we don't realize that there can only be one GENESIS, there can only be one dream of Genesis, because there was one Apocalypse, because there was a chapter 21 of Revelation: God's world that descends, the new Jerusalem coming down to take human space. Because in this discussion, in this topic of conversion, where we are all fighting and hitting our heads against the wall to see if we can achieve our conversion. We do not realize that what Francis brings is new. He has been the only one who has understood, first, that if someone becomes someone else, it is God who becomes us. This is the time to turn things around (turn this omelet which is burned on the other side.)

Francis was the only one who saw God in history. For this reason, he came to realize (the importance of) Christmas, and because of this, Christmas becomes for Francis the greatest moment. There God touches history. There God becomes one of us. There God becomes us. There we celebrate definitively the **alliance (marriage/bond)**. And here we must return to Emanuel, because this, besides being a time of dead words, this is a time of people widowed of their affections, made single by their emotions (empty of their emotions).

It is time for Emmaus. It is time that cries out for answers. It is time that shouts to be heard, but we, rather than hearing, we keep talking. Rather than hearing the people's pain, we continue imposing our theologies, our philosophies, our theological rubbish, which we load on the shoulders of others, when we are not even capable of lifting a finger. This is the time to go back to Emmaus. This is the time to rediscover those two disciples: They were leaving behind the centrality of faith and hope, and were walking towards the

periphery, towards the despair. *Their hope had been left hanging on a cross.* Nothing else makes sense. "And we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free! Besides all that, this is now the third day since it happened" (Lk 24, 21) And we're going toward Emmaus, we are going to the periphery.

Perhaps in this Latin American reality it may not be as visible as it is in other parts of the globe. But this is the time to hear thousands and thousands, millions of our brothers and sisters, walking toward Emmaus. Who in one way or another have left their hopes, their joy of life, and they are walking towards the periphery of Emmaus. This is the time that is up to us to live, that it is up to us to transform and to serve. Not to be gentlemen. To serve and not be served. This is very difficult. This is the time to return to the teaching of God HERE.

Who are the characters in the text of the passage of Emmaus?. How many are there? Three: the two disciples and Jesus. What does Jesus do here? This is the teaching of the Church and we are so far. We continue seeing in the midst of our group, the most savvy trying to make their contacts, to do their things, to get money, to influence here and there... By God what shame. It exists. This occurs.

What does Jesus do here with these two? First, He **sees** and what does He see? He sees these two that pass in front of him who are going from the centrality of hope to the periphery of despair. His first act is to find out what is happening. First, we must live the mission of the prophet. The prophet lives, he does not invent, he does not believe, he does not guess anything about the future. The prophet is the man or the woman who lives with his feet bolted to the present. And every day is a reminder of the faithfulness of God yesterday, he must be able to launch the sources of hope for the future. This is the prophet. To celebrate each day God's faithfulness from yesterday, to be able to shout the same continuity of God's faithfulness into the future. This is the prophet. The others are agitators.

First **he sees**, then, **he approaches**. (The second step ... and He has still not said a word). And then **he walks**. He has already done three things, and He still has not said a word. He looks, approaches and walks. And then what does He do? Here's the key. He asks a question: What is the matter with you? Notice that (he starts with) the experience of the other. He doesn't come and start with any discussion. He wants to know 'where does it hurt you?', 'what is the reason for your sadness?', 'what is the reason that you left your hope hanging', and you are going to the periphery of despair? And there you hear the answer...Could you possibly be stupid? Are you the only one who does not know what happened in Jerusalem? What is the reason for Jesus?. And, what does he say to them? What was it? A new question, a new attempt, to try to start from the other's experience.

And it is only at that point, after doing these five things, that you can start talking, you can begin to rebuild hope, in order to build this bridge between hope, anchored in the heart of Israel, to the very presence of God in history made flesh. God made man in Jesus Christ. **This is Emmaus!** It's time today, this is the teaching of today. This is the **ministry** today: to be underneath. Though, we don't love ministry, instead we love the magisterium.

This is Emmaus! This is the challenge of building this *OIKOS*. This is the time for *OIKONOMY* because the economy seems to be on the floor. Among other reasons, because we continue to believe that economics and finances are the same thing, and they are not But that's another speech.

The challenge of building this common house, with room for everyone without exception, without anyone having to carry a mark on his forehead, because he/she is different. This God in the world, is a God who is able to accommodate everyone. **It is this God who sees, who approaches, who is walking (with), and who is listening.** Beyond the policy options, beyond the religious choices, beyond sexual or gastronomic options.

....

What is God's religion? In whom does God believe? Do we have a God who is an atheist? We have a God made like us. I am God's religion. We are God's religion. This is a punch in the stomach, but we still don't have it clear. Catholics have the crazy idea that God is Catholic, Protestants believe that God is protestant. Muslims, that God is Muslim. Jews that God is Jewish. It is for this reason that we have been killing each other for centuries. That is why all religions have their hands stained with blood! Without exception.

