

The Wisdom of the heart

(A Guanellian method of spiritual life...)

OPERA DON GUANELLA

INTRODUCTION

In Church preaching, Christians are very often exhorted to have trust in Providence, being aware that there is a project of God-Father for every man. The task of man is to answer to these invitations and indications of life. However, practically:

How can we do it?

Which voices do we have to listen to?

How do we know what God wants?

It seems to me that the wisdom of heart is the Guanelian method to proceed with profit in our spiritual life. It is a method that is rooted in one of the strong points of Guanelian spirituality, namely, that God is a provident and merciful Father.

We generally know and acquire knowledge with our mind. But the wisdom of heart has a great power of knowledge too. It is more than intelligence because it includes in its operation something instinctive and automatic and something that comes from God's grace.

It is in the depth of our heart that God is revealed to us and communicates to us his messages.

The wisdom of heart is founded upon man's feelings. We have to acquire trust in the wisdom of our heart, in this automatic pilot that silently and safely directs our activity. We have to abandon ourselves confidently to this wisdom, which proceed from the Holy Spirit.

According to Jesus, God looks into the smallest details of our existence: he counts the hairs on our head!

"Five sparrows, aren't they sold for two cents? Yet, not even one of them is forgotten by God. Even the hairs on your head are all counted. Do not fear, you are worth more than many sparrows."

"Look at the lilies of the field... If God dresses so the grass of the field that today is there and tomorrow is thrown in the fire, how much more will he care for you, people of little faith." God dresses the lilies of the field... God weaves and dresses our life.

Do you imagine the care that God has for you?

The presence of God surrounds all our actions and, in spite of this, we live as irresponsible people! We have to learn how to defeat our rationalism.

Certainly, this is difficult because we have to fight against ourselves, we want to see what cannot be seen, to feel what we cannot feel.

We have to believe! Don't worry! Let's not be in anxiety!

God is Father and is close to us in every necessity, even the smallest one.

Jesus invites us: Do you perhaps want to think that God is less than a good papa?

"Ask and you will receive".

Therefore, wise is the man who knows how to read the continuous message of God, which is present in everything. God gives us many signs of his existence and of what he wants from us.

The symbols through which he reveals are as directing-arrows that point out the direction in which we have to seek.

We cannot meet God, face to face!

We are able however to continue gathering signs of his proximity around us.

SPIRITUAL LIFE CONSISTS THEREFORE IN LOOKING FOR HIM ALWAYS

Where does God reveal himself?

In the created things and especially in the events that constitute the development of human history and of our personal history, so that it would become a "sacred history".

God reveals himself through people, through things, in our relationship with the people we love and we are loved by. The entire reality is saturated of supernatural meaning!

1. BEING ABLE TO READ EACH EVENT IN A SPIRITUAL KEY

How can we read spiritually our life without becoming somebody like the magician that has the pretension to force God to reveal himself with a message, that correspond more to our pretension than to will of God?

1.1. Scripture as divine answer

We have to read in the word of God the answer we are looking for, or better, the transcendent meaning of a special sequence of our life.

1.2. Our life as divine answer

We move in God and we are in the weaving of God that penetrates all our daily events.

Every day of my life can communicate to me something of the mystery of God and reveal me something of what he wants me to do, to discover the keys He sets wisely on my path. In every instant, in every meeting, in every usual thing and in any unexpected one, I can discover the wonderful treasures that are in my life.

There is need, therefore, to acquire wisdom, that is, to stay, to remain with myself and to tell the Lord:

- "What do you want me to understand, through my experiences?
- What is the real meaning of this person's words, of this turning of the road, of this pain that has suddenly come to me?

- What is the meaning of these feelings that arise in me? What do you want to tell me through them and what do you want me to do with them?

God speaks, he speaks also through our psychological-affective, willing (volitive), conscious and unconscious structure.

All this is more difficult to interpret, so is necessary to be helped by some other wise person.

You have the task, in these years of formation, to know your internal life, from God's point of view.

