

## Sunday XIV (C) - Rome, O.Cist Generalate – Course for O.Cist Superiors

*Readings: Isaiah 66.10-14, Galatians 6:14-18, Luke 10:1-12,17-20*

"Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst wolves" (Luke 10:3)

In this surprising commissioning of his disciples, Jesus sends them to prepare for his coming "in every town and place he intended to visit" (Lk 10:1). But before being a pastoral or missionary instruction, it is a revelation of himself, a description of the mystery of his person and his mission. Jesus uses a word which tells us all about himself, all about his mystery, all about the parable of his life. With this word Jesus tells us about his birth in Bethlehem, his flight into Egypt, his hidden life in Nazareth, his public life on the roads of Galilee and Judea; and Jesus tells us, especially, about his passion, death and resurrection in Jerusalem. He is the first and true Lamb sent by the Father into the midst of wolves. He has so embraced his mission that he makes himself the Lamb who was sacrificed, sacrificed even for the salvation of the wolves, for the eschatological transformation of the wolves into lambs, as Isaiah prophesied: "*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb*" (Is. 11:6). And Christ remains the immolated Lamb, even if he is risen and glorious, even if he is the spouse and model of the Church in the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Rev 5:6). And in as much as he is the Lamb who was slain yet who lives, Christ continues to transmit to the Church the mission of following him in going as lambs among wolves, that is, in going up to the utter limits of love, the love of Christ.

Evangelization, whether new or old, is by its nature always new and it should be constantly animated by this invitation of Jesus who reveals to our freedom the secret and the nature of the success of any commitment to Christian discipleship and mission.

All the other instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples in this gospel are nothing but the resonance of this, nothing but particular aspects or practical facets of what it means to be lambs sent, just like Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus, into the midst of wolves. The poverty, the sobriety of means and of clothing, the simplicity in relationships, the peace that is brought into the homes, but also the power to heal the sick, to proclaim that the Kingdom is near, all this is nothing more than the explanation and realization of the fundamental mission in life: that of humbly incarnating the grace to follow, love, and represent "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (Jn 1:29).

The power of the name of Christ which submits even the demons to his disciples, "*the power to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the powers of the enemy*", and not be harmed by anything (Lk 10:17.19); all this power is paradoxically contained in the gentle and humble weakness of the Lamb of God who unites us to Himself, and who in his heart brings our names before the Father in heaven. The power of the disciples sent by Christ is, to borrow an expression of a famous Czech philosopher and dissident, a "power of the powerless," the strength of one who is freed from power, freed especially from the lust for power, freed from the thirst for benefits for himself, freed from ambition, freed from the desire to be successful, even "spiritually" successful:

*"Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven"* (Lk 10:20). Freedom is born and grows in us by cultivating this communion that God has taken the initiative to establish with each of us, now and forever, for eternity. The Father knows us by name. In the Trinity, each one of us is talked about by name. God gives personal attention to each little disciple of Christ, to every human being. This is the true joy that we can always desire, and that, if cultivated, frees us from the sadness of ambition for our glory, which is always a disappointing ambition and which separates us from others.

Thus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is for us the source of communion and mission, that is, at the same time, He is the One to whom we are united, to whom we belong, and the One by whom and in whom we are sent, in whom we live our vocation and mission. Because our true mission is communion of Christ, and in Christ with everyone, we must bring that communion even "into the midst of wolves."

Even when we meditate on our monastic and pastoral vocation, when we ask what it ought to mean for our mission as Cistercians, our mission as abbots and abbesses, as superiors, when we ask what we should do in our communities, we must not forget that no Christian charism nor state of life may propose other forms of vocation and mission than that of the Lamb of God, sent by the Father to save the world, who offers himself as a sacrifice of communion. The Lamb is the image of the Heart of Christ sent into the world to meet all men, to meet all that which in man is against God's love, to meet all the spears which, although wounding His Heart, receive from Him the water and the blood of the Redemption, of the Mercy of God again and always again (cf. Jn 19:34).

St. Paul, in the second reading from the letter to the Galatians, gets impatient with those who would define the Christian vocation and mission according to the criteria and values of human strength and power. Rather for him, only the Cross is the model and source of new life: *"From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body"* (Gal 6:17). Paul has assimilated in himself the offering of the crucified Lamb, he is made a lamb with the Lamb to whom he has sacrificed and consecrated his entire life: *"As for me, may I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"* (Gal 6:14).

The whole way of the Rule of St. Benedict and the Cistercian charism in its profound truth wants to lead us to this truth of life, to this transparency of ourselves before the Paschal Christ, the Lamb who was slain and yet who lives. We are called to follow and to offer to our brothers and sisters a path of humility and meekness that leads to charity without fear (cf. RB Prol. 45-50; 7:67; 70: 72). Yes, it is a road on which lambs who go with trust and love even in the midst of wolves, in order to allow the one true innocent Lamb to redeem the world.

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