

a gaze that transforms...



*When you looked at me,
your grace your eyes impressed on me;
that's why **you loved** me,
and in that they deserved
mine adore what they saw in you
(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle, 23)*

retreat June 2025

Training and Spirituality

PROVINCE OF OUR LADY OF THE PILLAR

This month's retreat invites us on a journey, a journey through some passages of Scripture, searching, scrutinising and wanting to lose ourselves in a gaze, one that transforms.¹

We are going to pray with the creative moment narrated in the book of Genesis and with the experience of a man whose life was changed by God's gaze in two stages, Peter, as told to us in two passages from the Gospels of John and Luke.

There are few things in life that can be as transformative, deep and penetrating as the gaze of a loved one. In the sparkle of their eyes, we find a whole universe of emotions and thoughts that compel us to explore beyond the superficial.

The gaze of a loved one, charged with affection and understanding, has the power to change our perception of the world. It makes us feel seen and understood in our purest essence, creating a connection that transcends words. Every time we immerse ourselves in eyes that observe us with love, it is as if we discover something new within ourselves that is reflected and illuminated in the depth of that gaze.

The gaze of a loved one is a constant reminder that we are not alone on this journey called life; it is a source of strength and comfort, a lighthouse that illuminates the darkest corners of our being, transforming us into more complete and authentic people.

¹ The whole thread of this retreat, as well as many of the texts, are based on the book *A gaze that transforms* (Desclée De Brouwer, 2024), by Francesco Cocco.

And if we must lose ourselves in loving gazes, let us lose ourselves in God's gaze which is a powerful and continuous creative act. Let us discover in the beating heart of human history (and of your history), a golden thread that crosses the centuries, a precious weft woven by the gaze of God, a gaze that creates, calls and redeems.

GOD's own gaze CONTEMPLATES your own life with new eyes. Let this gaze penetrate deep down and transform you from a passive spectator into an active participant in an eternal dialogue.

THE GAZE OF GOD ILLUMINATES CREATION

Reading from the book of Genesis 1:1-31

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a chaotic solitude and darkness covered the abyss, while the spirit of God hovered over the waters.

*And God said, "Let there be light. And there was light. God **saw** that the light was **good** and separated it from the darkness. And he called the light day, and the darkness night.*

An afternoon passed, a morning passed: the first day.

[...]

Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness, that they may have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over the wild beasts, and over the creeping things of the earth. And God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them, saying to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

And he added: "I give you all the plants that exist on earth and have seed for sowing; and all the trees that bear fruit with seed in them shall be food for you; and to all the animals of the field, to the birds of the air, and to all living things that move on the earth, I give every green herb for food.

*And so it was. Then God **saw** all that he had done, and it was all **very good**.*

An afternoon passed, a morning passed: the sixth day.

To understand well the message hidden in the biblical story that we propose to pray, we have to dare to discover that the essence of the human being is to affirm that *we are relationship*, beings created to open ourselves to *otherness*, to what we are not ourselves, to novelty, to difference, to the unexpected. And if we can say this, it is because we also believe that *God is relationship*, and as such wanted and wants to reveal himself to every human being.

The three characters of Rublev's famous and beautiful icon of Mambré present us with the relationship and communion that unites the three persons of the Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That perfect and mysterious relationship in which God exists from the beginning is the vocation to which we are each called. God himself calls us into existence by making us a *you* to relate to.

In the beginning, in the beginning, God's only will is one of love, of encounter, of creation. Every act of creation is an act of hope, a seed sown in the soil of history waiting to germinate. God decides to create human beings in order to relate to each other, to have a "*you*" to love.

Creation is a perpetual invitation to seek God, to recognise him in others, to live our lives in response to creative love. In this continuous search for harmony with creation and with the Creator lies the true essence of our humanity, a living image of God's gaze that illuminates creation.

All good. We are invited to look in this way... to stop in each creature and discover its goodness, its beauty, its loveliness; to discover, in short, the imprint of its Creator.

Let us recover the positive gaze that God had when contemplating everything that flows from his hands, let us recover that superlative contentment of God when contemplating his most perfect work: the human being, the culmination of creation. Let us realise that God's creative

will includes nothing evil, there is no trace of evil: injustice, envy, pride, selfishness... have another origin... from God, they do not come.

Created in the image and likeness of God, the fruit of a creative plural, which speaks to us again of our most real being: *relationship*. Being created in God's image gives us the gift and the responsibility to care for what has been entrusted to us: the harmony and beauty of all creation.

The human being is relationship. God is relationship. It is a perfect and mysterious relationship that was already in God from the beginning.