1.3. The internal structure of man as divine answer to communicate with man

God uses the Mind: God makes us understand. He makes us understand problems in a new light. He doesn't do this by making us restless (shaking us). On the contrary, Satan acts distressing us, God never! The voice of God is so various, but always so delicate that anything is enough to suffocate it.

In our life there are moments of great lucidity in which God has spoken in a clear way: you have probably experimented it.

God uses the Will: God makes us want. You feel what you have to do and what you can do. It is God that has touched you. The modern youth of today are lacking a great power of will.

God uses Emotions. It is necessary to be careful about emotions because they can be passing and ambiguous. They are authentic if they produce fruits of generosity, charity, etc..

God uses the imagination: in the dialogue between Joan of Arc and the judge, the latter tells the young girl": Those voices that you hear originate from your imagination." "Natural! - Joan of Arc answers to the investigator - God doesn't have other ways but our imagination to speak to us. But it is God that speaks"!.

God uses the memory: at times God talks us with the past memoirs.

It is good, every so often, to turn on our life to discover a new sense of our deeds (Examination of conscience...)

The problem in life is not lack of answers, but rather the ability to individualise the correct questions.

When we have well clear the questions, the answers always arrive!

We have to start from the presupposition that every event has a meaning and contains a message that refers somehow to our problems and somehow shows the will of God.

The challenge consists of finding a beam of light in every event, also in the negative ones.

GOD SPEAKS!... HOW MUCH DOES HE SPEAK!

2. FR. GUANELLA, MODEL OF TRUST IN HIS FATHER'S PROVIDENCE

In the Gospel very often Jesus invites explicitly to surrender ourselves to God's Providence.

The one who surrenders to Providence, acquires a special view on everything: on the events, on the crosses, on the joys, on things and on people.

Abandonment to Providence means not to (break so much our head) bother and worry so much in making human calculations in our life. Abandonment to Providence is being like a baby, never afraid of anything, because he feels as seized and held by a good father who wants only his good.

"You will be rich in the measure in which you will count only on Providence."

Abandonment to Providence means never to be anxious for any problem, for any event. It is natural to be distressed, because the Lord has given us flesh and blood, and our heart has its laws of suffering and joy.

Abandonment to Providence is a charism, a gift of the Spirit, and Fr. Guanella was very immersed in God, whom he loved as a Father.

Fr. Guanella often reasoned in this way: "If my father, the good and strong papa Lawrence, was able to untiringly work to see that the *"polenta"* could never be missing every day; if he could forgive my mistakes, (and some of them were very big!); if he carried me in his shoulders to enjoy myself at the feast of a nearby village; if his greater punishment was that of a severe looking when I was distracted during the rosary; if my earthly father was able to do so; what will not our Father in Heaven, who is clement and merciful, do for us?"

"God is Father, God is my Father" - he often repeated - a Father who always has the hand stretched toward man, toward his children, in every moment and situation, for every need of the daily life.

Fr. Guanella lived as a son who feels safe in his father's hands.

During his whole life, in every choice, in every turn or important decision, he allowed himself to be lead, hand in hand, by Providence.

Fr. Guanella is certain of this: God has his plan for each person, a plan based on his love of Creator and Father.

It is the task of every person (and Don Guanella undertook it himself with sacrifice), to understand this project and to collaborate with God, who has traced this project in the heart, in the mind, in the grace with which he has provided the person.

It is necessary, therefore, to learn how to see through signs, intuitions and internal impulses and through external guides, to continue with fidelity and perseverance through difficult obedience and choices that seems imprudent to many, and especially with faith and without presumption.

God took Fr. Guanella since his childhood and lead him as on a journey marked by:

Some signals of the presence of God.....until..., when the destination was reached, there was the evidence that the journey had been correct.

In considering his life, examining himself to understand if he had made the correct journey, if the preferential choices had been illuminated and wise, if he had followed his own caprice or the itinerary proposed by God, Don Guanella found again in his more distant memories, since the infancy, some signs that had lead him in his choices, in some particular moments.

