

25th Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for CFM - 25.09.2013

"...In the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the field, everywhere else" (RB 7:63).

With this "everywhere," in Latin "*ubicumque*," St. Benedict concludes, summarizes and extends indefinitely the list of places where the humble monk is called to radiate the Work of God.

"*Ubicumque*" could be translated with an allegorical etymology: "In relation with any person or thing with which you find yourself," that is, it is a relational-wise "everywhere". It's not like air and light which is everywhere, but it is to be everywhere as a person, someone who is capable of relating with other people, with things, with the whole of reality. In this sense, only God is truly "*ubicumque*," he is the personal Being able to be everywhere at the same time in relation with everyone and everything. "We believe," St. Benedict writes in chapter 19 which I have already mentioned, "that the divine presence is everywhere (*ubique*) and that the eyes of the Lord scrutinize the good and evil in every place (*in omni loco*)" (RB 19:1).

Prayer, if it truly unites us to God, gives us, in a certain sense, this ability to relate to everyone and everything, this ability of universal communion that only God can have. The work of God par excellence, I have already said, is the communion, the Trinitarian Communion that He is, and that communicates to us if we accept his offer of personal communion with us. The Divine Office is the daily act, culminating in the Eucharist, in which God offers us his communion in Christ and in the Spirit, and where we welcome it in ourselves and in our relationship with our brothers and sisters with whom we are united in prayer.

From that center, the work of the communion with God, given and accepted, tends to spread itself into relationships with everything and everyone, to the radiation of universal communion that St. Benedict precisely describes here with this simple adverb "*ubicumque* - everywhere."

This "*ubicumque*" to me is extremely important, if we do not want to live our vocation in a petty and enclosed way. In the end, all the circles listed in our famous verse 63 of the Rule's chapter 7 could still be enclosed spaces, or at least living spaces where we are closed in on ourselves, on our own interest. Up to the circle dealing with the fields, we could consider the Divine Office, the oratory, the monastery, the community, the garden, work, travel, as spaces where we close in on ourselves, where we seek our own interest, our own well-being, our income and that of our community.

With the "*ubicumque*" instead it is as if, at the end of the list, we were suddenly in front of the whole world, in front of all humanity, in front of the whole universe. A space without end, without limit, which we cannot fence off, on which we cannot put up a sign saying "Private Property," and even "Space reserved for cloistered monks only."

The space of *ubicumque* is so vast; it deals with all the people and reality that the work of God wants to put us in relationship with, that it wants to put us in communion with; so that we no longer know neither where to look nor where to go. It is a space where, if we really want to radiate in it, like it or not, we have to "lose ourselves".

"The foxes have dens and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). Those who follow Jesus, follow him into a space of love for everyone and everything where freedom must accept to lose itself, even living all one's life in stability and the seclusion of a monastery.

This must have been the infinite horizon in which Jesus' gaze must have been lost when he said to his disciples, "I have compassion on the multitude" as he looked at the crowds and the immense need to save all of humanity (Mk 8:2). The heart of Christ is precisely the center from which God's compassion for the lost and scattered humanity radiates out onto the world.

We should read and understand St. Benedict's *ubicumque* in the light of Matthew 9:35-38: "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity. Seeing the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were tired and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few! Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'"

In this missionary zeal of evangelization, every vocation and state of life, and I would say above all, even the monastic vocation, must find its place, its breath, the true nature of its fruitfulness and its radiation. Here Jesus says that the main duty of the mission, of evangelization, is, first of all, not *going*, but *praying*, and a prayer that asks the Father to send out laborers into his harvest. To be able to send workers, God must first create them, he must form them, and as we have seen, the worker of God is precisely a creature of God's work. To neglect prayer for the mission means to reduce God's mission to our mission, to reduce God's field to our field, to reduce God's harvest to our own harvest. One can also start to evangelize, to be a shepherd of the lost sheep, but if the person does not allow the work of God

to make him or her one of his workers, they will not work really and fruitfully in the field of the world and in God's harvest.

The missionary dimension of the monastic vocation, of the vocation of contemplatives, does not consist only in praying for missionaries and pastors of the flock, in praying for vocations, but it consists primarily in allowing monastic prayer to make us workers of God's work. So, even in peeling potatoes we will be effective workers *ubicumque*, everywhere in the Father's harvest.

We must not forget that the compassion of Christ for all the crowds, for all humanity, is essentially an act of His Heart's love, a continuous and eternal act of love. Jesus' problem is not primarily "how to organize the mission and the apostolate." His problem is that his compassion, his love for humanity, his love for every man, for every woman on earth be spread and grow in the hearts of his disciples. This is never something we can "do," and even "learn" with a formation course, ...not even with ours which is the best in the world. The love of Christ is a grace to ask for and welcome. And St. Benedict explained to us that God works on our hearts and forms it according to the model of Christ, his Son, when he starts to constantly put it in accord with the words of the communal Prayer: *mens concordet voci* (cfr. RB 19:7). Being everywhere to radiate the Lord's work of salvation is fulfilled in us only if, listening to and invoking the Word of God, we unite ourselves to Him who, loving us, is everywhere and with everyone.

So, in a certain sense, the monk who reaches the outer circles of the radiation of the Work of God, the monk who is called and sent to radiate it with everyone and everything, *ubicumque*, immediately understands that he must return to the center, that he cannot radiate anywhere without returning again and again to the heart of his vocation: the work of God welcomed and celebrated in prayer.

Again, Jesus is our model. We read in the Gospel of Luke: "More than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places to pray." (Lk 5:15-16)

The universal need of salvation, of teaching and of healing asked Jesus to be everywhere and with everyone, but he first knew that only in relationship with the Father could he give an answer to this immense need. To be truly with everyone, to be really everywhere, Jesus always came back to the center and source of communion with the Father.

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