- Change the way you look today... make it deeper, more from the heart. God creates, pronounces the Word and creates. God pronounces and creates us... Rejoice and recognise the imprint of your Creator in what surrounds you, in your own history, in your life.
 - You don't need to look anywhere, if you want to have an image of God, it is enough for you to immerse yourself in the mystery of your fellow man, for he was created in the image and likeness of God. Behold your neighbour, your sister, God himself is its author.
 - He looks at the infinitely small and the infinitely large, the world that extends endlessly and the environment that is closest, the light that inhabits it and the pain it suffers. God, Creator, is the ever-open question, the trust that is reborn in spite of everything, the creative responsibility, the Act that animates, the Breath that impels, the Relationship that unifies and serenades.
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THE GLANCES THAT CHANGED PEDRO'S LIFE

There are looks that cross time and the heart, that do not stop at the surface, but sink to the depths of life. Looks that shatter you from the inside, that awaken, that call, that provoke, that redeem. Such were the looks that Jesus gave to Peter, the fisherman from Galilee. And that is how this story begins: with an exchange of glances that completely transformed his existence.

A reading from the Gospel of John 1:35-40:

The next day John was with two of his disciples, and looking at Jesus as he passed by, he said, "This is the Lamb of God. The two disciples heard his words and followed him.

When Jesus turned and **saw** that they were following him, he asked them, "What are you looking for? They said to him, "Rabbi (which means Teacher), where do you live? He said to them, "**Come and see**".

So **they went** and **saw** where he lived and stayed with him that day: it was about the tenth hour.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus; he first finds his brother Simon and says to him, "We have found the Messiah (which means Christ)". And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus **looked at him** and said to him, "You are Simon, son of John, you shall be called Cephas (which is translated: Peter).

If we want to discover the face of God reflected in the gaze of Jesus, we will have to meet Peter, the stone-hard disciple who, even without understanding, never stopped looking at Jesus and never turned his eyes away from the gaze of Jesus, which does not judge, but penetrates and transforms.

Let us contemplate Peter, the one who experienced the mystery (gift and task) of being looked at by the Lord. In this experience of gazes is hidden a silent dialogue, a conversation that transcends words and becomes the seed of new life.

We are placed at a precise moment, "*the next day*", a temporal detail that invites us to turn the page and take up again John the Baptist's announcement: "*After me comes a man who is ahead*

of me, because he was before me". This is the end of John's mission: to prepare the way, to point to the Lamb of God, and then to step aside for others to follow. John fixes his gaze on Jesus and recognises him: it is not simply to observe, as if we were spectators, it is to penetrate, to discover what is beyond the visible, it is to touch the essence.

John reveals a truth that changes the course of history: the title, *Lamb of God*, refers to the one who bears the sin of the world, who will carry the cross of humanity on his shoulders. This recognition causes John's disciples to begin to follow Jesus, almost in a natural impulse, as if they had been waiting for this moment all along.

What follows is a delicate play of silences and steps: the disciples follow him, but dare not speak, it is Jesus who, sensing their presence behind him, turns around. This gesture is much more than a simple turn (in biblical language, to turn is a sign of conversion), it is the movement of God approaching the person, it is God himself taking (once again) the initiative.

Jesus asks: "*What are you looking for?*", a profound question, what are we really looking for, a teacher, a meaning, a new life? They answer with another question: "*Rabbi, where do you live?*" They do not seek an immediate answer, they seek to dwell where He dwells, to share life with Him. Jesus does not offer explanations, he does not give speeches, he only suggests an invitation: "*Come and see*". A call to experience, to be close, to see with one's own eyes what it means to live with Him.

In the imagery of John's gospel, the house of Jesus is more than a physical place: it is humanity itself. Jesus has come to dwell among us, and those who would follow him must learn to recognise humanity as his dwelling place. To see where Jesus lives is to enter into the light, to leave behind the darkness of misunderstanding, of anger, of complaint, of selfishness... it is to begin to form part of a new family, of a Community born of Encounter, of Relationship.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, almost sunset, the threshold of a new day (an afternoon passed, a morning passed... remember?) and from that very hour, their lives would never be the same again. And here appears Andrew, who, moved by the emotion of his discovery, runs to look for his brother Simon. It is an impetuous, urgent, irrepressible act, the joy of having found the Messiah cannot be kept, it needs to be shared, communicated.

[And at this point we can ask ourselves what are those news items that I can't stand and that I enjoy sharing on my whatsapp or on the phone].

Simon Peter, the fisherman from Bethsaida, was unknowingly on the verge of an encounter that would mark his destiny: no grandiloquent words, no promises, just a glance!