The challenge of the Gospel is this. Francis' challenge is this. This common house. This place where finally "*Love can be loved.*" Without fear of words, without fear of emotions. Because sometimes this becomes the mother-in-law's house. A "sick" home because we are all "fed up" with each other. And there is no one who will put up with us!

Being aware that we are there: The third rock from the sun. Mercury, Venus, Earth, a small dot in the universe. A grain of sand. But we are and we have our place and we need to change this piece of land where we live and it is up to us to touch, and it is up to us to discover that the new name for ecology might be solidarity, and the new name for ethics, could be fraternity. Because a phrase can change many lives. What is the phrase that can change many lives? **I love you!** It sounds easy and it's not at all. Because a little sugar can change everything. Because we live many times as Narcissus who lives in love with his own self alone. So many people in the world ... in love with ourselves: with our religions, our philosophies, our neuroses.

We return to paradise, but (we are) hidden. And this exists, and we continue making "trouble" in our fraternities, eating each other up. And in our communities we do the same thing, and we call it fraternity. In love with ourselves, bachelors and spinsters in history. And we do not realize something so simple: this God at Horeb who before Moses, presents Himself as YAHWEH, I AM. (Allow me to almost reach the point of heresy). What God says to Moses: "*I am the one who is being*". Here it's about grammar, but above all we must touch life, the life of relationship to its limit. God says to you, I need you in order to be For here the verb "to be" is transitive. Here is the conversion of God towards us. Here is the depth of discovering **that I AM**. Of discovering where our sin is, that is so original that it is not original at all. Because I am the one who says in front of his brother, I AM, and you go to hell! The fact is we have an unfortunate habit, that we can sin against God. How vane!! You sin against your brother. And if you don't understand this, you don't understand that you can only have a relationship with God when you have a relationship with others. Everything else is empty religion. It's the hysterical foolishness of hysterical people, who live

crouching in fear before God, and live like chickens in a poultry house, in front of others. (We have many people like this in our communities.)

"The first words of the Bible" In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was empty, darkness covered the abyss, and the Spirit of God "hovered" over the surface of the water. This is the beginning. So begins the adventure.

God's marital status What is the status of the Spirit in Genesis? He is alone. He is unmarried. This is the first sentence of the Bible. Let's take a leap. We will land in the last book of the Bible, almost the last sentence of Revelation 22, 17. "The Spirit and the bride say come." Status: "Married." A single God in Genesis, ends up married in the Apocalypse. And married to whom? With creation! What is the opposite of "polygamy"? *Monotony!* We don't have a *monotonous* God, but a God who is polygamous. Married with creation. With all peoples, with all cultures, religions, philosophies ... and if we don't understand this, then we don't understand anything. We will continue to be sectarian. We will continue to be Talibans of religion, no matter how Catholic you may be, no matter how many blessings you may have. This is the time to go from people of religion, to people of faith.

This is a leap. Only Francisco has taken that leap so far. We continue afraid to think. We continue to be afraid to have doubts. We continue afraid to ask questions. We continue afraid of losing our balance. And that's why we don't walk. We don't walk because we are afraid of losing our balance. Because walking supposes that we lose our balance. We can only move forward if we balance on one leg and then on the other. Imbalance is the condition for progress. Not an imbalance based on nonsense. But the imbalance of which Paul of Tarsus spoke when he said, "I know in whom I put my trust." This is the condition with which history can advance.

And there we can dream again about this place of grace, of freedom and of love. I left (said) this word "longing" .. From Genesis, we have to yearn for the past, or desire the future. Paradise, as it is in the Bible, never existed. It's not about mourning a paradise lost, it's about crying and shouting for a future paradise. We are here for that reason, not to lick our tears, but to wipe the tears of others. This is the miracle that the world awaits.

Not long ago people were running behind the images of the virgins that would weep blood. And they were shouting at the miracle! Bands of hysterical and historical people!. We do not realize that the miracle of our time is not the plastic images that cry glue, but rather that our brothers and sisters stop crying.

