

## 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter by the Abbot General OCist for the MFC – 11.09.2012

"Here is the second degree of humility: not to like one's own will, nor delight in the accomplishment of one's own desires, but rather imitate in one's behaviour the word of the Lord: 'I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me' (Jn 6,38). Scripture also says: 'Pleasure (*voluptas*) incurs trouble, effort procures the crown'." (RB 7, 31-33)

To be truthful, this degree begins in the first, when saint Benedict writes: "As to our own will, it is forbidden to us to do it under the terms of Scripture. 'Renounce your own will' (Si 18,30), and, what is more, we ask God in the Lord's prayer that his will may be done in us (cf. Mt 6,10)." (RB 7,19-20)

The main idea is that there is an exercise of our will that withdraws us into our selves, and an exercise which, to the contrary, opens us up to that which is beyond us. When the will is at the service of pleasure, one's own interest, one's personal gain, when, more than *voluntas* it becomes *voluptas*, we deprive ourselves of the momentum that is given to it as an element of the image of God in us. Freewill is the faculty that reflects in us the capacity of loving as God loves, the capacity to want and desire the other as the other, and not as an object to be used for our pleasure. Freewill is given to us from God to make us able to desire Him above all, and to desire infinity that is God Himself. *Voluptas* is to the contrary, the research for a pleasure onto which we withdraw, renouncing the tension towards the infinite. It is the pleasure that wants to consume and not to love in gratuitous joy without end.

But how can we disengage from the tendency that is now rooted in us, sinners, to want to possess straight away the object of our desires, to want to possess it only for ourselves, only for our pleasure? This tendency does not only concern the affective desire, the sexual desire, but all the other cravings of the human heart: desire for riches, desire for power, for beauty, the desire to be loved... Each of these desires could be good, and can serve the common good, if we live it without withdrawing into ourselves, without the object of these desires becoming a prey, plunder.

Saint Benedict helps us to understand that Jesus Christ wants to meet us and free us, precisely on this point, from the misery of our heart. Jesus wants specifically to take us by the hand and help us find a path to get out of this obscure wood, this jungle of our desires curled up in ourselves that suffocates the freedom to love and desire God for whom we are created.

To guide us in this liberation of our will so that it achieves gratuitous love, Jesus has gone before us and above all has given us the example of this new life, this new heart that He wants to recreate in us.

Here we must revert to the Christological hymn in Philippians 2 that I quoted a few days ago, but starting from the words saint Paul uses to introduce this hymn: "There must be no competition among you, no conceit; but everybody is to be self effacing. Always considering the other person to be better than yourself so that nobody thinks of his own interest first but everybody thinks of other people's interest instead. In your minds you must be the same as Jesus Christ" (Ph 2,3-5).

In this hymn, the fact is underlined that Jesus, being at the same time God, "did not cling to equality with God" (2,6). Literally: "did not consider as a prey his equality with God", that is to say as something to grasp and to hold uniquely for oneself, for one's own pleasure.

The humility of Jesus right up to the abnegation of the Cross goes against the current of all voluptuousness, of the concupiscence of the world, of sinful humanity, in counter-current to the spasmodic research of personal interest, gain, or pleasure, that poisons the hearts and relationships of all humanity.

Jesus is specifically the good shepherd who by losing his life for us, leads us to free our will from withdrawal into ourselves of the mercenary, of the thief, and the brigand, or even the wolf, to lead us to the inexhaustible fields of his love (cf. Jn 10,1-18).

This is to say that Christ helps us above all to leave the fear of the renouncement of our pleasure and our interest. If we seize the objects of our desires as prey and devourer them at once, it is, above all, because we are afraid of being unsatisfied, of not finding joy, the satisfaction of the desire of our heart. If we coil up in ourselves, it is because we are afraid of losing ourselves, to finding ourselves without anything, without joy. The mentality of the world presents the thoroughly debauched as heroes, as dauntless people who have the courage to grab and profit from everybody and from everything. But in fact, these people are terribly afraid, afraid of not being happy, afraid of giving their life. They are as people shipwrecked on a river in flood that grasp uselessly at anything that gives them support.

Jesus approaches the man who lives like this, and each of us carry in some way or another this man, and before judging him or condemning, he speaks to him of the Father, of the confidence that He has in his Father, that we also can have. Reread the meeting with the Samaritan (Jn 4) or with Zacchaeus (Lk 19,1-10), or the different encounters with the publicans and prostitutes. In one way or another, Jesus sits down beside the person who is a slave to pleasure, and, before asking him to change his life, he gives him his confidence that in the desire of the Father we can lose all attachment to our own interest and pleasure without losing the fullness of life, of happiness. And even, it is precisely this detachment that assures the possession of what our heart really desires.

Let us return to our degree of humility and to the renunciation of our own will that Benedict asks from us. We discover that he asks this renunciation of us precisely by uniting us to Christ who abandons himself with confidence and desire for the will of the Father: "Here is the second degree of humility: not to like one's own will, nor delight in the accomplishment of one's desire, but rather imitate in one's behaviour the word of the Lord: 'I have come not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me' (Jn 6,38)." (RB 7,31-32)

Saint Benedict asks to renounce our own will by remembering the prayer "Our Father: Your will be done" (RB 7,20). He asks us to renounce our will by asking with confidence from the Father, as Jesus, that His will be done, so that, in friendship with Christ, our heart no longer fears to open our hands, hands with which we would like to grasp and clasp everything and everybody, to instead, embrace the Father who loves us and gives us life and all things in the centuple of his gratuitousness.

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