3. SIGNALS ON THE WAY.... COINCIDENCES... DREAMS OR VISIONS? IN THE LIFE OF FR. GUANELLA

A. The old man of Campodolcino Do you remember?

WE WILL MAKE THE SOUP FOR THE POOR...

B. One day, at Gualdera... In the following years...

C. As a student (at Como) in the Gallio college (1854-60), he was walking one day along Holy Cross Street and suddenly an internal light struck him, as a presentiment: that place and those fields would have interested him, and for a moment, he seemed to see a great building on the side of the road. And that was really the place where he begun in 1886 his first house in Como, now Tomaso Grossi Street. Also other saints had similar presentiments.

D. Another time:

"Fr. Guanella remembers very well that, when he was a newly ordained priest, travelling by boat (on Lake Como) he looked at the church of Pianello and he had like a light in his mind that he couldn't describe, and a movement in his heart that seemed to say: - Look there, because in that place you will have some work and some sweet satisfaction. It was as a sweet consolation that filled his heart for brief moment and then, all was ended."

E. In the same way, when he was rector of the Salesian college of Mondovì (1876-1878), he foresaw his work in Pian di Spagna, and also in other occasions he had similar presentiments.

"From Pianello, crossing the place, looked at the Pian di Spagna with certain attraction. Was it a presentiment?"

One day, he was walking with some pupils, and the Pian di Spagna came to his mind in a clearer form. He fixed it in his mind, feeling that there, one day, he would made a foundation."

F. in July 1881 at Gravedona, news came that the priest Carlo Coppini had died on July 1st, leaving the hospice with the orphans in the hands of some pious women, who had been living together for ten years since 1872. In Fr. Guanella's mind passed a clear thought that seemed to repeat to him: "You will be his successor", and this thought grew alive in him and, for a moment, it appeared clearly, almost a revelation that said: "Be patient! Because from there you will begin your mission."

These are some signs along the race of over seventy years of a hard-working life, with oppositions and sacrifices. These moments compensate so many obstacles interposed on his journey, as a "little sugar" in so much bitterness. Fr. Guanella was not a visionary man, even from his infancy he had always been a concrete, positive, exuberant and fanciful boy: if in

some cases he uses the imagination, we have to be convinced that these feelings were well rooted in his heart and his will.

He said of himself: "I see the things that can be done, as clearly as in a mirror"

When he was with Don Bosco, he wrote in 1878:

"I consider a great fortune to have come with Don Bosco, but I would feel an empty space in my heart for all my life, because there is in me a continuous thought to build something at home".

While "the strong intentions" he had at Gualdera grew up in him, Fr. Guanella reached the certainty that what he had improved was founded upon the fatherly Providence of God:

"Time will come, he told the first Sisters at Pianello, and it will not be distant, in which you will live in long rooms... ", until that decision that makes him write to his Bishop in 1885: "I feel in me a spirit of action that I don't know very well how to delineate, but which assures me of some good result in the middle of the greatest upsetting of the times, when I, by means of my superior, can feel to be led by God. With God's guide I seem to have a great strength; without this, I don't feel I can move any step."

This internal strength made him being held as a fanatic or crazy man from somebody.

Later his works and life showed that this was the way of Providence.

If we had some love and so much patience to "re-read" the biographical stories of Fr. Guanella in the light of Providence we would realise that he doesn't make a step, nor move a hand, neither take an important decision, before having found that Providence does want it.

Feeling himself as being a tool of Providence he tries more and more adjust his own plans to the signs that he reads in the events of real life, rather than forcing them to his own schemes.

Providence, for him, doesn't have anything philosophical; it is not a general theory of government, but something alive and concrete, something that breathes in the daily life, that permeates his life, actions, human relationships.

Often he didn't also know, as Abraham, if it was the voice of God that ordered him to sacrifice his life, or if it was his own pride, or an utopia or an false illusion.

The Saints have to communicate us the way to discern these mysterious traces of the divine grace in our own heart: their journey can bring comfort to the one who is about to undertake something important, or who has doubts on completing it.