This result, which is nothing more than death ... and death among whom? Cain and Abel ... Here is the biblical scene that explains all the evil in the world. From the words, from the names. Cain in its Hebrew root means "acquired", the one who has everything, who is everything. Abel, from the root ABAL, is the one who is nothing ... the one who does not exist. Look at who kills whom. The one who believes himself to be all powerful kills the one who is nothing. And look at the conversation. God asks two questions in the Bible. "Adam, where are you? (Chap.3 Genesis), and the question he asks Cain, "What have you done with your brother?" And he answers, I am not my brother's keeper. The keeper is not only the responsible one. He is the one who has and guides – not because he is required to do so but because of a love relationship

with someone. This is the cause of all the evil in the world. That nobody feels that he has to be his brother's keeper. That no one feels a vital intimacy with anyone. For that reason we are bachelors and spinsters. (i)

The exodus becomes a key reading: discovering that God creates memories in history. But look, this is only the beginning of the book of Exodus, (8, 1 |) When the whole narrative of the disaster starts with the persecution in Egypt, it begins by saying, "*a new king ascended the throne of Egypt who did not know Joseph.*" Another way of saying this, is that a man who came to power had no memory (of the past). Then, he comes to power without (the background of) history. This is where it seemed that everything had gone. Where hope was under the desert sand. It is here that my people discover God. For this reason, Exodus is the founding experience of Israel. The text carries the whole symbolic load of time and of memory. We have been able to survive for two thousand years, only because from the year 70 to 5/14/1946 we kept saying every year -- next year in Jerusalem. We start here, and here we are. God is the national hero of Israel. And we owe this brilliant intuition to the Jews, and to the people of the Old Testament, to have brought the God of heaven to earth.

The God of Abraham, of Isaac, Jacob, Jesus Christ, is not a God of a distant heaven, but a God of the here and now. A gypsy God, of the road, of the dust, and of the wind. He is YOUR (familiar) God. (In Greek and Hebrew there is no "you (formal)" nor "authority"). "Blessed be you (familiar), Lord God of Israel, the eternal King." This is how all Jewish prayer formulas start. We talk with God in the familiar, (like the Spanish "TU"), not out of disrespect but because it means we are giving Him another message: The message is that God became us. For my "I" can only grow in face of a "YOU (familiar)" in my relationship. Any one of us in the presence of an Excellency, bows. My "I" can only grow in the presence of a relationship with a "TU" – (a familiar YOU). This is the message of the Bible, this is the message of Francis. This is the cry of the universal fraternity, without masters or slaves. A society of brothers and sisters. But how far we are from this!. In our own and native cultures, many times we live in our fraternities with the same lack of respect which society lives. We keep living based on our titles. Based on our "gold". Based on our caste. At all levels and in all cultures. And there is a caste mentality in our fraternities, in our convents, and monasteries. We are wrong. This is not the road. The ultimate goal cannot be in power. The ultimate goal to fix my life and the life of those who are mine cannot be to become a member of any organization. To serve myself of the structure where I put myself. And this (is what) we have. People coming to suck, parasites -- of the Church, parasites of the order, parasites of the fraternities, of the convents and monasteries. We are fed up with these people!.

We go back to the dialogue between God and Moses at Horeb (Exodus 3, 7 - 10) To call attention to the verbs in the text. This is not about a God from a distant heaven. It is about a God who sees, who knows, who comes down to free. This is the *kenos* (self-emptying), and what we are doing is that *ours* is often not a *kenosis* (self-emptying), but a *anastasis* (resurrection). We become priests, nuns and friars, and this does not mean coming down to the level of anyone, but going up the social scale. This is the shame of the order in the world. I saw this on every continent. We continue to have many vocations. There, where being a priest, a nun or a monk is still a social promotion. Where it is not, things get ugly. (This is a personal relief...). But it would have us think. If we came for a *kenosis* (self-emptying), or if we live for *anastasis*

(resurrection). They say in my country that the only people who can live without working, are the priests and the military Perhaps they are right.

This God who changes himself and brings himself to our level, so that we can then rise up. The God that comes down to my world, who becomes me, so that my history can be transformed into eternity. So that my immanence can be transformed into transcendence. **This is the way.**

And this is the message: "*The Lord of hosts will create on this mountain a banquet of rich food, a feast of fine wines, delicacies of marrow, refined wine for all peoples, he will remove on this mountain the veil that covers all peoples and the coverage that covers all nations; he will remove death definitively. The Lord will wipe away tears from all faces, and remove the shame of his people over all the earth, because the Lord has spoken (said)*" (Isaiah 25: 6-8). Here is the Eucharistic text of the Old Testament. Here's the challenge of intimacy dreamed. This is Isaiah. What is the theme behind the text? It's a meal. Who is the cook? GOD!. Who invites to the meal? GOD!. Who are the guests? All the people, including Catholics. And what is the menu? Fleshy meat and aged wines. Consider the idea of time: a cow needs time to fatten. To age, wine needs time. This is a plan, this is a project open to all without exception, without exclusion. We have a Church with people who are marked and excluded because they are outside. Because we, the saints can not live with the sinners. But instead, at that feast, everyone comes!. Prepared with time and for all. From this life lived together, this experience of communion and fraternity, what is going to happen with this veil? What is a veil of mourning? It is a cloth that keeps us from seeing, and thus impedes communication. Not because of our differences, but WITH our differences. What will God do to the tears?. Where do I have to be to wipe the tears of another? Where is God? He is not a God in a distant heaven. It is a God who is not afraid to say, I love you!

