

20th Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for the MFC – 17.09.2013

Until the end of the course, we will try to see, in the chapters that we still have to give, how the radiation of the “worker of God” happens in life’s various areas. As I said on Saturday this radiation is like the waves that are formed by a rock which is constantly emerging from the water, and which is the center, the *opus Dei* of the Divine Office, that continuously generates these radiations. It is not that the center only generates this radiation in the oratory, and then the oratory generates the circle of the monastery, the monastery generates the circle of the garden, and so on. No, each circle is centered on the work of God and radiates it if it is always produced from the center, if it is always a radiation of communal prayer. For this reason, as I said, the work of God must recur and renew itself with regularity during the day; it is not enough to celebrate it once in the morning.

It's a bit like in the parable of the landowner who goes out to look for laborers for his vineyard, a gospel that has certainly inspired St. Benedict (Mt 20:1-16). In fact, this landowner goes out in the morning, at the third hour, at the sixth hour, at the ninth hour, and finally around five o'clock in the afternoon: in short the daytime hours of the monastic Office according to the Rule. At every hour, the Father calls us to be workers in his vineyard, and even if we answer this vocation only at the last hour, the wage is the same as for those who have worked since the morning, for we are called precisely to be workers of the Lord, workers of the work of God. And it is He who gives fulfillment in what we do for Him and with Him, whether we work all day and our whole life, or whether we are called only at the last hour. For this reason it does not make sense to make comparisons, be jealous, complain to the Lord. "Are you envious because I am generous?" (Mt 20:15), the vineyard owner asks the laborer who worked the whole day without receiving more than those who have worked only one hour. It's like the prodigal son's older brother: he does not realize that God calls us to cooperate with His goodness, with his good work, and that this is the real "salary", this is what we "earn": the fullness of life for which we must always be more than grateful to God.

This awareness, which we should regain at each Hour of the Divine Office, makes us humble and joyful, and free from the self-centered value that we give to what we are or do. As St. Paul writes to the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God; it does not come from works, lest anyone should boast. We are indeed his work, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared so that we perform them." (Eph 2:8-10)

We are the work of God who, by the grace received in faith, become instruments of God's gift to the world.

We saw yesterday how we are called and educated to remain in the Office's work of God, in particular, with a silence that recognizes and listens to the Lord's presence. This is the principal theme of the Rule's chapter 19.

Going forth from the center of God's work of the Divine Office, we see how the humble monk begins to radiate God's work "*in oratorio* – in the oratory" (RB 7:63), the circle immediately in contact with the *opus Dei*. This is the theme of the Rule's chapter 52: "The Oratory of the Monastery." Here St. Benedict speaks mainly about how we should behave after the community celebration of the Divine Office "*Expleto opere Dei* - When the Work of God has concluded" (52:2). He, thus, speaks about it as the first concentric circle that radiates the *opus Dei* we just celebrated. He explains, in fact, how the monks should leave the oratory after the Office, or how they can remain in prayer between one hour of the office and another. "Everyone leaves in great silence and in an attitude of profound respect for God, so that the brother who wants to continue to pray, is not disturbed by the misconduct of others." (52:2-3)

How does one conclude well the Divine Office and leave the oratory? Here St. Benedict gives us a basic indication which reveals to us the profound nature of the radiation of God's work in our lives. He reminds one, in fact, to leave with an interior prayer, a prayer of the heart, which is like a treasure, a pearl, to hold dear in themselves and in the others. A prayer that keeps one interiorly in the presence of God, with an attitude of "reverence", that is, of adoration, but which does not isolate one from the others, but rather, makes them more attentive to the other as a temple of God, as a heart which is in the presence of God. If one leaves with this attitude of deep respect for God and neighbor, their silence will help this attitude in the other's heart as well. There is no greater love and respect for one's neighbor than recognizing and promoting the other's personal relationship with the Lord.

The oratory is the specific place that needs to recall this deep respect for God and neighbor, with silence, discretion, the abandonment of everything to live the work of God. There must be nothing in it and nothing must be done in it that is not for prayer (52:1). In fact, in Chapter 43 St. Benedict asked us to put down everything in our hands so as to be able to participate in the work of God: "When it is time for the Divine Office, as soon as you hear the signal, leave whatever you are working on and go with maximum solicitude, but always with seriousness, in order not to offer an opportunity for distraction. Nothing must be preferred to the Work of God" (RB 43:1-3).

Again, here is a call to respect others, respect the recollection of others. The seriousness with which one moves is to avoid feeding distraction, feeding dissipation, in ourselves and in others. Here the Rule uses the term "*scurrilitas*", which is an attitude that St. Benedict also condemns very severely in Chapter 6 on silence (RB 6:8) and which he asks us to fight against during Lent (RB 49:7). "*Scurrilitas*" is an inner dissipation, light and vulgar, which if it is not opposed by an asceticism of silence and recollection of God, sooner or later overflows out of the person and into relationships.

"*Scurrilitas*" is a self-centered buffoonery, a joviality without love, which, as St. Paul writes, "grieves the Holy Spirit" (cf. Eph 4:30). In fact, in the chapter on Lent, St. Benedict tells us that in mortifying ourselves concerning "*scurrilitas*," that is, jesting, we can then wait for Easter "with the joy of spiritual desire" (49:7).

In the Rule of Taizé there is a phrase that echoes St. Benedict's sentiment: "Real joy is first of all within. Buffoonery has never renewed joy. Let us not forget that there is an unclear distinction between a friendly spirit and an irony that freezes the smile." (Rule of Taizé, "Joy")

In summary, the oratory is the place that must educate us to the meaning of mystery, to the meaning of the mystery of God and the mystery of man, to the meaning of the human heart. This awareness of the Mystery, the memory of the mystery of God and the mystery of the human person called to a relationship with Him is precisely what should be radiated by the Divine Office and through the oratory. Without this, there is no depth in relationships, only superficiality. Without this, there is no chastity, neither for the consecrated person, nor for those who live in marriage. For one builds chastity in relationships through the awareness that each person belongs in a mysterious way to God who created and loves each one from all eternity. Without this awareness of Mystery there is no real fraternity, for only through adoration of the Father are we given the awareness of the deep fraternity that binds me to others, to all. The immediate radiation that each Hour of the Divine Office, each moment of prayer, but also each *lectio divina* and meditation should reawaken in us, is this adoration of the Father in spirit and truth (cf. Jn 4:23), which allows us to worship Jesus Christ in the other, honoring the other in a bond of fraternity for which Christ has shed his blood and given us his Spirit.

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