It appears clearly:

- + the first duty for a Christian is to be himself, in the light of God (vocation);
- + to understand himself as a dynamic and active person, as a collaborator of God;
- + to risk everything for an idea, a personal project, trusting in God's Providence;

Lacking these dispositions, man is an useless nothing.

Then it is task of Providence to accept or not the humble human project: if God will want to bless it he will know how to multiply the small that the man offers; if God decides otherwise, the man has to take conscience of it.

It is found very well in the life of Fr. Guanella (for example in this episode): Visiting one house that was starting with a lot of difficulties, he found some Sisters and various novices a little discouraged: their strength was not enough for a work that was becoming every day greater in for the numerous and pressing new applications.

The Sisters presented the state of their minds and their difficulties to Fr. Guanella. He asked them:

- "You, martorelle of God, how many are you?"

The Sisters answered : - "Fifteen"

- "And if we write near it a zero, how many do you become?"

- "One hundred fifty"

- "And with another zero?"

- "You joke, Father!"

- "Not at all. Rather I want to tell you my opinion: if a man limits himself to be a zero, he is nothing and never will do anything. Instead, if he tries to be something, whatever is within his possibilities, he becomes something positive ...

Later he have to ask that Providence should put a zero, two zeros, three zeros after to this small number and the small thing immediately becomes great.

But Providence cannot do anything with the one who limits himself to be a zero, who doesn't bring forward his small capital of good will and charity.

Do therefore whatever you are able to do, offer your work and sacrifice to God and ask Providence to multiply your few loaves of bread and your few fishes."

4. ANYBODY IN THE HOUSE OF PROVIDENCE EXISTS TO BE A PATRIMONY OF LOVE: OPERATIONAL FORM

Now, to avoid to keep on doing only "theory" about the daily action of Providence, and to begin learning the will of God, that is hidden also in the simplest events, I will try to elaborate an operational form, a kind of guide and a stimulus to see beyond the appearances and beyond the superficial or human vision of life.

Only faith recognises God in the confused elements of the daily life. I cannot give you some faith.

What I can offer to you, instead, is an aid, an instrument for you to learn the difficult work to understand the will of God in the fleeing instant as in the fragment of the Eucharistic host.

4.1. The coincidences in our life

Do you take seriously the coincidences of our life?

They make us understand that there exists Someone who is working behind every one of our actions.

Nothing happens by chance! Even the most banal and casual meetings often have a much deeper meaning than it appears at first.

Coincidences can be signals that give light to our journey in search of the will of God.

An example of coincidences:

Have you ever had a presentiment, an intuition about something that you wanted to do, or a change that you wanted to impose to your existence, without however to know how to put it into practice?

And later, after you have almost forgotten of it, suddenly you meet someone or read something or come to a place that leads you really to that same opportunity that you had imagined.

The coincidences regularly happen but you have to recognise them... and follow their meaning.

When we are worried only for ourselves, we don't are able to grasp the "passage" and to verify that the coincidences come true.

4.2. The thoughts.

When a thought arrives up, let's ask why we have it exactly in that precise moment and how it is connected to the matters of our existence.

4.3. The people

Any person we meet has a message for us.

Casual meetings don't exist.

If we speak with a person we have met and in his words we don't find the message relative to our present questions, this doesn't mean that there was no message. Simply, for some reason, we have not been able to grab it.

4.4. The dreams

The dreams should be considered again what for a long time the wise man and the simple ones had realised, that is, the same voice of God from the depths of every man.

(Remember how S. Joseph was lead by God in his life...)

Dreams, if well observed, carry out a wisdom that understands the deep sense of our life; they come to tell us something that escaped from our life.

Why God would be revealed during sleep?

In the quiet of sleep the soul is more free from impediments of material and sensitive kind, and therefore it is more attentive and ready to perceive the divine reality.

Besides, God is even more powerful and effective in the sleep, in which the filter of our rationality is removed.

