

19th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for MFC – 17.09.2014

"In Christi amore pro inimicis orare" (RB 4:72).

I feel that we need to go deeper into this instrument of good works which is in the Rule's Chapter 4, at least in the sense of what I was saying on Saturday. This *"in Cristi amore"* that expresses and gives its fruit in *"pro inimicis"*, in prayer, and therefore, in the relationship of charity that God asks of us and gives to all without limits, without exclusions; it is the essence of life, of mysticism, of Christian holiness.

I realize that all the saints and mystics are basically an illustration of this grace to live *in* Christ *for* everyone, a grace which means living the life of Christ, letting Christ live in us: "I have been crucified with Christ; I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And this life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal 2:19-20)

How is it possible not to think of St. Bernard, who was a real mystic *"in Christo"*, and at the same time totally *"pro omnibus"*. I like to quote, and above all to meditate on, a passage concerning him by one of his first biographers, Geoffrey of Auxerre, who was his secretary, and thus lived with him. Taking into account his style, and certainly some hagiographic exaggeration, this passage, nevertheless, describes well how this "one glance" of the heart towards Christ can unite and animate the multi-faceted life of a "universal" pastor, a prophet of his time. This passage describes well how one lives "in Christ" with all his or her heart. This is its primary concern – how to be a gift for everyone, for the whole world:

"This faithful servant of Christ did not seek his own advantage, but rather was only interested in everything related to Christ. What crimes did he not denounce? What discord did he not stifle? What scandals did he not halt? Is there a schism that he did not reconcile, a heresy that he did not refute? On the other hand, did he not use his authority to intervene with zeal and charity in everything that in his epoch seemed holy, honest, pure, amiable, commendable, virtuous, orderly? (...)

Which person who nurturing evil plans was not restrained by fear of his zeal and authority? Which person pursuing a good end did not have, if he could, recourse to his advice, his protection, his help? What man in the throes of tribulation appealed without success to his heart, a true temple of the divinity? The afflicted received consolation from him, the oppressed rescue, the anxious advice, the patient a medicine, the poor alms.

In a word, he became the servant of all, as if he were born for the whole world; and yet kept his soul free from everything and everyone, as if he only dedicated himself to the custody of his heart." (*Vita prima sancti Bernardi*, III, 8)

This text helps us to understand that universal charity, a responsibility towards all which comes from one's vocation, this being "the servant of all, as if born for the whole world," is not the result of a media blitz, but rather the result of constant work on one's heart. This is the work of which I have sought to talk about in these days. The mystical marriage suggested by the Song of Songs is the centerpiece of a charitable mission and ministry without boundaries; it is an unreserved dedication to the need for salvation of all humanity. And it is in this sense that we must study and meditate on the works of St. Bernard, such as his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, precisely because they help us understand what it means to focus on guarding one's heart in such a way that it, like that of Christ's, may become the center of the gift of our life to the whole world. Figures such as Saint Bernard are fathers and masters of this life because they help us to *live in Christ for everyone*, to live fully the "*pro omnibus*", the "for all", "*in Christi amore* – in the love of Christ".

Bernard was not the only one "born for the whole world." Each of us, every human being, is born "for the whole world" because in creating man and woman God's plan is for humanity to be one big family. And every human being is born a "brother" or a "sister" of everyone else. Divisions, hostilities, fratricidal wars are a consequence of sin; they never were and never will be part of God's plan. After original sin, Cain killed Abel, and only in Christ and in His crucified love can the universal brotherhood of humanity be recovered and truly again become possible.

When Jesus says to his disciples, "You are all brothers" (Mt 23:8), he wants to initiate among them, "in Him for all", a work of recovery and dissemination of the fraternity of all humanity. And this work starts with a preference given to Jesus as Teacher and Guide, and by God as Father: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi', for one is your Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth "father", for only one is your Father, the heavenly one. And do not be called "guides", for one is your Guide, the Christ." (Mt 23:8-10).

In this sense, universal brotherhood and living "for the whole world," as St. Bernard did, has a mystical center, a concentration on the relationship with God in Christ. This seems to be repeat what Jesus said to Martha: "Only one thing is needed!" (Luke 10:42). Yes, we need to focus on only one Master, on one Guide, on one Father if we want to serve all as Marta wanted to, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?" (Lk 10:40). The problem was that Martha did not start from the center. She saw the service to be done, and measured the strength she needed to do it. Instead, if she had started from the center, from Jesus, the only thing needed by her and by everyone, serving others would have radiated from the center of her being in Christ the Teacher as a daughter of the Father. As St. Bernard who "kept his soul free from everything and everyone, as if he only dedicated himself to the custody of his heart," and for this reason "he had become the servant of all, as if he were born for the whole world".

I am increasingly aware as I visit the communities of how many divisions there are in the communities! You also are aware of this. How many conflicts, how much competition! Real, true "atomic", or rather "chemical" "world wars", because the divisions and disagreements are like toxic gases that pollute the air one breathes in every corner of the monastery, at work, in choir, at recreation, in the chapter... And it is useless to remind ourselves about goodness, forgiveness, fraternity, because it is like pretending that there is light in a room without turning on the lamp in the center of the room.

What is missing, I repeat for the hundredth time, is a mystical communion with Christ, which is a preference for a relationship with Him, and in Him with the Father in the Spirit. If there is this, the light comes on, there is fraternity, the filial and fraternal "for all" can radiate out and be recovered in the community and throughout the whole world. And I repeat that to turn on this mystical communion with Christ "a single glance" is enough...