

Abbatial Benediction of Dom Peter Verhalen
Abbey Our Lady of Dallas, 12 April 2012

In the chapter of the Rule of St Benedict on *Lenten observance* [RB 49] all the communal and individual observances of the monks are aimed towards returning to the truth of monastic life that we offend by our negligence. At the same time, Lent has, of course, the aim of bringing us to celebrate Easter, the expectation of which should fill the monks with “the joy of spiritual desire”. [49,7].

Thus St Benedict brings us to understand that, for him, the purity of monastic life coincides with the desire of the Pascal event, a desire that inspires us to offer our life “in the joy of the Holy Spirit” [49,9]. The life of a monk is a desire to offer his life to the Resurrection of Christ that transforms and saves the world enslaved by death and sin. A desire that wishes to adhere to the desire of Christ himself, who by giving up his life on the Cross, offers his death to the event of the Resurrection, of filial and eternal Life for all.

All life, at all times, all the rhythm of monastic life is for St Benedict centred on Easter, animated by and constantly regenerated by Easter. If a monk regains, during Lent, the truth of his vocation, it is because that truth is a Pascal grace, the same that Christ breathed on his disciples in the Cenacle, this breath of joy and forgiveness that is the Paraclete [cf Jn 20,22-23].

However, it is at the heart of this time of joy of spiritual desire tensed towards Holy Easter, this time which is in fact the time of all human life, of all human life that resuscitates in Christ at the moment of death, it is in the heart of this time that St Benedict unveils the profound meaning of the role of the Abbot for his brothers in the monastery.

Each brother is responsible of offering freely to God, in the joy of the Holy Spirit, something more than the fixed measure, but St Benedict adds “that which each offers, he must submit to his Abbot, so as to accomplish it with his prayer and his consent – *et cum eius fiat oratione et voluntate*” [49,8].

As so often in the Rule, this indication, which could be limited to regulating a particular observance, concentrates in a few words all the sense of the abbatial ministry, as a drop of water is able to reflect all the countryside around it.

The Abbot is effectively the person who, in the midst of his brothers, assumes the responsibility of the offering of their life, so that it may excel in the grace of the joyful pneumatic attraction of the Pascal Christ.

The Abbot must exercise this responsibility through his prayer and his will, by his prayer that intercedes and his will that consents, that approve the offering, saying that the offering is good, agreeable to God and men.

Prayer and consent: through these two attitudes the Abbot unites himself to the offering of the brother, as God the Father to the perfect Offering of his Son Jesus. Thus the brother becomes also his son, a son that the father leaves to grow in the love without measure, in the gift of life larger than life, in the Pascal life of Christ.

It is this profound ministry of sacerdotal paternity which is the soul of all the acts and the multiple and disparate tasks of an Abbot, and that will deeply unify them, in the heart of his prayer and his freedom, in the heart of his offering and his love, in the Pascal communion with Christ who died and is resuscitated so that all should have Life in abundance [Jn 10,10].

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