It is this God before whom we too can say the prayer of Isaiah, "*the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me.*" Who was anointed? We are all anointed!. And for what is the anointing? It is only good for one thing, for the mission. The rest is pure folklore. The rest is wanting to continue to discuss nonsense!

Finally, we will enter the most dangerous text of all Scripture, the most revolutionary text of all the history of mankind. I wanted to present to you the constitutional charter of Christianity. The text that managed to explain why we are here. The text where we can discover our mission, that, if we don't understand it, we will never find the meaning of our lives. I leave before you, the text of the **Beatitudes**. You know this text by memory. This is the text that is the constitutional charter. Our most important text.

Let us first of all make an exercise of reading the text as if we had never known it before. Sometimes, familiarity with certain texts and interpretations, always on the same line of thought that we listen to, can lead us to lose some sensitivity of detachment, and many times we repeat ideas without the work of properly analyzing them.

If we wanted to situate this text in the context of biblical teaching, we would necessarily place it in the line of continuity and evolution of another inescapable parallel text. Naturally, we are talking about the Ten Commandments. As two sides of the same coin, we start from the pedagogy of "not" in the Ten Commandments, to present a new form of language and, above all, of being and reacting, with the Beatitudes.

This is a type of parallelism that I like to present between the two texts. There is actually in the Ten Commandments a pedagogical and educational intention? Personally I am convinced that there is. Furthermore, let us look at in the formulation of the Decalogue, the amount of times in which the word "no" appears. All sentences begin the same way ... "No...!" We get the feeling that we are facing a text produced for small children, for whom it is necessary to prohibit what is illegal, but still having no ability to understand what they "already" can do. We are thus at this initial stage between the "not yet" and the "immediately", assuming that the latter will come later with the formula, still and always educational, but in another style, of the Beatitudes in Matthew Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of Luke.

Read literally, the text proclaims blessed, thus happy, the poor, those who cry, those who suffer from hunger, those suffering thirst, the persecuted ... and the list could continue ... Read literally, we see at least one text that speaks of a masochistic god who rejoices with the sufferings of all kinds suffered by his faithful; a god who needs to see us cry, suffer, bleed, crawl. A god more pagan than this is impossible to find ...

A cold and decontextualized reading of the text can only lead to this conclusion. Even worse than this, always, a cold and decontextualized reading of the text can lead to the sin forbidden to all Christians, of becoming professionals of hope deferred.

When I speak of religious terrorism and postponement of hope, I am speaking of this, a set of attitudes that this text can activate when poorly read or misunderstood. We can still play everything at the level of personal conception of God and of greater or lesser inability to go beyond any Oedipal complex badly resolved.

What we have before us is really the Constitutional Charter of Christianity, and the most revolutionary text in the history of humanity. It must be noted, however, that we must find the appropriate reading key to be able to read the entire text without going into crisis and without assuming attitudes that have nothing to do with the bottom message, which is anything but a message of a tyrant god or a stoic philosophy to be brought down to the last consequences; *abstine sustine*¹

It is really possible to use this text to turn it into a pious exhortation to resignation, a kind of anesthesia, that removes from the individual the ability to fight and depersonalizes him or her to attribute to the will of God everything in their lives in terms of actual needs, effective, affective, and material, as well as the lack of recognition of their personal dignity, with all its variants, a kind of "limbo" waiting for a liberation that never comes, and that leads to the sin of deferring hope.

The danger is precisely this: resignation and postponement. Resignation in living ... postponement of hope ... More than just a form of opiate or neurotic relationship with the transcendent, any reading that goes in this line of thinking is ultimately offensive to human dignity, an affront to God, making religion approach dangerously its worst form, i.e. transforming the believer into a kind of abulic robot unable to recognize its relational dignity with God, before God, before self and others.

-Are you suffering? Are your rights violated? Are you hungry? Do not have the minimum required to live with dignity? Feel alone and abandoned?

¹- "The slogan used by the Stoics "abstain and support."

-Be patient because this is the will of God ... and in eternity you will be very happy (!)

This is the sinful postponement, the opiate, neurotic and stupid hope. This is, unfortunately, still very much the speech of some "pious minds in our squares". Although not saying aloud these barbarities, they think, and form a frame of thought and reflection that can lead to a foolish little charity but that will never lead to revolutionary solidarity needed in our time. One of my revolts against this type of mysticism that, I will never forget, happened at the sickbed of a patient dying of cancer. The priest that spoke to her says at one point: "Be patient, this is the will of God" ... brilliant! What anger!

Let's examine Matthew, being the first. It is important to say first of all that, however well we speak a foreign language, we cannot stop thinking in our own language. This is exactly what happens with Matthew. He writes his texts in Greek, but his language is Aramaic or Hebrew.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit..."

