

### 3rd Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for the MFC – 28.08.2013

"... during the Divine Office, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields, everywhere else - *in opere Dei, in oratorio, in monasterio, in horto, in via, in agro vel ubicumque*" (RB 7:63).

As I said yesterday, this sentence on the twelfth step of humility describes what we might call the "Benedictine area" of life. An area that is largely the same as that where every human being lives, but which has an order, a particular structure. This structure, I said, is made up of a center that has many concentric circles which radiate out from around it. Think of what happens when you throw a stone onto a calm water surface. The point where the stone hits the water becomes the center of the circles that radiate farther and farther out. And the circles, near or far, always have a common center, they are all unified by the center of their radiation.

Now, if you look carefully at the list of circles that Benedict enumerates, we can see that there is a substantial difference between the central point and the circles: all the circles are architecturally or geographically identifiable places or spaces: the church, the monastery, the garden, the road, the field, the world. The center, instead, is not really a place; rather it is an action, an event, something that happens: it is the work of God. So, at the center of the humble monk's radiation is the work of God, a work that God does. Certainly, the Divine Office is prayed in a place, in the choir; and St. Benedict could have made his list placing the oratory at the center; he could have started from the oratory where we celebrate the Office. Instead he makes a distinction. He starts his list from the Work of God, then he mentions the oratory, etc. It is not so much the church as a place, as a space and building that is the true center of the humble monk's radiation, rather it is the monastic prayer as the Work of God, which in necessity, as is stated elsewhere, may be celebrated even in the fields or on the street (cf. RB:50).

The work of God, *l'opus Dei*, if the expression is understood literally, means God who works, God who does something. This means, first of all, that God is present, and that He is present as the living God, the Creator, the All-powerful One, who is in action, who works. This means that at the center of our lives Benedict puts the Lord who works. Therefore, the radiation in all the areas of the humble monk's life is not something that the monk himself does; this radiation is not the fruit of his work, rather it is a radiation of the work of God. This requires total humility, because this radiation is only possible if God, not man, is at the center, and it is possible only if radiating is not the work of man, but the work of God. For this radiation to happen, it is necessary to have the humility to put God and his work at the center of life, at the center of ourselves, at the center of who we are and what we do. The entire path of the steps of humility described in Chapter 7 of the Rule wants to lead us to become persons who are totally centered on God and his work, and therefore, persons who allow this center to radiate outwards into all areas and spaces of human life.

We immediately notice that this totally humble monk is not passive, mediocre, or a person who plays dumb. Instead, he is extremely purposeful and active, precisely because he is not limited to simply radiating what he is and does, but what God is and does. We will see in more detail what this means, but it is important that we keep this in mind from the start.

The true model of this humility centered on the work of God and that radiates outwards into everything else is obviously the Virgin Mary. When Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), in that "fiat", in that "may it happen" in that "may it be done," is expressed precisely all her humility which allows the active presence of the Lord to be at the center of her life. And the immediate effect is just what St. Benedict describes: a radiation of the work of God wherever Mary goes. "In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah. Entering the house of Zechariah, she greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit"(Lk 1:39-41).

It is to this fullness of life and vitality that St. Benedict wants to lead us. But the condition is humility, and the condition of humility is allowing the work of God, the God who works, to take the central place in our lives. The fullness and the truth of human life, that is holiness, is the radiance of the work of God.

Why is this? Why is radiating the work of God the most profound and sublime truth of our lives? Why is the person who puts God who works at the center of their life a real human being?

Simply because we ourselves are the work of God, we are being brought into being by God, in every moment of our existence; and nothing more than letting God work corresponds to our nature, to what we are. Whoever puts the work of God at the center of their life, puts the ultimate and total truth of themselves at the center of their life, and because of this they can carry and radiate this truth about themselves wherever they go. The humble person is therefore a witness and prophet about the truth of our human nature; even more, they are a witness and prophet about the truth of every being, of every creature, from a blade of grass to the stars. For even the blade of grass and the stars, in their unconsciousness of what they are, will be able to be reflected in the heart of the humble person in order to reveal themselves in their true beauty.

I think that we need to deepen this point even more, and I hope to do so in the next chapters, because it seems that it is very important for our lives and the life of our communities, as well as very important for our Orders and for the Church. For I always have the impression that if we do not live our vocation at this level, at least as desire and awareness, we will never be happy, and our monastic life will not help us to grow, to be real people, and thus to radiate in the world the truth and beauty of the Christian life to which all are in great need.

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