

Co-protagonists of hope

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Whoever visits the cathedral of Otranto in the far south of Puglia in Italy will have the good fortune of coming upon a rare marvel: the massive 12th century floor mosaic which covers the entire central nave which portrays the tree of life. On it are immortalized scenes of the history of salvation, from the murder of Cain and the crowd pressing round the Tower of Babel to the redemption brought through Christ and the time of the Church. But there are also depictions of ordinary life with symbols from the arts and professions. As well as the biblical world and the Church there are also images of Alexander the Great and from the Muslim world. The view opens out further to all of creation, with animals and plants and the signs of the zodiac marking the changing of the seasons. It is a complete vision of history and the world, a monastic work in the Greek Pantaleon tradition, not dissimilar to the *Divine Comedy* of Dante but in a visual form. There is only one phrase written on the entire work, a key to interpret the whole picture, almost at the top of the mosaic where the beginnings of events are drawn: "Where is your brother?". The decisive question upon which everything depends.

A page from the mystical writings of Chiara Lubich comes to mind which offers two phrases which themselves offer both an anthropological and cosmic universal vision: "I felt that I had been created as a gift for those who were near me and who in turn had been created by God as a gift for me." "Everything on earth is in a loving relationship with everything else." Herein lies the duty of care which we are called to have towards one another and creation: the reality is that nothing and no one is foreign to us! But the writing continues with an important observation: "One needs to be Love in order to find the golden thread running through all things". It is worth saying that care for the other and for things is, before being a task or an activity, *a way of being* which gives us a new heart and new eyes, a different way of seeing things, a mentality which goes beyond simple reasoning: "One needs to be Love in order to find the golden thread running through all things".

We speak today and are aware all the time of a sense of an anthropological transition. But to what, one might ask? We are grappling with a gender ideology that risks dissolving the fundamental man/woman polarity, and a transhumanism which dreams of extending the human beyond all limits. The digital revolution has enriched us with new opportunities but

it has also created loneliness the risk of each person closing themselves in their own world. Globalization could have made us think that an era of fraternity was dawning but instead it has brought about new forms of poverty and more acute inequality.

All this cannot be simply met with regulations and moral wish lists. Fundamentally there is a need for a more mature and different anthropological vision: to transition from a selfish individualism and hostility towards others to being inclusive and welcoming; from a way of living focused only on one's self to making room for the other in us which is far more creative; from the monotone "I" to a resounding, symphonic "I"; a sense of one's self which recognizes one's limits and is modelled on Christ where one allows one's self to be wounded by the other, ready to be responsible for them.

This issue of *Ekklesia* aims at this horizon. It addresses the need to confront an anthropology of perfection with an "anthropology of limits" and give voice to the urgent requirement of opting for those who are excluded. The issue is an invitation to see a means to hope, a way of being before taking action.

Last April 30, Pope Francis quoted a passage from Mark's gospel to the members of the national council of the Italian Catholic Action: "*The Lord worked together with them and confirmed the word by the signs that accompanied it.*" (Mk. 16, 20) Who, therefore, is working? The Gospel tells us that the action is that of the Lord: it is his exclusive right, walking "unknown" in the history we live in." "Remember this," Francis remarked, "that does not mean we have no responsibility, rather, it brings us back to our identity as missionary-disciples. [...] Keep well in mind that 'our competence comes from God' (2 Cor 3, 5); that history is guided by the love of the Lord and we are co-protagonists".