

6th Chapter by the Abbot General OCist for the MFC – 30.08.2012

“Timentes Dominum (...) operantem in se Dominum magnificant – Those who fear the Lord (...) magnify the Lord who works in them” (Prol. 29-30).

We repeat this beautiful expression of the Prologue, because it seems to me to be important to understand it and so live truthfully our vocation. I said yesterday that saint Benedict invites us to contemplate God at work in our lives, and to contemplate that work magnifying and glorifying the Lord. That means that the fear of the Lord is a quality of relationship with God that involves all our life, which changes the relationship to all our life, and above all our relationship with ourselves. For the person who lives and cultivates this quality of relationship with God, in oneself and with everybody and all things, the fear of God becomes dilatation of the heart by the fact of magnifying God. This evident allusion to the Magnificat allows us to understand that the essential work of God in us, as for Mary, is the presence of Christ, Christ in us who lives and grows, who is incarnated to give himself to the world and save it.

Let us keep in mind the spirit of this phrase, this conception of the fear of God, that sees God at work in our lives, that sees God creating and modelling us now, and at all times, and forming in us the fullness of life in Christ. Let us keep in mind that phrase because all the aspects and effects of the fear of God that the Rule presents us will always be like a deepening of this attitude: to become instruments full of joy and thankfulness for the work of God in us. We shall see this in chapter seven on humility; we shall see it in the chapters on prayer. But, first of all, I would like to see it in the more "practical" chapters that embody the fear of God in everyday life, because it would not be Christian to diminish the fear of God to a piety, to a spirituality. For saint Benedict the fear of God is for life, for a truth and a fullness of life, in all its aspects, even daily and humdrum. The Virgin Mary also sang the Magnificat going to serve Elizabeth. I like to imagine her singing the Magnificat as she took a broom and started to clean the house, to put water on to boil to prepare the meal, etc.

For this reason, amongst the people in the monastery of whom saint Benedict asks that they should have the fear of God, I shall take, to start today, the cellarer, or the steward: the most practical person in the monastery.

Chapter 31 starts thus: "Let there be chosen from the brotherhood as Cellarer of the monastery a wise man, of settled habits, temperate and frugal, not conceited, irritable, resentful, sluggish, or wasteful, but fearing God, who may be as a father to the whole brotherhood. Let him have the charge of everything, let him do nothing without the command of the Abbot" (RB 31, 1-4).

For saint Benedict, it is as if the fear of God was that which corrects and deducts a whole series of flaws that would make of the community service asked from the steward a dictatorship, a theft, an egoistical exploitation of goods and people. Without the fear of God, the cellarer would be a slave to capital sins, to which Benedict make allusion in the list of flaws that the cellarer should not have. He would be slave to the possessive instinct of his "me". Instead of being "as a father for the community", he would be a corrupt dictator, a ravenous wolf. Instead of "taking care of all", as a mother, he would only think about his profit and his comfort. Instead of being worried about not saddening

his brothers (31,6), he would be preoccupied only by his own pleasure. Pride would bring him to despise his brothers, their frailties and their demands. (31,7.13.16).

In short, we understand that throughout chapter 31 the fear of God depends on the new humanity of the cellarer, that is to say whether he will live his service in charity or not, if he will live it like Jesus giving up his life for all or not.

Thus, the task of the cellarer in the community is vast. It is a very heavy responsibility towards people and things. St Benedict presents it as a great work, a great undertaking. He must take care of everything, think of everything. Humanly, it is almost an impossible task. But it is precisely for that reason that to assume that responsibility, as so many others in a monastery, the fear of God becomes indispensable. It becomes indispensable precisely as an attitude that opens our life to the work of God in us and through us, that is to say to grace. The cellarer in fact can do nothing nor be all that is asked of him except in the measure that he becomes an instrument of God, if not in the measure that he is open to the work of God in him and through him. Do not forget the phrase of the Prologue: "Those who fear the Lord (...) magnify the work of the Lord in them" (Prol. 29-30).

In the chapter on the cellarer, it is as if Jesus said to Martha, busy doing things for everyone, that one thing was missing from what she is doing: that God should do it in her and through her, that she do her work as a work of God and not as her work, that she should live as an instrument of God and not for her own glory. Then, instead of complaining, she would also be able to "magnify the Lord at work in her". And this consciousness, this attitude, would allow her to accomplish "great things" (Lk 1,49), because they would be works of God.

This aspect, saint Benedict underlines it for the cellarer in Eucharistic terms: "Let him regard all the vessels of the monastery and all its substance, as if they were sacred vessels of the altar" (31,10). The steward, precisely in virtue of the fear of God who recognises the work of God accomplished through him, consciously lives out the baptismal priesthood, in such a way that all that he does makes Christ present, as at the Eucharist.

Saint Benedict concentrates all these instructions when speaking about the cellarer, but what he says is valid for everybody, for everybody in his own task, small or great, in the community. For each person it is essential that he should live his task in the fear of God, so as to be free to live to magnify God rather than themselves, to be free from the tendency of sin and to live everything while magnifying God rather than themselves, because it is there the secret of joy in all things.

I see in all the monasteries worldwide, that the greatest temptation for monks and nuns is not against chastity, poverty or something other, but the temptation against humility, that is the temptation of pride and of power, the temptation that caused the fall of the angels, and of Adam and Eve. Saint Benedict asks of the cellarer and of everyone else to fight against this temptation, that poisons all that we do, and to cultivate the fear of God that glorifies the Lord instead of ourselves.

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