

Material for reflection – Union of Catholic Apostolate

May 2006.

The Imitation of Christ according to St Vincent Pallotti (continued).

Dear brothers and sisters in the Union, we propose to continue, for the month of May, with our reflection on the imitation of Christ as outlined by St. Vincent Pallotti in the text ‘**a Practical daily reminder to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ**’ (OCC III, pages 37 to 39). This will be the final meditation on this text. We will begin to reflect, from June onwards, on St. Vincent’s Rule in the so-called ‘33 points’.

In preparation for the reflection let us pray with St. Vincent Pallotti:

“My Jesus, by myself I can do nothing. May you accomplish everything in me, may you do so out of love for Mary, most Holy, and in your infinite mercy and by your infinite merits, which I mean to offer once more to the Eternal Father and to offer them from all eternity and for all eternity in thanksgiving as if you had already given me everything and as if you had already given it to me from all eternity and for all eternity. Amen.”

The effects of the Practical daily reminder (OCC III, pages 37 to 39).

St. Vincent teaches us that:

- if we have trust in Jesus Christ and if we strive to imitate him, he himself will destroy in us all our faults and shortcomings, because on entering into our soul, he is actively present and so continues to live his life in us;
- Jesus Christ will live in that soul and he will apply the merits of his most holy works to the soul, this is affirmed by the words of Jesus as reported in the Gospel of John: “whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works” (14, 12), and indeed, the truth of this can be verified in the life of the person;
- Jesus Christ himself will do everything in us. Here Pallotti quotes the words of St. Paul, words born of his own experience of the Spirit of Jesus operating in him: “I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2,20).

Pallotti invites us to remember that “... Jesus Christ, in his infinite mercy and in his infinite love, and in order to continue his most holy life in us, deigned to remain among us in the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist in which he gives us himself as food and nourishment for the soul”.

Let us meditate on the words of Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter ***ECCLESIA DE EUCHARISTIA*** on its relationship to the Church (n.16):

“The saving efficacy of the sacrifice is fully realized when the Lord's body and blood are received in communion. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful with Christ through communion; we receive the very One who offered himself for us, we receive his body which he gave up for us on the Cross and his blood which he “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). We are reminded of his words: “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57). Jesus himself reassures us that this union, which he compares to that of the life of the Trinity, is truly realized. *The Eucharist is a true banquet*, in which Christ offers himself as our nourishment. When for the first time Jesus spoke of this food, his listeners were astonished and bewildered, which forced the Master to emphasize the objective truth of his words: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life within you” (Jn 6:53). This is no metaphorical food: “My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (Jn 6:55).

Pallotti, in the **Practical daily reminder to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ**, continues to reflect on the manner of imitating Jesus, he affirms that, “in order to imitate Jesus Christ, we need, above all else, to have his Spirit”, if we possess his Spirit then all the interior movements of our souls can be similar to those of Jesus Christ, because to imitate him sincerely implies that the external works are true expressions of the interior ones.

In summary, he says that (i) enlightened by Faith, (ii) with trust and confidence in the grace of God, and (iii) with mistrust of ourselves; we can and must “ponder and call to mind Jesus Christ, at least in the principal interior and external actions of his most holy life.”

Then Pallotti lists the principal interior actions:

- a spirit of sacrifice;
- Jesus’ infinite love of suffering;
- to relive in ones minds the sufferings of Jesus in the passion;
- constantly doing the Will of the Father, just as Mary most holy, did;
- the humility of his heart;
- the docility of his heart;
- the stance of not seeking ones own glory;
- a love for being held in contempt or disdained;
- an incomprehensible love of poverty;
- a love for the honour and glory of the heavenly Father;
- a love for the welfare of souls; Jesus had such a love even though he knew how few would take advantage of his salvation and how many would be ungrateful in the face of the benefit of Redemption:
- a spirit of prayer and of continuous entreaty;
- a spirit of union with God.

St. Vincent Pallotti was Spiritual Director to the seminarians at the Urbano College of Propaganda Fide in Rome. The present students at the College participate each year in the Triduum in preparation for the celebration of his feast day on January 22nd and it has become a tradition that one of them write a letter to St. Vincent, in reply to the letter of encouragement that he sent to the students during the Roman Revolution in 1849. This year it was written by the seminarian Janan Shamil Aziz of the Chaldean Church in Iraq, he is from the diocese of Kirkuk.

In his letter to Pallotti Janin wrote: “Dear St. Vincent, on reading the letter that you wrote to us, I have been touched by the great love you had for us ... I was struck by the phrase “have hope” because you wrote these words in 1849 which was indeed a very difficult moment in history ...

Today, as then, we need apostles of hope like you were. In fact our own time is not that different from yours: this is a ‘hard time’ for the Church ... but it is there, in those places where there is persecution, suffering and hardships, threats and pain, that hope stands out ...; our Christian community is still alive, and it seeks to always be an instrument of hope for all the Iraqi people; a living hope founded on faith. You left us the example of uniting a living hope with charity, and it is this that has inspired so many men and women to follow in your footsteps in the Catholic Apostolate; this is especially true for lay persons like Thomas Alkusi – who was a close collaborator of St. Vincent, and a native of Alkush, Iraq – who put in practice your motto ‘Caritas Christi urget nos’. St. Vincent, I also ask myself “what must we do?” (Acts 2,37), asking the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and listening to “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches,” (Rev. 2,7). Further I ask myself: how can this be done? How can we become a sign of hope in today’s world?”

We could reflect on the challenges that these extracts from the letter of the seminarian Janin to Pallotti put before us, and do so in the context of meditating on Pallotti’s teaching on the imitation of Christ, we could ask Pallotti himself to show us the way.

The Union of Catholic Apostolate proposes that our spirituality be one of following Jesus Christ. Article 16 of the General Statutes of the UAC indicate what this entails and how it should be lived: “The spirituality particular to the Union is the following of Christ, Apostle of the Eternal Father. In faith and in love, the members of the Union choose to remain united with the Crucified and Risen Lord ever-present among them (cf. Mt. 18, 20). They strive to imitate his love of the Father and of all people, seeking to imitate his life-style and apostolate as perfectly as possible.”

Pray together: The CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH (Lk. 1, 68-79)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel!
He has visited his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up for us a mighty saviour
in the house of David his servant,
as he promised by the lips of holy men,
those who were his prophets from of old.

A saviour who would free us from our foes,
from the hands of all who hate us.
So his love for our fathers is fulfilled
and his holy covenant remembered.

He swore to Abraham our father to grant us,
that free from fear, and saved from the hands of our foes,
we might serve him in holiness and justice
all the days of our life in his presence.

As for you, little child,
you shall be called a prophet of God, the Most High.
You shall go ahead of the Lord
to prepare his ways before him,

To make known to his people their salvation
through forgiveness of all their sins,
the loving-kindness of the heart of our God
who visits us like the dawn from on high.

He will give light to those in darkness,
those who dwell in the shadow of death,
and guide us into the way of peace.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.