

17th Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for the MFC - 13.09.2013

As I highlighted yesterday St. Benedict uses the term "*operarius*" only three times; but each use is significant.

The first time he uses it is right at the beginning of the Prologue when he says that our vocation is born with God's search in the midst of a crowd for a worker who desires life and happiness (Prol. 14-15). So we understand, then, that the work that God wants to accomplish and in which he calls us to collaborate is our happiness in life, the fullness of human life in Christ, therefore, the filial life, as we have seen.

The other two mentions of the worker in the Rule are in Chapter 7, the chapter on humility. The first mention is in the sixth step of humility. In this step, humility consists in being content with everything, even with what is worthless and without honor. And this contentment with anything is possible if the monk considers himself "a bad and worthless worker" (7:49). St. Benedict puts the words of Psalm 72/73 on the lips of this monk, who holds himself to be a bad worker: "I am brought to nothing and I am without understanding; I have become as a beast before you, and I am always with you" (RB 7:50, Ps 72:22-23).

To be a bad and unworthy worker as this psalm says does not mean to be a worker who does not work, but rather one who allows themselves to be under the yoke to do the humble work that another directs. *Iumentum*, here translated as "beast," etymologically means "beast of burden", the beast that can bear the yoke, that carries the burden without complaining, because it does not feel worthy to do anything better than to serve. Normally, this beast is a donkey. I met an abbot who had as his abbatial motto: "*Sicut asinus* – like a donkey." Why not? An abbess could instead take "*Sicut gallina* – like a hen" since this is an evangelical word which Jesus uses when referring to Himself (Matthew 23:37)...

In the context of the entire sixth step of humility, the worker, then, is one who is content to do the work of another, and the quotation of Psalm 72/73 makes it clear that it is the work of God. Doing the work of God, the monk stays close to Him; he is always with him, especially if he wears the yoke of Christ, and bears it with Christ.

But it is at the end of Chapter 7 on humility that the true work of the Lord's worker is revealed. St. Benedict says that once all the steps of humility have been climbed, "the monk will quickly arrive at that love of God which, being perfect, cast out all fear" (RB 7:67).

Filial love replaces servile fear. It is as if in perfect humility the monk is enabled to perfectly live the filial adoption which the Father grants him in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Everything he does seems to him to be easy and light, because now, he is moved

by love more than by duty. He is no longer a beast, a donkey, a beast of burden, but a child of the Father, united with Jesus, in whom the Holy Spirit acts. In fact, Benedict, concludes Chapter 7 with the words: "May the Lord be pleased to manifest all this by the Holy Spirit in his worker (*in operarium suum*) now cleansed from vices and sins" (7:70).

He could have used other words, for example; "in his monk, now cleansed from vices and sins," or "in his son", "in his servant"... No, rather, he still uses the term "*operarius*": one who works, one who carries out a work. It is the worker of the Lord, who loves God and no longer fears, who completes the monastic and ascetic path of humility.

And now we understand that it is this loving and trusting worker that God was looking for in the crowd in order to bring him into the monastery and have him follow a path that would take him from working out of duty as a beast of burden to working as a son of God. But he remains a worker, and this reminds us that his great vocation is that of being transparent to the work of God, to serve God's work, to allow the work of God to be fulfilled in him and through him, as the Father's work is accomplished through and in Jesus and through Jesus in the world.

At the end of Chapter 7 on humility, in the passage which I have just mentioned, the Trinity appears, because it speaks of the love of God the Father, the love of Christ, and it alludes to the action, to the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. 7:67-70). The worker cleansed from vice and sin is thus the worker of Trinitarian love, of the communion of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit which is opened to humans. God works by loving, the work of God is charity. The monk is called to be a worker of God's love, to incarnate it, to serve it, to spread it through his work as a worker.

It is this that just a few verses before announced the step of the twelfth degree of humility from where I started earlier, "in the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields, everywhere" (7:63).

It is the monk, the "worker of the Lord," the monk called, formed and purified to incarnate the work of God, who radiates God's work in all areas of life. He is the person who radiates the work of God. He radiates it by being formed by it, shaped by it. He is the worker of a work: even his identity is entirely defined by the word "work," and the genitive "of God." The work of God defines him so much so that even he is "of God," he is the worker whom God calls "his" (Prol. 14, 7:70), and who is always with him (7:50). Between God who works and his worker there is a communion of work and of life, a communion of love.

When Benedict tells us, regarding the Divine Office: "Nothing must be preferred to the Work of God" (43:3), we should think of this his worker who is totally defined by the work of the Lord. His identity is defined by the work of God, which is why he is called a "worker".

When we say that nothing should be put before, preferred to, the Work of God, we begin to think about the punctuality, the quality, the attention that we are called to bring to the monastery's communal prayer. And Ok, that's fine. But I would say that there is a deeper level to the monk who is defined as a worker of God, a worker of the work of God; it point us to the level of identity. The worker, as I said, is defined by the work, and the worker of God is defined by the work of God.

So, let us ask ourselves a question that perhaps we never thought to ask ourselves before: Do we *define* ourselves by the work of God? Does the work of God, and here I'm especially thinking of the Divine Office, does this work of God *define* our identity? And what does this mean, what does it mean to be defined by the Office, by the communal liturgy, by the Eucharist in as much as they are times and "gestures" in which God works, is present and works in a specific way in our midst?

When we understand this, when we understand in what sense the monk-worker of God is defined by the work of God, then we will be able to accompany it in the radiation from the center of the Work of God to the whole world in order to see how the Rule asks and gives us to fully live our vocation and mission, focusing on the work of God of the communal liturgy and directed towards spreading this work to the ends of the earth.

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