

2 HOLINESS

This theme of the miracle, the sign that sustains human work when it is lived as tension towards the final resurrection, introduces us to another great category of effectiveness or dimension, on which any verification of the Church's credibility must focus and that is holiness. In the Catholic tradition, the holy person is a saint, and, in the strictest sense of the word, the saint is the individual who realizes more com-

pletely his or her own personality, what he or she is supposed to be. The word "holiness" coincides in the total sense with a true personality. If one is self-fulfilled, he is realizing the idea for which he was created. In fact, for the Church, the concept of sin signifies what first of all obstructs an individual from realizing his personality.

The personality on the conscious path to its realization – that is, the personality, characterized by holiness – is modulated in a clear consciousness of the truth and in its use of its own freedom or self-governance. Within this path, human activity becomes entirely significant: every action, even the apparently least incisive, acquires the nobility of a great gesture. However, this is only possible if an individual acts in the awareness of the ultimate motivation for his action, for this will bring with it a consciousness of self which will facilitate a collaboration with Grace. This is to say, this awareness will facilitate self-dominion and direct freedom, tending the person towards faithfulness to the reason that spurs life on.

And so the saint in the Church makes Christ's presence a presence in every moment, because he, in a transparent way, determines man's action. The saint's self-consciousness is total: he is the master of his action because he has cemented it in the objectivity of God's plan. He consistently governs everything he does in that he seeks to the utmost to adhere to the ultimate reality of things.

The life of Hermann the Cripple, who was born in Von Reichenau and lived in the year 1000 exemplifies how one who lives out the Catholic conception of holiness realizes his personality. Let us listen to a passage or two of Cyril Martindale's touching account of Hermann's life, the incredible rich life

of the little creature who was born most horribly deformed. He was afterwards nicknamed "contracted," so hideously distorted was he; he could not stand, let alone walk; he could hardly sit even in the special chair they made for him; even his fingers were all but too weak and knotted for him to write; even his mouth and palate were deformed and he could hardly be understood when he spoke. ... I tell you he appeared to the judges of 900 years ago what we would call "Defective." His parents sent him away to a monastery where, at the age of 30, he became a monk and where, little by little, that mind believed to be as sclerotic as his body proved to have an extraordinary capacity for expansion. Bertold, his biographer and disciple, began his account of Hermann's life by saying that he was as "expansive" in mind as he was contracted in body."

Martindale continues: "Not once in his life, can he have been 'comfortable,' or out of pain, yet what are the adjectives that cluster around him? I translate them from the Latin biography: 'pleasant, friendly, easy to

talk to; always laughing; never criticising, eagerly cheerful... And the result was that *'everybody loved him.'* And meanwhile that courageous youth ... learned mathematics, Greek, Latin, Arabic, astronomy and music." Hermann was just over forty years old when he died surrounded by the love of the monks. He passed away after writing such works as a treatise on astrolabes and a *Chronicon* of world history, after making clocks and musical instruments, and, according to tradition, after leaving us his admirable composition of *Salve Regina* and *Alma Redemptoris*. Martindale rightly concludes his account thus: "In this twisted little fellow from the Dark Ages shines out the triumph of the Faith that inspired love, of the love that acted loyally by faith."¹² He was called "the marvel of his time."

How can a life lived in pain become so rich and attractive? The energy deriving from adherence to the ultimate reality of things means that even what the world around us sees as useless has its use: evil, pain, the fatigue of living, physical and mental handicap, boredom, and even resistance to God. Nothing cannot be transformed and admirably show the effects of that transformation if all life is being lived in relation to true reality – if it is "offered to God," as Christian tradition puts it. In his comparative study of the world of Greek literature and Christianity, Charles Moeller comments: "The frontier between the human and divine has now been crossed: demolished at last is the great wall, clearing the way to the Kingdom of God, to the transfiguration of human pain. ... In truth – and it can be seen clearly – man's sanctification through suffering introduces him, even down here, to a better world – the kingdom of God."¹³

Offering any form of wretchedness to God is the opposite of abdicating. It is the bond, consciously and energetically affirmed, between our particular circumstance and the universal. Father Carlo Gnocchi, who devoted his life to the suffering of others, used to say that the world's happiness derives from human pain offered to God. And this offering holds the key to the meaning of the universe.

It must be stressed that no mechanical, forced acceptance will work the miracle of the fulfilled personality. Accepting is not enough, as Moeller adds: "A Christian cannot be a man *resigned*. He must be a man who takes up suffering in charity and joy. Then the Easter joy will reappear on earth, man's true face will be transfigured in suffering and through suffering: because of sin, pain has become a means of resurrection."¹⁴

What then is holiness? Holiness, this sign of divine life bestowed on the Church, can be encountered in the form of its three distinguishing characteristics: the miracle, equilibrium, and intensity.