The divine reality has not to be reached with the intellect, but rather with the affection, that is, with the sense and the taste of our soul and of our heart

How to interpret the dreams?

The dreams talk to us, but with a language not at all evident, as it is during the state of awareness that characterises the vigil. They require some criteria of discernment and interpretation. Dreams belong to ourselves. Dreams have a meaning for us; none of them is without sense.

Failure to believe in dreams it is like neglecting a part of ourselves.

Therefore it is a wise and essential thing, for a true internal growth, to keep in mind our dreams, recording them at the moment of awakening.

* The dreams must be read in the context of the life of the person.

It is necessary to compare the history of the dream with that of one's own life.

And it is necessary always ask for the help of a guide.

4. 5. The complexity of our internal world (our desires)

It is necessary, therefore, to discover and to reflect into these internal movements, which often join together our awareness with our unconscious world

The unconscious is almost the container of the presence of the divine grace.

The desires (the day-dreams),

(A young person without desires has no future...)

* They direct the individual toward an wider understanding of his own actions, revealing the deepest aspect of one's life.

* They lead the person to open to a project of life more truthful and superior, compared to the project which we find in awareness.

* They disclose the soul to an experience surpassing the human persons (from the divine plan to the human; from the social plan to the individual; from the cosmic plan to the personal).

The desires (the day-dreams) can induce a man toward a more mature and objective understanding of his own internal world.

They are able to go out of a limited way of our being.

They lead us to understand and to face our life with a fuller and transcendent purposes.

Nobody more than the daydreamer is able to judge its validity, especially if he is able to confront what he desires with his real possibilities.

The desires can give a notable contribution to the process of spiritual growth, for the power of evocation, for the charm and the energy that emanate often from them, to provoke an authentic jumps of level in the religious conscience..

4. 6. Abandonment to God's providence as the therapy which help us to understand the complex world of our internal life.

For those people who live with decision in a solid context of faith: the abandonment to God is necessary.

"Yes, Father, in your hands I entrust my life as a blank cheque".

"Your will be done!"

The abandonment consists therefore in detaching one's self and entirely submitting in the hands of the One who loves us: God. It is not a passive action, because it needs a very strong work on our own personality.

4.7. How the Father loves us.

"God sees us and knows us all, one to one. Whoever you are, He individually sees you. He calls you by your name. He understands what really you have done and what you can do.

He knows what is in you, all of your feelings and more intimate thoughts, your dispositions and preferences, your strength and your weakness.

He looks at you in the day of joy and in the day of sadness. He loves you in your hope and in your temptation. He takes interest in your anxieties, in all your memories, in all the "ups and downs" of your spirit.

He has counted even the hairs of your head and measured your stature; he surrounds your and sustains your hands. He lifts you up and turns you down.

He observes the lines of your face, when you cry and you smile, when you are sick and when you enjoy of a good health. With tenderness He looks at your hands and your feet; he hears your voice, the beating of your heart and even your breath.

You don't love yourself more than He loves you.

You cannot tremble because of your pain as He trembles seeing it coming to you, and if He permits it, it is because also you, if you were wise indeed, you would choose it for a greater future good..."

5. THE CRITERIA POINTED OUT BY FR. GUANELLA TO DISCERN THE WAY OF PROVIDENCE IN ONE'S OWN PERSONAL LIFE

"The first help of Divine Providence is this: she opens before us a clear way to travel on, and to feel that we are strong enough to make our journey on it. (OUR VOCATION), through these steps:

1. An internal belief of our mind, and a prevision that the work we are implementing could produce a good for us or for the society;
2. Such aspect of this work (our vocation) needs to be well pondered by us, also with the help of the confessor (or formator) and of the legitimate superior;
3. The necessary means for this work have to appear sufficiently clear, so that it can be achieved;
4. After we discover that one particular way is possible, without reasonable doubt, this way must be travelled with faith.

The difficulties that often arise must be faced with the certainty to win them, with the divine help: "The One who has given the power to begin, will give also the power to complete."