When composing this which is really the key phrase to read the entire text, the first, that one key that unlocks the first door to the hidden code of the Bible - **Blessed are the poor in spirit** ... - he feels that the Greek language is not able to bring to light the exact concept he is trying to get across.

Indeed, everything is played from the word "poor." This really is the key to reading and interpreting the whole text. In his mother tongue, Matthew has two different words to talk about the two different categories of the poor. The Hebrew uses the words *Dalim and Anawim* to talk about two different categories of people with regard not only to their social status, but, above all, to their main attitude toward life.

The Greek language, like most of the languages we use today, has few words to talk about "poor" and those who are available always describe people who lack at least the minimum to live on with dignity. Take the case of Portuguese: the poor, needy, destitute, homeless, beggars, etc... All adjectives that qualify certain type of people to which, objectively, we cannot say that "they are happy," fewer still that are in that situation because that was the will of God and that in eternity will be very happy...

It is here, with this kind of thinking, that we can actually make religious terrorism and agree with Marx and Freud in using religion to insult God and the poor, committing that sin of postponing hope. We cannot be professionals of hope deferred. We cannot insult the poor in the name of God, especially from our own abundance describe the misery of others as God's determination of a *sine qua non* condition for a future of eternal bliss. This is an insult, this is terrorism, but it is done, unfortunately...

One of the ills greatly afflicting our thinking has to do with the fact that we are more or less convinced that our eternity begins at the time of our death ... Another big mistake ... The fact is that our eternity has to begin at the moment of our conception.

Thus, if it is so, this time, this space, and this earth are already eternal time, space and earth forever; thus, if it is so, and so be it, we are already experiencing eternity; then, if it is so, the moment of death becomes the pinnacle of life and thus, if it is so, the moment of death is the moment of the definitive encounter with God, therefore, the moment of death is the moment of resurrection!

I believe that, to this day, Francis of Assisi was the only one able to understand all this to its logical conclusion and therefore was able to call death "sister".

If all of this is really true, there needs to be urgently a qualitative leap if nothing else, and it would be quite enough, even up to the "simple" level of language, the level of practices of piety, to the forms of liturgical celebration of faith, to the level of discourse that continues to be marked by a memorial dimension, not to say funereal, that makes many Eucharistic celebrations, for example, seem like seventh day Masses "for the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Pardon the possible vulgarity of my words, but it is also at the level of the language that revolves around the forms celebrating the deepest mystery of Christian faith that is important to have the courage to change the terms used. There are still many - too many - circumstances in which we hear of "celebrate Masses for the dead"! How is it possible? For where is the certainty that Christians have of the resurrection? We are led by the determinism of evil, or are we able to believe that Christ is risen?

If Christ is really risen, in the expression "to celebrate Masses for the dead" we have no less than two gross errors. First, in the risen Christ there are no dead but living; in the second, we do not have the right to celebrate Masses **for** the dead but to celebrate the Eucharist, the praise for God par excellence, with thanksgiving, **with** those who are still with us in intimacy with God in a more perfect way.

I realize that getting here is not easy. It requires effort to change certain ways of thinking and acting consecrated by time, and that words cannot express. It is important, however, that we dare make the sincere effort to "imbalance" which helps the "move forward". What it is, after all, is to give a body by way of word, to the depth of faith. That's all. As if that were not enough!

Back to the text that we left and must return. Let's return to this linguistic difficulty of Matthew who lacks words in Greek² to say whatever his Hebrew linguistic culture purports to embrace.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, the poor of spirit, motivated by the spirit, the poor led or conducted by the spirit ... all these are possible translations of this Greek word that Matthew is forced to add to the word "poor" to safeguard the dignity of the latter, or the dignity of the ways to speak and understand God in his "being" and "acting" with us, but especially through us.

Here the revolution starts. And it is also here that the said "hidden code" is articulated... and because so hidden, also here shamelessly made manifest. Not a "code" that hides unspeakable secrets but a "code" that discloses how to be of God and of others, or better yet, how to be of God being of others. But it is also from here that can arise the religious terrorism that postpones the hope to a beyond in temporal time, or then throws us in the deepest dimensions of being and acting human.

More than a text that speaks of the "act of God" the Beatitudes are, on the contrary, the Magna Carta of human action in the light of God, the Constitutional Charter to be followed by all those men and women who dare to be of God like Jesus Christ, that is, those men and women who dare to be of God and of others, and will never be too much to repeat this idea ... maybe one day it sticks...

From here we can start reading the text and read our own lives without fear or hindrance. Here we find, in fact, such a code for reading the Bible. Far from being a secret code hidden in the innermost shelves of eternity where the mold will gnaw, it is a challenge too disquieting and disturbing that makes me come out of myself, and thus sets me free and throws me into action, which does not allow me to use a cosmetic salon that hides the wrinkles of my faith, but pushes me into the open field where the sun can even burn me, but is the only place where I can find a "lasting tan."

