

AF N° 67 : To laugh or not to laugh

Saint Ambrose said, "Let us drink the sober intoxication of the Spirit with joy." Laughter is the fruit of true Love and of redeemed man. Blessed be the Lord who renews our strength and our being in a thousand ways, sharing with us His joy to the point of mirth-- James of Milan in the twelve century spoke about this very thing, as did Saint Benedict as the same period.

Abram who has become Abraham (Gn17:5) ushers in the first laughter in the Bible (Gn17:17). **"Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'"** This laughter is not a mocking one as it seems at first, rather it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit mocking our helplessness. Sarai becomes in turn Sarah (Gn 17:15). Through this name shift both Sarah and Abraham have received this « hé » an Hebrew letter meaning the Breath of God. This is also the letter of the Holy Spirit in the Hebrew alphabet. In the same manner Sarah laughs as well (Gn18:12) and Isaac, who was born according to the announcement of God, means **"subject of joy, child of laughter"**.

Hence, God's answer to the original sin, uprooting fear-- first emotion rooted in man's guts, will be laughter. In this is the blessing of the Father, who makes all things new. The Bible is punctuated with occurrences in which the Spirit of God allows barren women to conceive in their old age and little ones to face giants (David and Goliath). Saint Paul summarizes lacks and limits in this pithy sentence: **"Whenever I am weak, then I am strong"** (2 Co 12:10).

This laughter from God is rooted in the will that chooses to love, not in ones wounded affectivity, linked to the feelings. This laughter of the Holy Spirit is true gift of God, destroying even the most serious reasoning according to the human mind and all guilt. "The doors of bronze and... iron bars" (Isaiah 45:2) are broken in an inner "let go" without knowing when it will cease, saying good bye to the prison of our image of good conduct! This oil of joy is spread in us and around us teaching the soul the way of healing and humility. This laughter of the Spirit is a short cut to touch the being in its depth. It short circuits reason, fills the soul and renews hope, faith and love. Ultimately it opposes the prideful intelligence.

Ps 2: 1-4: "Why are the nations in an uproar ? And the peoples devising a vain thing?...the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed...He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them."

Ezekiel 47 tells about this new Holy Land and of the source of the Temple. It is a river bubbling with life. A modern psalmist sang of it: "all who touch it can be revived, and those who linger on this river's shore will come back thirsting for more of the Lord ... The river of God fills our mouths with laughter and we rejoice for the river is here." Ps 35:9: **"Then my soul shall rejoice in the LORD, exulting in his deliverance..."** This laughter of the Holy Spirit is an anticipation of our eternal jubilation. It staggers our enemies, both visible and invisible. Ps 36:12: **"The wicked plot against the righteous, and gnash their teeth at them; but the LORD laughs at the wicked, for he sees that their day is coming."** Mary, in her Magnificat, exulted from joy and whirled singing [the verb Hebrew "guil" means to jubilate whirling out of joy, laughing] **"My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior"**. On the contrary, the devil does not laugh, he snickers. In fact he cannot laugh for he is enclosed in his sadness and his hate.

Will we be attentive to the Holy Spirit, who is a spirit of order (in the Divine Order) and not a spirit of disorder? If so, we are brought back from the dead, in these places in us where sin has brought death. The laughter of the Holy Spirit is a jubilation of the soul. It allows one to be touched by her Lord when so desired, and causes one to grow in love. This laughter can bring us even to the point of drunkenness, "this sweet wine" which is life, in front of the darkened wisdom of this world. This laughter is an expression of joy that no one can snatch from our hearts for the Lord hears the cry of the poor and defends him from a stronger enemy. He is our shield.

This laughter shapes like unto the heart of child and knocks down our inner Babylon. Ps 8:3: **"From the mouth of infants and nursing babes, You have established strength because of Your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease."** Ps 125:2 **"Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting"**. So let us not fear to laugh!