

## Conclusion

### ETERNAL LIFE

After having reviewed the articles of our faith in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the articles about the mystery of Christ - from his birth of the Virgin Mary continuing with the cross and resurrection -, the Symbol of the Apostles concludes with the articles about the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church and about “eternal life”.

The symbol of the Apostles, as we said, is an expression of faith of the early Church in connection with the Baptismal rite in which the Catechumen were asked three questions about their faith in God, to which they responded “I believe”. The current Rite of Baptism starts with a question to the parents “What do you ask of God’s Church for your child? The classical response is the following: “faith”. The priest asks again: “What does faith give to you? To which the response is “eternal life”. According to this dialogue, the parents were seeking access to the faith for their child, because they saw in faith the key to “eternal life” (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 10).

Indeed, the duo “faith” - “eternal life” gives us a clue to the meaning of Christian life and the origin and purpose of the human being. Thanks to faith eternal life begins in us. The encyclical *Spe Salvi* by Pope Benedict XVI teaches that the “blessed life” is certainly directed beyond the present world, but it also has to do with the building up of this world—in very different ways, according to the historical context and the possibilities offered or excluded thereby (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 15).

This real life, towards which we try to reach out again and again, is linked to a lived union with a “people”, and for each individual it can only be attained within this “we”. It presupposes that we escape from the prison of our “I”, because only in the openness of this universal subject does our gaze open out to the source of joy, to love itself—to God (*Spe Salvi*, 14).

The terms “faith” and “eternal life” are a clear resonance of the teachings of Saint John the evangelist, who repeats, to the excess, that eternal life is intimately united to faith. He says for instance: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (3:36). And he explains that the Incarnation of the Son of God has as its objective that man receives eternal life. The initiative is in the love of the Father, who: “so loved the world that he gave his only son in order that all who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life” (3:16) and just as the people of Israel looked at the serpent mounted on the pole to recover their health (cf. Numb. 21:8-9), so shall it be for anyone who looks at the risen Son of Man, and believes in him (cf. Jn 3:15). “This is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life and I shall raise him on the last day” (6:40).

Saint John the evangelist clearly distinguishes two points: “eternal life” and “resurrection”: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day” (Jn. 6:54). These are two aspects of the same reality, albeit eternal life begins now in the present and resurrection deals with the future, with what happens after death. However, we read in the work that has served as the basis for our reflection: “resurrection is not just a distant happening at the end of the world but happens now through faith. Whoever believes is in the conversation with God that is life and outlasts death”<sup>1</sup>.

Man can no longer totally perish because he is known and loved by God. All love wants eternity<sup>2</sup>. As we said already in another place: love is stronger than death. Whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what “life” really is. He begins to perceive the meaning of the word of hope that we encountered in the Baptismal Rite: from faith I await “eternal life”—the true life which, whole and unthreatened, in all its fullness, is simply life (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 27).

Eternal life is linked to the knowledge of faith, not merely intellectual knowledge but experiential knowledge. We have spoken about this along our reflections. “Being overcome by the beauty of Christ is a more real, more profound knowledge than mere rational deduction”<sup>3</sup>. Jesus himself gives us this explanation: “This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn. 17:3).

This knowledge of God stems from what we have seen and heard and is begotten in our spirit through an experience that, sometimes, comes into us through the language of symbols. Specifically, the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate represents a place of encounter between God and mankind. This Cross, fruit of a mystical experience, shows us how the Heavenly Father is manifested through the light, as the fount, the beginning and the end of our life; a living God, full of love, Who gives Himself through the heart of his Son and the love of the Holy Spirit, penetrating into the intimacy of our being.

The Cross of the Apostolate is not a static or photographic image, it is rather a dynamic cross, which will show us different aspects of the mystery of God and of our human being-ness.

To conclude this reflection, we see it as a transfigured cross which transports us to eternal life. Concepcion Cabrera used to say: that cross reminds us of the one in heaven (AC 3:44, April 27, 1894). The wooden cross has become a *luminous Cross*. It no longer symbolizes mankind in his bodily condition, but in his new dimension where man is received by the Trinity.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 352

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 350

<sup>3</sup> J. Ratzinger, *On the Way*, 36

The Cross of the Apostolate slides now through space, via three kinds of light: the light of fire, the heavenly Father's light which envelops us in His love; the light of fire that emerges burning from the heart, this one symbolizes the Son and bring us inside the eternity of God; the light of the Holy Spirit which, clean and clear, transforms the soul, elevating it until the union (cf. *Life*, 2:314).

We contemplate the rising movement of this cross. When the Word of God takes on our humanity, He takes it to the divinity within the family of God. We contemplate on the Cross of the Apostolate a cross, symbol of humanity, that united to the Heart of Christ, brings us to the intimacy within God.

Our purpose was, when we started this work, to delve more deeply in the fundamentals truths of our faith contained in the Creed, in light of the teachings of Benedict XVI and of the spiritual experience of the Venerable Servant of God, Concepcion Cabrera de Armida, expressed in the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate. In this way we mean to penetrate the pedagogy that encloses the image of the Cross of the Apostolate, like a symbol which, through living the spirituality of our baptism, introduces us into the intimacy of the family of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Proclaiming our faith in eternal life, we have arrived at the end of our reflection about the Symbol of the Apostles and the repercussion this teaching has in the spiritual experience. The symbolic language has allowed us to capture, at once, what theology teaches through its own method. We conclude our work making a reference to what Saint John says in his gospel: "These are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31).