The final challenge remains the same, challenging, disturbing, disquieting, pushing for victory over this schizophrenia that leads us to want to be of God without being of others, to live the life of this divorce in a pseudo-marriage with God,... marked by successive and increasingly deep "stabs on matrimony."

The keyword, the central concept that gives meaning to all the text, is the reference to the poor. Separated into two basic categories that in the Hebrew language allows for no confusion, we find then a God who needs a miserable people, ragged, snotty, waiting for a happiness that is sure to come in the afterlife, but with a personal and unavoidable challenge.

Are proclaimed happy, not those who do not have the minimum to live on with dignity, but those who recognize that everything we have comes from God and, therefore, are open to others unconditionally. Those who put all their "riches" of whatever type they are at the service of others. Of these will be the kingdom of heaven, because of these it will be, and it is the task of building a world in defiance of the "norm", the "do not you worry," the image and likeness of Cain's speech, in his answer to the question of God: "Cain, what did you do to your brother?"; " I am not responsible for my brother." How much actuality in a sentence with more than 2500 years of history...

It is not therefore a delay of any hope of happiness for the future, but a personal and not transferable pledge, to now, for now.

It is now, it is immediate, it is this time, in this space, and on earth, it's already time, space, and land of eternity where there are people whose rights are violated, suffering, starving, who have no right to be human. Those who challenge me in my stillness of being, in my appeased conscience that the senescence of faith cannot stir; those who should, who have to worry my wealth...

And here, again, it is important to revive and resuscitate the dead words. The poverty that God loves, the poverty which God challenges in the Beatitudes, is not even close to the poverty of the "not having" material goods or other materials; the challenge goes to poverty, at least the "not to have the mania " that we own the world, the navel of history, the holders of the absolute truths about life, death, and eternity; these riches that lead so many people to live with their belly full of God in such a way that they cannot let out more than a few mystical gases for the consumption of others, because space of conversion itself is quite occupied... and the belly so swollen that they cannot see the floor that they step on ...

To be poor doesn't mean you don't have... This clear conscience could even help to overcome some difficulties that sometimes come to the margins of schizophrenia or at least of "self-flagellation" from those who have the option of living a "vow of poverty..." The poverty that God loves goes the other way. And it is very important to make this clear. I can be much richer by owning a car falling to pieces but that I do not put at the service of anyone, than to have a late model car that I put at the service of all and, moreover, being myself the driver ...

What is at stake is the poverty of service, of openness to others, the experience and the struggle for a world without rulers or ruled, without masters or slaves, of non-ownership, of the ability to put savings in the bank of life, and the heart of History, the gifts that I own in the material, cultural, intellectual, or artistic levels.

What is at stake is the construction of a society, a kingdom where everyone can be and feels free to be himself, in full relation, complete, and definitive ...

This is the key to the reading of the Beatitudes. As we said, the most dangerous, and revolutionary text in human history; far from being a text which speaks of God, it is, above all, a text in which God speaks for us.

The difficulty is precisely here ... to accept that God speaks ... furthermore, to accept that God pushes me to be different, to put at risk all my comforts, my securities, my preconceived ideas, my ways of "not thinking" because all this is difficult' because all of this hurts, because all this makes me concerned, because it stirs all the chicken coops where I move; hopefully at least Jonathan Livingston Seagull learned the joy of flying ...

But it is precisely here that one throws the strength of a religion, it is here that one can evaluate the degree of commitment of someone with your way of reading life and understanding God. A religion is exactly this. A challenge to freedom, a "punch in the stomach" of laziness that makes me not even think, because everything is already said and thought by others ... and I have nothing more than conform myself with what was "always taught me" because it is there, because it is "boring!"

This is such a religion -- opium and neurosis in the words of Marx and Freud respectively. In this respect we should hear Professor Agostinho da Silva's words "I do not have a religion; there is a religion that has me."

The more people that become enabled to live coherently the full meaning of this statement, the farther we come from a religion of bachelors and spinsters embittered with life and with others, and we'd meet more people of the kind that are capable of loving every day, all the people, because they lost their fear and are able to resurrect the dead words and know exactly the meaning of "making love,"

In the face of this entire framework, we can read without fear the rest of the text. The poor and suffering will no longer feel insulted in their dignity, and even those who do not have even the minimum to live with dignity (the poor *Dalim* in Hebrew), already can finally feel happy, not because after death they would be able to enjoy all that was denied them in life, but because every time there will be more people like you, every time there will be more *anawim*, those people that meddle in our lives so that other people may have the right to be people and to have life, and the *dalim*, without the right to live the life of people, cease to exist.

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted ..."

