

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for the MFC – 27.08.2013**

So together we'll seek to meditate on the Rule, in order to find the source of the water that rekindles the flame of God's gift of our vocation. It seems paradoxical to speak of water that feeds a flame, but that is the nature of the Holy Spirit who is fire and water.

In a little town in Friuli I saw a fountain that emits water along with a flammable gas. If it is night you can light a match and the gas will ignite and you can see that the fountain emits water and fire at the same time. This is a good image of the Holy Spirit, Source of living water and burning flame, who bathes and ignites our lives, so that they bear fruit. The Spirit is both the water and the sun that bring forth fruit out of the seed of the word of God sown in the soil of our lives and freedom.

Therefore, meditating on the Rule in the light of the word of God serves to give water and sunshine again to the seed of our vocation, to the seed of the charism of our religious family, so that it bears fruit in the soil in which it finds itself, grounded in the reality in which we live today, in the place where each of us lives with our qualities and our defects, in the soil of our culture, with its social situation, with our own personality.

Sometimes it seems difficult to understand what St. Benedict asks of us in order to live his charism today. But I am convinced that St. Benedict wrote his Rule with such a profound and universal knowledge of the human person and of the Christian event that every culture and era can discover themselves in him, that they can deepen the knowledge and the way that he proposes. I realize more and more that when one feels that St. Benedict is distant from our cultural awareness, in truth it is not because St. Benedict is distant from us, but because we are far from a true and deep awareness of our humanity, from a Christian awareness of our humanity, that is, from a way of feeling human and of living our humanity which are only possible in the light of Christ and of the Gospel.

Having said this, with the Chapters of this Course I would like to start from the point where we left off last year; and if you have forgotten, you can reread those Chapters on the Order's website ([www.ocist.org](http://www.ocist.org); [Capitoli Abate Generale](#)).

Last year we meditated on the fear of God, and then I commented on the whole of Chapter 7 of the Rule, the Chapter on the degrees of humility. In the meantime, however, at the beginning of July there was also a Course for the

Superiors of the Cistercian Order, and there, as well, I gave three Chapters on the theme of prayer and the role of the Superior in the monastery's communal prayer. It would be worth your while to go and read them, because in those Chapters I began to meditate on some points I want to deepen with you during this month. I will take up some of the passages of those Chapters to the Superiors when it comes to developing them with you, especially with regard to the two themes that seem fundamental to me: the concept of the Work of God, that St. Benedict identifies with communal prayer, and the theme of filial adoption that is offered and given to us in Christ.

Last year I commented on Chapter 7 which deals with humility. This chapter culminates in the 12th step of humility which presents us with the totally humble monk, "whose humility is not only in his heart, but is also noticed by those who see him. That is to say that whether he is at the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields or anywhere else, and whether he is sitting, walking or standing, he always has his head bowed and his eyes toward the ground. Feeling the guilt of his sins at every moment, he considers himself already present at the hour of Judgment and constantly repeats in his heart what the publican in the Gospel said with his eyes fixed on the earth: 'Lord, I am a poor sinner and am not worthy to lift up my eyes to heaven' (Luke 18:13; Matt. 8:8)" (RB 7:62-65).

This step of humility gives us the starting point for a reflection on the Rule and on life. In fact, I am struck by the sentence in which Benedict lists the times and places where the humble monk expresses his humility: "at the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields, anywhere else" ( RB 7,63). In Latin, "*in opere Dei, in oratorio, in monasterio, in horto, in via, in agro vel ubicumque.*"

This is not a random list. It has an order, and this order is the order of radiation. There is a center, and then there are always widening concentric circles. The center is the Divine Office, the *Opus Dei*; the circles arranged in an order flow from it: the oratory, the monastery, the garden, then the road, then the fields, and finally there is an "*ubicumque*", an everywhere, that ideally is throughout the rest of the world.

In this short sentence I think we can see a key to interpret and understand the entire Rule, as well as the concept of the monastic vocation and its significance for the world that St. Benedict transmits to us. The truly humble monk embodies and perfectly expresses this vocation. We must look at this icon of the truth of life in order to understand how we should live the whole Rule. Then, we should

allow ourselves to be formed by it so that we, too, embody this truth of life that humbly radiates out to the whole world.

The Rule, in fact, as a whole describes the various circles that St. Benedict lists here, and how we should live them. At the center there is the Work of God, the Office, communal and personal prayer. Then, the church, the oratory of the monastery, is the first circle that forms around this center. Next there is the monastery, the house where the monks live, meditate, sleep, eat, welcome guests, etc. Following this is the garden, that is, the internal garden, which also includes the work spaces inside the monastery enclosure. When you go beyond the monastery walls, you find yourself "*in via*," on the public road, therefore in the circle where strangers are met. Next follows the circle of the fields, that is, the land in the countryside, often in places far beyond the monastery walls, but which nonetheless belong to the monastery. Finally, there is, as I said, an "*ubicumque*," an "everywhere else", where we can ideally see all the world, the area or space where the monks normally do not go, but which St. Benedict does not exclude from the radiation that the humble monk personifies.

The rule wants to teach us to live with truth in this ideal space of life that has a center and that from this center radiates out to the entire world.

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