

16th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for MFC - 11/09/2014

Everything we have seen and tried to deepen so far, we need to deepen within our monastic vocation, within our Benedictine, Cistercian vocation. I repeat that the gift Christ gives us of a heart to heart communion, or it would be better to say "heart in heart", is the center and source of Christian life. But every particular charism or form of life deepens it and lives it according to a determined accent.

I fully realize that a month of chapters is certainly not enough to explore all this. It has not been my purpose, after all, to be "exhaustive" in an area that cannot be "exhausted" because it is a source larger than the sea. You could say that Christian mysticism is the source that contains the sea. Normally the sea is the result of all the water sources in the world, and all the rain that falls on the earth. Who knows how many water sources there are in the whole world! But in mysticism, the Source is only one, and it is a source that contains all of the sea, which gushes and to which all the seas return, that is, all the seas of Christian life, of the life of the Church, of the holiness of the whole history of the Church, from the beginning of the world until the end of time ...

Therefore, my Chapters are only an attempt to launch a study of deepening, of research, of meditation, and, above all, of life, that everyone must do personally. Maybe I have already said too much, or I should have been much more concise. In these things a word, a sentence, a poem stimulates more than many words. But before I continue trying to listen a little to our fathers and mothers in the monastic life, if I were to say what is the essential point of the mystical life, of the divine life that the Holy Spirit wants to instill in our hearts, through baptism, our vocation, the grace that is always granted us, I would say that it is the gift of *being in Christ*, of *living in Christ*, of *abiding in Christ*, as He is, lives, dwells in us.

I said this in Chiaravalle in the homily for the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven: "The grace of living in the Lord, and the Lord's life in us is the mystical heart of every Christian life. A mystical heart given and asked of each one, because it is the grace and the experience of our baptism, and of all the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. We are given this grace and asked to truly live in Christ and let Him live in us ever more profoundly. St. Paul, like St. John, will never tire of recalling this experience, and of founding the whole Christian commitment in welcoming the grace to live in Christ. It is this experience that Mary rejoices in and in which she rests all her faith in the redemption of the world. And it is this experience that helps us to understand the mystery of her Assumption into Heaven, and the mystery of why this concerns us personally. (...) Paul writes to the Corinthians: "For as in Adam all die, so *in Christ* all shall be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22).

Mary immediately received a life fully risen, because her being "in Christ" was total and perfect also on this earth. The Dogma of the Assumption recognizes that being in Christ, it could not but be carried out immediately for Mary what she already completely was in God and God in her. But this fact helps us to recognize that we, too, are destined for the same fullness, because we, as she was, are called to live "in Christ" by the Paschal grace of baptism. "In Christ all shall be made alive": this is the great destiny of humanity that the Church is called to incarnate and proclaim, as Mary who in this is Mother of the Church, that is, the Mother of God and Mother of all humanity, Mother of God's gift to all peoples.

What does "living in Christ" mean? It is an experience too big and too deep to be able to define. It is a mystery. But Mary is proof that we can experience this mystery, to which we are destined by the love of God, and that we can begin to live in this life.

This is perhaps the main reason why the Cistercians have always favored this feast more than all other Marian feasts. All of the Cistercian churches are dedicated to the Assumption. In the end it is not only a Marian predilection, but above all a Christological one, because the meaning and the main mission of the monastic life is the desire to live in Christ, which is nothing more than a concentration on the vocation and mission of every baptized person. In the Exordium of Cîteaux, the first story of the birth of the Order, citing St. Paul to Timothy, it sums up the desire of the early Cistercian monks saying that they wanted to "live devoutly in Christ" (Chap. 1; see. 2 Tim 3:13).

Looking to the Virgin Mother in Heaven, praying in the churches dedicated to her, it is this grace and vocation that we always want to remember, opt for again, embrace again, so as not to neglect the fullness of life that Christ has already given us. The Christian does not live a life so different from that of others, and basically neither do those in monastic life; but to live consciously in Christ transforms the meaning of daily life, of ordinary life. It makes it Marian, a life of the faith of the Magnificat, a life really and totally *taken up* in grace, in the glory and joy of living in God." ([www.ocist.org/Omelie Abate Generale/2014.08.15](http://www.ocist.org/Omelie%20Abate%20Generale/2014.08.15)).

Here, we must help ourselves, and let the Church, and the Virgin Mary and the saints, help us to experience the sublime mystery of being able to live in Christ, to live in God in the mystery of Christ. Christ, who for us, for each one of us became incarnate, died, rose and ascended into Heaven in order to be the "dwelling", the "home" with the Father in the Trinity. A filial dwelling, of sons in the Son, of the adopted children in the only begotten Son. This is Christian mysticism, this is grace, this is such a profound communion with Jesus that we are given to live in God by holding fast to Him, by uniting ourselves with Him, in welcoming his communion with us to the point of the gift of his heart, of his life. If we pretend to live our Christian life and our monastic vocation, neglecting this grace, it is as if we wanted to be Christians without Christ, without the gift that Christ is for life, without that which Christ came to freely offer to our lives, to everyone.

It is not a matter of feeling, of character, of spiritual tastes. It is an ontological question. The nature of the Christian mystery is the gift of Himself that God gives to us; he really gives Himself, to the point of dying for us in order to show this love to us, to the point of enabling us to live in Him. If we reject this, we reject everything. It is not enough that we retain some ideas, morals, commitments inspired by Christ and the Gospel. Why? Because in Christ, God has given us infinitely more than good ideas, good morals, and good commitments. He has give us himself in order that we live in Him.

If we do not place this grace at the center, if we do not desire it, if we do not let ourselves be won over by it as something that gives our lives an incomparable fullness, we do not understand anything of St. Benedict, nor of St. Bernard, nor of St. Gertrude, nor anything at all, because we understand nothing of the Gospel either.