Can you see now? Perceive now that even those who weep in despair can feel happy? See now what is your role? Now also realize that in fact you have to cry not because we have a tyrannical God who needs our tears to feel himself God, but because we are only able to cry for two reasons ... Or we cry for joy, or cry of sorrow, isn't it? But I dare go further. There is only one reason able to make us cry.

In Portuguese, there is one of many expressions that allows us to briefly tell you many things in few words and which say "*Quem não chora não mama.*" ("The one who does not cry does not suckle.") Well, simply remove one letter to discover the "code" to unlock a secret ... *They who do not love do not cry.* This is the only real reason that makes someone cry.

Every day we are confronted with news of tens, hundreds, even thousands of dead casualties, but sometimes even we may not cry. But if one person that we love dies then we surely cry. However, in

numerical terms, the reality is unparalleled. Tens, hundreds or thousands of deaths on one side and "only" one killed on the other ... The only thing that really changed was the relationship; that which led to the tears of sadness in this case, was love.

That's it... Blessed are you who weep because you are blessed. You who love, who are able to have and build rapport with someone, who refuse to live proudly as "singles," who are able to make love with others and with life ... who do not live to do transcendental meditation looking at your own belly button ... who are not content with lonely pious mystical ruminations ... The only thing is, as another Portuguese proverb says: "Those who are subject to love, shall be bound to suffer".

Well, nobody ever said it would be easy; yet, none of those who dared to live like this said it was not worthwhile.

"Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth ..."

Another "declaration" in defiance of the norm ... another possible misunderstanding of what it means to be "meek." Here, we must define the concept of "gentle" in the light of what has been said before. Once again we are challenged to a new attitude of "being," of "being different," of being in a new way, and in a way unlike that of those who make violence a driving force behind their existence. The meek are the experts of non-violent violence.

The last word cannot fit, will never fit to the "violent," if we want to put it in opposition to "meek". But perhaps we can, and we must, go a step further. In the depths of their being, the "gentle" is, ultimately, someone in balance with oneself, with others, and with God. This meekness is to be urgently cultivated. We are not talking about any apology of an apathetic, abulic attitude towards life, an attitude of "anything goes" or herd ideology, (*Mary goes with the others*) meek ... humble ... poor thing ... with problems of self-esteem ... The challenge is much more profound. It is the challenge of Mahatma Gandhi, Teresa of Calcutta, Martin Luther King -- it is the "war of the non-violent."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice for they shall be satisfied."

Anawim and *dalim*, poor and needy in spirit, and miserably poor, united in the same struggle, the same desire to regain lost dignity, the right to become the person who they are meant to be, so often denied by the great ones of this earth, by the lords of hatred, of opium, of power, and of death. This is not a commitment to change history, not just a fancy, but a willingness to go further that resembles the sensation of hunger and thirst, that touches the innermost being of each of us, and whose goal will only be achieved when it ends in satiety.

Proclaimed again to be happy are not those who postpone having hope, or those who call for the fatalistic and submissive resignation "to the will of God." Happy here, fortunately, are precisely those who "roll up" their sleeves and go to battle with the fighting claw of the hungry seeking the food they are denied, and the courage of those who, thirsty in the desert of life, seek the source of living water that kills all thirst.

Here, again and always, one more qualitative step forward. It is not enough to be "nice;" our society already has enough of the friendliest people ... it is not enough to cultivate the smile of political correctness. Confucius said that "behind the smile are teeth" ... did you ever feel that people were smiling at you really

wanting to bite? Did you ever smile at anyone willing to do the same? Indeed, the challenge is much deeper: it is the blatant invitation to empathy. Not enough just to be "nice" sympathetic (sun + pathos = to suffer with someone ...); the urgent urgency of the revolutionary act definitely pushes toward empathy (em+ pathos) suffer with, making mine the struggle of the other; right now, today, this moment, now and for eternity.

Thus, the time that is today, is not to cross your arms, waiting around the corner of life waiting for eternity to pass ... the time that is today is to roll up our sleeves without fear, with the courage of those who know in Whom they put their trust.

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy...”

And the litany continues ... More happy people, more people sharing one of the fundamental attributes of God that the Old Testament presents using the Hebrew word *hesed*, mercy, merciful heart ... may be similar expressions, but they do not, in my opinion, convey all the grandeur contained in the original concept.

From the two central claims of the Old Testament about the "attributes" of God -- mercy and truth (*hesed* and *'emet*), Matthew places in this phrase this load of identification to say that the *anawim* are precisely the people who live this same sense of God. A God of *hesed*, a God of mercy, ultimately, and going to the etymology of the terms used, a God with "guts" - we should say, in a more poetic vein, a God with a heart - who challenges the *anaw* to this same attitude toward life.

Far from being simply an utterance to the taste of poetic liberty, the invitation that remains, in this one more element of bliss, of happiness, is precisely that of having a heart beating to the rhythm of the heart of God. A passionate heart, a heart not solitary; married to life and to the world, just as God married the whole creation... no exceptions ... God married all ... even the Catholics.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God...”

