

## 10th Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for MFC - 05.09.2013

Yesterday I said that the center of the center of God's work is Christological, paschal and Eucharistic. We can better understand this if we think that, in Christ and in the gift of the Holy Spirit, the heart of God's work is, essentially, the filial adoption that the Father's mercy grants us, thanks precisely to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The work that God wants to accomplish in us is to make us his children in his Son. It is a work that cannot be realized without a filial relationship with God, and therefore without his participation, nor without ours. In the *Opus Dei* of the liturgy, God is present in order to make us his children. I spoke about this at some length in the course to the Superiors, highlighting the quote from Romans 8:15 that St. Benedict used when he explains why the superior of the monastery is called *Abbas*. Let me quote you from that Chapter to the superiors:

“Prayer as a relationship with God is the fundamental vocation of the monks and nuns who are called to follow the Rule of St. Benedict. With respect to this fundamental and common vocation, the abbot has a precise responsibility which St. Benedict presents at the beginning of the chapter on the abbot when he explains why the superior of the monastery is called “Abbot”. As you know, St. Benedict refers to a passage in the Letter to the Romans: “He (the abbot) is believed to be the representative of Christ in the monastery, since he is called with a title of Christ, as the Apostle says: ‘You have received the spirit of adoption of sons by which we exclaim: Abba, Father!’” (RB 2:2-3, Rom 8:15).

One may not have noticed it, but this biblical quote, in which St. Paul uses the term “Abba” in reference to God the Father and not to Jesus, inserts the name and role of the abbot into the context of Jesus' prayer, into the cry of love to the Father that the Son expresses in the Holy Spirit. More precisely, this biblical quote inserts the term Abbot into the context of the prayer that the Son of God shares with all humanity by virtue of the Redemption that makes us sons in the Son, adopted children of the Father in Christ who died and rose for us.” ([www.ocist.org](http://www.ocist.org); Capitoli Abate Generale; Chapter 2013.07.05 EN, p. 2)

Filial adoption is the culmination of God's work of love towards us. In it each level of God's work that we have meditated in the Psalms reaches its completion. Filial adoption completes the creation as St. Paul expresses in his letter to the Romans: “For creation waits with eager longing for the children of God to be revealed. Creation, in fact, was subjected to futility, (...) in the hope that creation itself will also be set free from its bondage to decay and be brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God. We know, in fact, that the whole of creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. And not only creation, but we too, who have the first fruits of the

Spirit, groan inwardly while we await the adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies." (Rom 8:19-23)

Filial adoption also brings fulfillment to the history of salvation. It is the culmination of the Covenant between God and his people. The Covenant has led to the incarnation of the Son of God in the people of Israel, and in Christ the new people of the Church are being formed through baptism in which all people are called to become children of God in the Son.

In this regard, we read in Pope Francis' encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*: " In accepting the gift of faith, believers become a new creation; they receive a new being; as God's children, they are now 'sons in the Son'. The phrase 'Abba, Father', so characteristic of Jesus' own experience, now becomes the core of the Christian experience (cf. *Rom* 8:15)." (n. 19)

And when the Pope treats of baptism, he writes: " In baptism we become a new creation and God's adopted children. The Apostle goes on to say that Christians have been entrusted to a "standard of teaching" (*týpos didachés*), which they now obey from the heart (cf. *Rom* 6:17). In baptism we receive both a teaching to be professed and a specific way of life which demands the engagement of the whole person and sets us on the path to goodness. Those who are baptized are set in a new context, entrusted to a new environment, a new and shared way of acting, in the Church." (n. 41)

"Christ's work penetrates the depths of our being and transforms us radically, making us adopted children of God and sharers in the divine nature. It thus modifies all our relationships, our place in this world and in the universe, and opens them to God's own life of communion." (No. 42)

According to St. Benedict, the ultimate purpose of the Rule and the monastic life is precisely to enable us to fully accept this filial adoption that God wants to give us and that we have received in baptism. This profound intention of the Christian monastic life is well presented in the Prologue right from the very first words: "Listen, my child!" (Prol. 1). And Benedict immediately explains that through obedience we return to the Father whom disobedience made us abandon, like the prodigal son, or rather like Adam and Eve (Prol. 2). Then St. Benedict asks us to pray earnestly so that God will bring to completion the journey began, so "that He who has now deigned to count us among His children may not at any time be grieved by our evil deeds. For we must always so serve Him with the good things He has given us, that He will never as an angry Father disinherit His children" (Prol. 5-6).

Thus, life according to the Rule aims to be a life that responds to the grace of filial adoption that we have received in Christ and through the gift of the Spirit. It is a grace, a free gift, but for this very reason requires the freedom to consent, to conform to this grace, in order to become fully what we are through a free choice of God.

An adopted child is a person where the adoptive parents have made the choice to consider this person their child, but if the person does not respond to this choice, if they do not ratify this choice, accepting it with love and choosing the adoptive parents in their turn as parents, this grace cannot become a reality for them.

What struck me about the verse from Romans 8:15 that St. Benedict quotes for the Abbot, is that St. Paul unites in this sentence the Spirit's gift of adoption and the filial prayer of Jesus who cries out "Abba!". We become adopted children of God and live as such primarily by entering into Jesus' prayer to the Father, entering into his communion of love with the Father.

It is above all in this sense, I think, that for St. Benedict the Divine Office concentrates in itself the basics of the work of God toward us. For in the communal liturgy, the Church makes us enter into the prayer of Jesus, into the prayer of Jesus who prays to the Father, into the prayer of Jesus who prays the Psalms. And this participation in the prayer of Christ is the deepest expression of the filial life that He shares with us, so much so that when the disciples ask him to teach them to pray, He teaches them to say to God with love and trust: "Father" (Lk 11:1-2). In the communal Office, we request and we live this filial life, this communion with the Father of Christ. Thus, from this center, as this filial and fraternal life, the work of God strives to radiate out to all areas of life.

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