

18th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for MFC - 13.09.2014

I said yesterday that the new life in God, that the Psalms promise us, that the Psalms make us want and ask God for, becomes possible and is accomplished in its fullness only "in Christ". I have already mentioned a verse of St. Paul to the Corinthians in this regard: "If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creature: the old things have passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17). It is this innovation that we are called to deepen and live, because it is the fulfillment of the Christian mystery, of the Easter mystery. It deals with a *new creation*, a being radically, ontologically renewed.

This innovation, this new creation is objectively realized in the sacrament of Baptism. Baptism makes us new in Christ, it recreates us in Christ. A baptized person is new in Christ. But this newness is offered and given to our freedom; we are called to respond to this ontological newness that is given us in Christ Jesus for all of our life. But a person can live his or her whole life without living in this new creation. It cannot be eliminated, but it can be denied. More often, this new life is just ignored by us, and in a way, we do not allow it to "conquer" our life, to become a source that recreates and renews all of one's life. However, thank God, the Church, accompanies us and helps us not to let our baptism remain inactive. It teaches us to live the new creation of baptismal grace, through a community (this usually begins with the family) that educates and catechizes us, and that through the other sacraments allows the baptismal grace to penetrate and transform the whole of our human existence, and above all, when due to our fragility we need to be forgiven.

The monastic life, the consecrated life, is a concentration on this commitment of the Church to enable us to fully live the newness of baptism, the new creation in Christ which we become through baptism. For this reason, the monastic life must mainly focus on "living in Christ" completely. The Rule of St. Benedict can be considered as a help and a method to learn to live completely in Christ, and thus to live as a new creature. In this it is clear that the monastic vocation in the Church is and should be a help and a sign for all the faithful to live fully their baptismal life, the paschal life in Christ. However, the monastic life will accomplish this, only if those who live it focus on the grace and vocation of living in Christ, if the communities, despite all their activities and ministries, concentrate on this experience. An experience that is global, as the life of Christ is global. But I mean, and I know I am repeating myself, this deals with a mysticism that is concerned not only with prayer and spirituality, but is concerned with all the dimensions of life. In fact, we are called to live in Christ our relationship with God, as well as our relationship with our brothers and sisters.

St. Benedict, quoting Saint Paul to the Galatians (2:28), reminds the superior that he or she must not use preferences, because "*in Christ*, whether slave or free, we are all one" (RB 2:20).

In the tools of good works, he asks us to "pray for our enemies in the love of Christ – *in Christi amore pro inimicis orare*" (RB 4:72). This advice is very interesting because it summarizes the center and the breadth of Christian mysticism, which is an "*in*" that coincides with a "*pro*", an inner experience that radiates out in universal love, universal service, such as Christian prayer which is always a penetration into the love of Christ in order to embrace all of humanity, even those on the "outskirts", those who are more distant from us, those who are "enemies", that is, those who, in one way or another, do not love us or whom we do not like. You understand then how deep this "in Christ" must be if it is to enable us to embrace everything and everyone without limits. To claim to be "*pro*", to be able to love everyone, to be able to take care of everyone, to be able to give one's life for the others, even for our enemies, without cultivating the "*in*", that is, the mystical relationship with the Lord, without allowing Him to give us His heart, as we have seen, is a superficiality that sooner or later will ruin our life and vocation, as well as the others whom we claim to help. A superficiality and a division in the Christian life that sooner or later will "break" our life, our faith, our vocation.

Christian life is in fact a real life, a unified life, if in our adherence to Christ we do not dissociate our inner life of love, our living in Christ from our living for others. To want to be in Christ without radiating him in the "*pro omnibus*", in the "for all", is not mysticism, rather it is sterile pietism. But also wanting to be "*pro omnibus*", dedicated to everyone and everything, without inserting this self-surrender in the font of an intimate and personal love of Christ, sooner or later becomes an activism even more sterile than pietism. Only if the "*in*" and the "*pro*" always imply each other, only if they dialogue with each other as the poles of a single love, the love of Christ, only then will the Christian life bear fruit in peace and harmony, with humility and joy, and with freedom.

St. Benedict reminds us of all this throughout the Rule, but in this particular tool of good works – *in Christi amore pro inimicis orare* – he is able to express this mystery in a synthesis that is like a pearl which we should treasure and meditate on in the context of our everyday life and allow ourselves to be converted by this awareness. For example, Monday, try to live your day, during the outing, thinking about this call and grace to live "*in Christo pro omnibus* – in Christ for all"; and perhaps also think about how we can foster among ourselves this depth and width, this center and this radiation, typical of the Christian and monastic life. Life quickly becomes a very interesting adventure; it is interesting because our hearts' thirst for a fullness and they thirst for the love of every human being.

This is basically the mystical theology of the discourses of Jesus at the Last Supper in the Gospel of St. John, especially chapter 15, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:4-5)

What is the "fruit" of a person, of a life? If Jesus uses this metaphor, it is because the fruit of a tree is a symbol of how a life must be fruitful. What is the fruit of a tree? For the tree, the fruit is that which carries and nourishes the seed. A good grape actually is a nutritious pulp that contains and nourishes the seed that allows the vine to reproduce. At the same time, however, the fruit exists not only for the tree, it gives nourishment and pleasure to the insects, animals and humans who eat it. The fruit is "for" it is "*pro*". It exists for the life of the tree and for all those that eat it. The fruit of the vine exists to reproduce the vine itself, as well as to feed and cheer humans. It can be eaten, but it can also be used to produce wine. The grape is a fruit that can be "for others" in an increasingly broad way. It may even come to be transformed into the Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, and then to feed in us not only human life, but the life of God. In this increasingly vast and universal fruit of the vine, this "being for others", Jesus sees a symbol of the fruitfulness of the lives of the disciples. But all of this infinite, fruitful radiating of the vine and of life – what, in fact, is more infinite and eternal than the Eucharistic Blood of Christ! – cannot be realized without having its "roots" of "being in Christ": "As the branch can not bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me." (Jn 15:4b).

It is not a coincidence that St. Benedict asks the one who was ordained a priest in the monastery to "progress more and more in God - *magis ac magis in Deum proficiat*" (RB 62:4). And how must one progress in God? By following the rule with an ever more humble obedience, because that is how the monk remains rooted in Christ. (RB 62:2-4).

But this applies to everyone: the more our life is called to bear fruit for others – and the fruit is always for others – the more it needs to deepen its remaining in Christ, its permanence in Christ, that is, the baptismal and mystical dimension of our vocation.