Jesus looks at him, pierces him, penetrates him and in that instant changes his name: "*You are Simon, son of John; you shall be called Peter*". Jesus' gaze sees in Peter what he is not yet, but what he is called to be: a rock, a pillar, despite his weaknesses, his outbursts, clumsiness and contradictions. Peter makes no declaration of intent, he says nothing, he just lets himself be looked at, and that look is enough to sow something new in him, something incredibly fruitful.

When you invited us to go and see, it was the tenth hour, already close to the hour of sunset, which marked the beginning of a new day, the beginning of the new humanity.

– You ask What are we looking for?

 What do we expect from You?

 What do we think you can give us?

– And I ask: Jesus, penetrate me with your gaze.

However, this is only the beginning. There will be another look, much later, that will complete this transformation.

A reading from Luke 22, 54-62

They arrested him, led him away and put him in the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. They had lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and were sitting around it; Peter sat among them.

*A maid **saw him** sitting by the fire, **stared at him** and said, "This one was with him too.*

Peter denied it, saying, "I don't know him, woman.

*Soon another **saw him** and said: "You are also one of them.*

Peter replied, "I am not, man.

About an hour later another insisted: "This one was really with him, for he is also a Galilean.

Peter replied: "I don't know what you're saying, man.

Just as he was speaking, the cock crowed.

*The Lord turned and **looked at** Peter, and Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times".*

And going outside, he wept bitterly.

We come to the dark night, when Jesus has been arrested and taken to the high priest's house. Peter follows him from afar, his fear clinging to his body. Around a campfire, under the accusing gaze of servants and onlookers, another decisive episode unfolds.

Peter denies knowing Jesus, he denies having seen him. A curious choice of words, for the verb "to know" in Greek is linked to the verb "to see". Peter, the one who was looked at, now says that he has not seen. Perhaps he is not completely lying, perhaps he has not yet understood, he has not yet seen with his heart.

And in the face of our inability to see, Jesus' gaze again, taking the initiative: We don't see Him? There is no reproach, no condemnation, only a gaze that embraces, that sustains, that loves in spite of betrayal.

Pedro remembers, relives that first meeting, that first of many complicit, amusing, healing, performative glances (sisters, allow me this precious word that just writing it already produces the desired effect), that moment when his life began to transform. And she weeps bitterly, leaving that aftertaste in her mouth when you know that you have swallowed again what you shouldn't have, tears that are not only of pain, but of a deep understanding, of a conversion that now springs from the most intimate part of her being.

I like to imagine that Jesus' gaze never left Peter. Even in his denial, even in his flight, even when words fail and fear wins. Jesus' gaze remains, patient and loving, waiting for Peter to meet himself, waiting for him to truly see.

And in that gaze there is also you and me. Because in each one of us there is a Peter who doubts, who stumbles, who denies, but who is also capable of crying and of allowing himself to be transformed. However great our falls may be, that look of compassion that wants to remake us, that wants to make us new, always awaits us.

Jesus looked at Peter and saw beyond his error. He looked at him as one looks at a friend, at someone who is loved for who he is and for what he can become. And that is the promise offered to us: that our miseries are not the last word, that there is always a look that lifts us up again, that converts us, that calls us to be greater than we ever imagined.

Peter, the fisher of men, is a witness to this love. A love that does not stop in the face of betrayal,

a love that transforms denials into confessions of faith, a love that turns bitter tears into the beginning of a new life.

Your gaze is full of love, a gaze that heals deep wounds, a gaze that rehabilitates and recreates us.

- Lord, help us to look at ourselves with your gaze.
 - If we do not turn away from the depths of your gaze we will have life, however complicated our paths may be and however incapable we may be of adhering to you with consistency and firm and sincere faith.
 - Even in the deepest silence Your gaze continues to seek us, to call us, wanting us to participate in Your saving work.
 - Let us not be content with merely brushing against Jesus, let us live looking Jesus face to face, allowing ourselves to be penetrated by his intense gaze.
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Looking at me from you

Look at me You,	my unknown self,
Jesus of Nazareth.	sown by You
That I feel	since my inception,
to rest on me	and germinate my future
Your free look,	breaking into silence
without slavery	with the green of its leaves
synagogue,	the crushed earth
no requirements	that buries me
to ignore me,	and that nourishes me.
without the distance	Let me in
that freezes,	within You,
without the greed	to look at me
that I buy.	from You,
May Your gaze	and feel
is posed	that dissolve,
in my senses,	so many glances
and filtered	their own and others
to the corners	that deform me
inaccessible	and they break me.
where it awaits you	

B. González Buelta

♪ **Where do you live? - GLENDA [Click here].**

