

7th Chapter by the Abbot General OCist for the MFC – 31.08.2012

I ended yesterday's chapter by saying that what seemed to me to be the case everywhere, was that the greatest temptation for monks and nuns was the temptation against humility, that is to say the temptation of pride and of power, which is the temptation and nature of original sin. It is for this reason, I think, that saint Benedict asks from the cellarer and everyone else to cultivate the fear of God, to oppose this temptation that poisons everything that we do and above all community relationships.

In the context of work, of responsibilities, of the task that we accomplish, it is important however to understand that the fear of God is in opposition to pride and the thirst for power if we live it as a preference for the work of God rather than our own. That is to say, that it is not enough to fight pride by opposing it with a sentiment of humility. Humility, to the contrary, consists of leaving the work of God overcome ours. Humility is to prefer God's work to ours. One triumphs over the pride in the construction of the tower of Babel by preferring the construction of the Temple of God that is the Church, a construction of which the principal master craftsman is God himself, the Holy Spirit, and of which we can only be collaborators and instruments. Humility is to accept in the concrete reality of our life what Jesus says: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15,5).

It is to be noticed that this humility is the humility of Christ himself who never wished to do anything else but accomplish the work of the Father: "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work" (Jn 4,34). And at the end of his earthly life Jesus says to the Father in the sacerdotal prayer at the Last Supper: "I glorified you on earth and finished the work you gave me to do." (Jn 17,4)

Jesus is the first to "magnify the Lord working in him" (cf. RB Prol. 30). But these words of Jesus underline an essential aspect of the fear of God and of humility of which the chapter about the cellarer is an excellent example: obedience. Saint Benedict, several times, asks from the steward a precise and docile obedience towards the abbot: "Let him do nothing without the command of the Abbot, let him do what has been ordered him" (RB 31,4-5); "Let him do all things in due measure and according to the bidding of his Abbot" (v. 12). "Let him have under his charge everything that the Abbot has entrusted to him, and not presume to meddle with matters forbidden him" (v. 15).

This obedience, we must understand it in the framework of the fear of the Lord that makes us magnify God at work in us. The best way to do the work of God is humble obedience, the obedience of Christ to the Father. The fruit is that, in all that we do, the Father is glorified, as Jesus himself glorified, magnified: "I glorified you on earth and finished the work you gave me to do" (Jn 17,4).

Thus all the work of the cellarer, his preoccupation about everything, for so many practical, concrete, material things, for the material and corporal needs of his brothers, becomes the "earth" to which Christ came incarnated as man, and which is waiting to become the dwelling place of the glorification of the Father, the dwelling place of his glory, as in Heaven. This is why there must be the fear of God, the sense of the presence of God to be adored, equally in the practical and material tasks of the

monastery, because in Christ, all the earthly and human aspects have become the place of the glory of God, have become the Temple of his presence, have become the "altar", as saint Benedict suggests to the cellarer (RB 31,10).

Saint Benedict is conscious that obedience does not only enable us to act as God wishes, but it allows the work of God to be realised in us and through us. The humble obedience that fears God, that is to say which recognises His presence and loves it, allows God to be at work in our lives, to have a part in what we do and thus, to manifest his glory on earth, that is to say to manifest Himself, his Presence, his Love. Jesus lived on earth in a humble and continual obedience to his Father, conscious that this obedience allowed the Father to manifest Himself to the world, to manifest his glory. The Cross also manifests the work and glory of God, because in the Cross Jesus expresses and totally accomplished his humble obedience to the Father. Thus even in death, God was able to work and act, and the action of God through the obedient death of the Son is the Resurrection, the glory of the Resurrection.

Another task in the monastery for which saint Benedict asks for "a god-fearing man", is the task of infirmarer: "Let a cell be set apart for the sick brethren, and a God-fearing, diligent, and careful attendant be appointed to serve them." (36,7)

Already, in task of cellarer, we see that for saint Benedict the most important thing, much more than material things, is always the fraternal relationship, charity. For example, he asks the cellarer that "if he has not the things to give, let him answer with a kind word" (31,13). He asks that in all things, his preoccupation should not only be good management of material goods, but above all to encourage the growth of communion, fraternal charity.

In the office of infirmarer, this aspect is even more important, because he must act in the context of relationships rendered even more delicate because of illness, suffering, and the necessities of the invalid.

Towards the sick, saint Benedict asks for extreme attention and respect. He demands priority attention, an absolute preference of attention: "Before and above all things, care must be taken of the sick – *Infirmorum cura ante omnia et super omnia adhibenda est*" (RB 36,1). The reason is, more than natural compassion, the faith in the presence of Christ in them: "That they be served in very truth as Christ is served – *sicut revera Christo, ita eis serviatur*". And the foundation of this faith is the revelation, the word of God, the Gospel: "Because He said, 'I was sick and you visited me' (Mt 25,36), and 'That which you did to one of these my brethren you did it to me' (Mt 25, 40)" (RB 36,2-3).

We understand that in this case, the fear of God of the infirmarer is founded first and above all on an act of faith, to see with the eyes of faith the reality, to see people in the light of Christ, recognising the Christ, being in relationship with Christ. To recognise Christ present in the brother or sister who is in need is the condition and the nourishment of true charity.

We shall go deeper into this chapter tomorrow.

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