

21st Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for the MFC - 18.09.2013

"...In the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery..." (RB 7:63)

As we saw yesterday, the radiation of the Work of God in the oratory is already a radiation in the monastery, through the climate of silence and fraternity that God wants to create in the whole monastery, in the "house of God" of the monastic community.

We have already discussed in depth the work of God in the community in the chapters devoted to peace, to peace which is always a good to ask about, because God alone can achieve it among us and with everyone, if we embrace his work through reconciliation between us, in an unselfish communion of goods, in a humble obedience to those who represent Christ in the community.

However, today I want to focus on the monastery as a community, and what it could mean that the work of God in the Divine Office should radiate in the monastic community. Speaking of the work of God and the oratory, in the end, we talked about a heart; but the body of this heart is this community gathered in a "home" as a family of brothers and sisters. On Monday we meditated on the situation in Martha's home. It is a good imagine of what is and should be a Christian community. In fact, the house of Bethany is the home of a family of brothers and sisters. There is no mention of parents, wives, husbands or children. Martha, Mary and Lazarus could be a symbolic image of a fraternal community that is aware of itself and finds its vocation beginning with the moment when Jesus becomes the center of their relationship. Jesus, as I pointed out yesterday, makes God present in their midst: the God who speaks to the human person, the God who reveals himself to the human person who thus establishes a relationship with Him, the God who recreates and reorders the human relationships between us. He recreates these relationships in such a divine way as to raise even the physically or spiritually dead among us, as he raised Lazarus. Remember the words of the father of the prodigal son: "This brother of yours was dead and has returned to life, he was lost and has been found again" (Lk 15:32).

The *opus Dei*, the community prayer, I will never tire of repeating, for St. Benedict is this and for this reason. The Lord's presence and word continually come up again in our midst; it is this merciful source of communion with Him and among ourselves which radiates out into all aspects of life and reality. And the most characteristic and extraordinary radiation of God's work is fraternal communion in which we rise to a new life, loving and forgiving one another just as the Father forgives us. As Saint John clearly expresses it in his first letter: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers" (1 Jn 3:14).

Let's not forget, since we are talking about Martha, Mary and Lazarus, that the friendship of God for the human creature is the only reason for all this. John, the most expert Apostle and evangelist concerning the friendship of Christ, tells us: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (Jn 11:5).

I say this because at times in monasteries and among many monks and nuns, it is as if everything that is asked of them to live our vocation was a duty. Of course, what is asked of us is not always easy, for if we have to be educated in something that is bigger than ourselves, it is inevitable that a sacrifice, a discipline, a renunciation of other things will be asked for. But we must not lose the ultimate reason for all this which is only the fact that Jesus loves us, he loves each of us, as he loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

What we find hard to accept is that Jesus has a way of loving us which, if it is personal, it is not individual, or rather individualistic. To love me, it is as if Jesus is taking other people into the embrace which he gives me. It's like Bernini's colonnade: it is an embrace, a hug, but the "arms " are a crowd of columns and statues.

"Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus": he loves each one of them, but he does not separate them. Rather, his love for each one pulls them even closer, even if, as we have seen, they are very different from each other, with some aspects of mutual hostility; and at that moment one of them is even dead and buried. And when Jesus goes to raise Lazarus, he does not go directly to the tomb, raise Lazarus and leave. Rather his visit includes all the relationships: he is preoccupied about Martha's faith and Mary's sorrow, so the good he wants and does to Lazarus involves the sisters, or better still: it is as if the life he wants to communicate to Lazarus should also resurrect his sisters.

The life of the Christian community, fraternal life in Christ, is Jesus' personal embrace of each of us that pulls other people closer to us. All humanity is pulled closer to us, because Jesus loves us by shedding his blood which redeems all humanity. But the way Jesus touches us personally is through the persons in our community.

For this reason, the biggest aberration that can be seen in monasteries and in other Christian communities of all kinds, is primarily to live in them without awareness that in them Christ loves us, and to live in them as if in His loving us he does not bind us to others in a communion of love and destiny that has no comparison, not even with the closest family ties.

"The multitude of believers were of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32): when I think of this verse in the Acts of the Apostles, it makes me dizzy; but I also ponder how far I am from radiating the work of God as a gift of his Holy Spirit.

Who among us really feels of one heart and one soul with the brothers and sisters of their community? Not with *a* brother and *a* sister of their community towards whom one feels a particular sympathy, because "even the pagans and tax collectors do this" (cf. Mt 5:46-47). The Spirit of God wants to give us the communion of heart and soul with the "multitude" of believers, with our entire community, and from there with the whole Church and humanity.

We should read the whole Rule with this consciousness, with this awareness that we are called in a monastery to be embraced by Christ with an embrace that pulls the brothers and sisters of our community closer to us, which pulls them closer to our heart and our soul, in an eternal bond. Benedict never loses this consciousness of faith in speaking of the community. It would be enough to meditate on Chapter 72 of the Rule, which is the hymn to filial and fraternal charity that in the absolute preference of Christ leads us "all together to everlasting life" (RB 72:12).

We cannot accept the personal love of Christ without accepting that He pulls the others closer to us, that is, without accepting that the persons who Christ gives us "touch" our life, they condition it, they change it, they disturb it. Even the apostles were not able to receive the love of Jesus which was so personal and intimate for them without often being "crushed" by the crowds drawn to Him, or disturbed by children whom He wanted to hug, or by the smell of the leper who approached Jesus to be healed. To get away from this it would have been necessary to distance oneself from Christ and his love.

Community life is the same. The one who neglects the fraternity, neglects the divine and filial adoption of the Father in Christ. The one who neglects or despises the presence of their brothers or sisters, neglects and despises the Lord's presence. The person who thinks about converting and sanctifying themselves without a real communion with the brothers and sisters of their community, with time becomes monstrous, but without the community they will not even notice.

St. Benedict also educates all this in us with the celebration of God's work, because there the appointment and the meeting with the Lord coincide with the appointment and the meeting with the brothers and sisters of one's community. If every Hour of the Divine Office were to make us at least a millimeter more conscious of this, more attentive to this, our community life would improve more and more, because it would change *us* more and more.

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