The parallel goes on ... Committed in history and with history, this heart that seeks to adjust its pace to the rhythm of God's heart, will "inevitably" be able to find its balance, will be able to recover its original purity, and whoever would be able to make this journey of intimacy, cannot fail to find their own balance of being ... will have found the first stage that leads to happiness, that of the balance with oneself..

Por isso se deixa “ver”, por isso se deixa “tocar”, por isso não se preserva em termos de relação.

Then it will be possible to "see God", then the taboo falls definitely to the ground; then it will be possible to understand that those who can really "see God" are those who are able to see the others ... because God is not in any distant heaven, but here, in the right now, in the life and the time which is already eternity and it is now.

The God of the Bible, the God of Israel, the God of Jesus Christ, is not a God of a distant heaven, but a God of "earth," a God "Gypsy," of the road, of dust and wind, a companion God, a God of you, and, therefore, a God of relationship.

Thus, because of this, God lets us 'see', to "touch", and is not preserved in terms of relation.

“Blessed are the peacemakers , for they shall be called sons of God.”

The text, in its growing explicitness of the "blessed", now points to a new category of people, who constitute the initial point of arrival of all the attributes outlined above: the peacemakers, we should say, are the "*shalémicos*," asking forgiveness for the neologism. We reached the great central concept of the challenge of change.

Shalom, much more than a concept that speaks of the absence of war is, in itself, a concept of wholeness encompassing all dimensions of life and relationships of each one with himself, with others, and with God. It is indeed a utopian concept, a challenge to the construction of the future, a dream of eternity, an education for the "nostalgias for the future," the construction of a paradise that never existed but that, tendenciously, and by the will of God, all humanity is called to dream and build.

This dream of full equilibrium is present in all cultures, times, peoples, and civilizations. Whether you call it peace, shalom, salaam, morabeza, nirvana, pankasila, metempsychosis, shanti, we will always face this desire written in the depths of humanity's genetic code. There where God's plan is really inscribed. The problem resides in the human inability to make a correct reading of its own code ...adenine, thymine, cytosine and guanine -- divine and human -- merge and intertwine in an upward spiral of complexity / consciousness - in the words of Teilhard de Chardin - and we are having so much difficulty in understanding the harmony of the movement of this dance that we therefore attempt, too quickly, to build a "personal peace", building instead the "collective war" in the name of God ... and in order to build peace ...

No other animal in creation can be so incoherent...

And we confuse it all ... sad our plight ... Too ready to establish peace through war, in every age, the great "cultures" that have always been able to find reasons to justify killing in the name of God ... Today we wonder with the recent fundamentalisms... but ... we have more glass roofs than most. Metanoia, conversion, jihad, are concepts reconcilable in the same context of meaning, all of them, etymologically, or at least theologically, reducible to a concept of "war," "holy war" even, but primarily and essentially, a war being waged by each to himself, a struggle to overcome the disabilities of the ontological self in its subjective relation with others and with God.

Achieving this level of balance is really to build peace through war, but a war that sees on the battlefield the "warrior" who do not want to "kill the other" or the "god of the other," but simply to kill their own false gods that keep them from accepting the other and his way of understanding God, seeking a balance that will lead "fatally" to peace.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Well, actually this seemed too good to be true. The text "lands" back into the real world. Having presented the ideal in light of our possibility, the reader is left in this final portion of the text, to be confronted with the reality of "fate" which waits for anyone who expects to be able to base their life in this set of principles, taken to the last consequences.

Persecution, insult, lie, slander, will be the traveling companions of anyone who dares to touch

these preconceived ideas, the lucubration's opiates, or installed neuroses that only find refuge in a tyrant god thirsting for innocent blood.

There are many other moments of the fulfillment of this "prophecy" throughout history. Therefore, that's why I said at the beginning that this is the most dangerous and at the same time most revolutionary text of all the literary history of mankind; so, too, a text whose ultimate meaning can never be hidden.

The Beatitudes really are the Constitutional Charter of Christianity. The Beatitudes really are the "reading code," the secret code of the Bible and of Life. The Bible was born from Life, and if we want to and allow it, life can be born in the Bible ... only it will not be an "easy life" ...but then, nobody ever said it would be easy...

To all of you brothers and sisters in Christ and Francis, agents of active solidarity, I leave the manifestation of my respect and affection for what you mean to me -- hearts beating in history, hearts that beat to the rhythm of the heart of God.

Frei Fernando Ventura^{*}

* Cf. Ventura, Fernando, *Roteiro de Leitura da Bíblia*, Ed. Presença, 2009.

Ventura, Fernando, *Do Eu solitário do Nós solidário*, Ed. Verso de Kapa, 2011