



Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - October, 2006

Fundamental Rule 11 – Spirit of Obedience

Introduction

“Our Lord Jesus Christ subjected himself to being guided and governed by Our Lady and St. Joseph, and they, faithfully, lovingly and in humility, guided and governed him; thus all of us, for love for Our Lord Jesus Christ, must subject ourselves to any Superior, and all the Superiors will govern their subjects, that is, their spiritual Children, faithfully, lovingly and in humility.” OOC III, p. 45.

St. Vincent Pallotti wrote the rule for the Society in 1846, however, these '33 points' on the imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ in both his public ministry and in his hidden life are a fundamental text for us members of the UAC as they indicate that this is central to the life of those who are inspired by St. Vincent.

On reading and reflecting on this point 11 of the '33 points' we can individuate several themes:

- a) Jesus Christ subjected himself to Mary and Joseph;
- b) Mary and Joseph with love and humility both guided and governed him;
- c) so too, we, in imitation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, will subject ourselves to every superior (understood in the context of consecrated life in a community);
- d) every Superior, faithfully and with love and humility should guide and direct the members of their community, that is, their spiritual children.

St. Vincent was struck by the humility of Jesus Christ, he, the Son of the Father, the Eternal Word, freely and voluntarily, took on human flesh and became man in Mary, St. Paul expresses it thus: “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler, yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.” (Phil. 2, 6-

8). Jesus Christ accepted all the limitations of human existence, he ‘freely’ placed himself in the care of Mary and Joseph, he learnt from them, he was nurtured by them, he was obedient to them, “He went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority ... and increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men” (Lk. 2, 51-2).

Mary and Joseph received the Lord Jesus with open hearts, they were aware of their lack of preparation for such a task or vocation. However, with love, with wisdom, with care and concern they guided and directed the child Jesus towards adulthood; Mary, in all possible humility, accompanied him and watched in wonder as his public ministry unfolded.

We too are ‘subject’ to the constraints of human life and living, we are members of a family, a neighbourhood, a community, a parish, a diocese, an association of the faithful, a Church. There are constraints or limitations that flow naturally from our participation in human life and that arise from the relationships that are part of our belonging to various groupings of persons.

The challenge this month is to reflect on the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, to see how he accepted such ‘constraints’ as a natural and normal part of life and both grew and matured in the process.

Reflection.

The Fathers of the Church, gathered in the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) stressed in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, ‘Lumen Gentium’, chapter V, that there exists a ‘Universal Call to Holiness in the Church’. In paragraph 32 of LG we read that “The People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4,5); sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because "there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus (Gal 3,28)" within “the Church everyone does not proceed by the same

path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God.”

This affirmation opens on to a reflection on the different roles exercised within the one body of Christ, which is the Church. There is the vocation to exercise sacred ministry which is expressed in the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, however the exercise of this ministry carries within it an essential union because the pastors and members of the Church are bound together in a community of relationship.

The text goes on to outline the tasks of the pastors of the Church which is fundamentally one of service and affirms “Thus in their diversity all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ. This very diversity of graces, ministries and works gathers the children of God into one, because "all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit".” (1 Cor 12,11). Those who are in sacred ministry “by teaching, by sanctifying and by ruling with the authority of Christ, feed the family of God so that the new commandment of charity may be fulfilled by all.” This text speaks of the teaching and guiding role of the Church. The Lord himself is our primary teacher, but through the Pope, the Bishops and the Pastors of the Church he continues to teach and guide his Church. Our late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, in the Apostolic Exhortation ‘Pastores Dabo Vobis’ on formation of priests, introduced the theme of the Exhortation with a quotation from the prophet Jeremiah: “I will give you shepherds after my own heart” (Jer. 3:15). In these words from the prophet Jeremiah, God promises his people that he will never leave them without shepherds to gather them together and guide them: "I will set shepherds over them [my sheep] who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed (Jer. 23.4).” Sacred ministry is thus seen as a participation in the shepherding of Christ.”

St. Vincent Pallotti was himself guided and led by the teaching role of the pastors of the Church; he sought the guidance of wise and holy spiritual directors all through his life, he recommended his spiritual sons and daughters to seek council, to ask for advice, to discern the workings of the Spirit of the Lord with the help of others. He was known as a particularly wise spiritual director and much sought after by the people of Rome and beyond. He also carried out this ministry by letter, one such example was the frequent epistolary communication he maintained with Felice

Rondannini, during the time he spent in Vienna. In November, 1840, St. Vincent, speaking to him in the third person, wrote:

My dearest (friend) in Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified.

How are the worries of the well-known person? Tell him that they are without foundation, and that he is submerging himself in them without reason (grounds): and to make a pleasing offering to the most High of all that he has suffered. Assure him that things are going better than he could imagine; and therefore to put an end to a life full of fears, doubts, perplexities, and anguish, and to begin another life of peace, of tranquillity so as to run speedily in the paths of true love of God.

The grace, the peace, the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communication of the Holy Spirit be always with us and with all.

Pray for me, for my living and deceased (relatives) and for many pious works; and I commend myself to your charity.

OCL (Complete Letters of St. Vincent Pallotti) Volume III, p. 287.

Texts for reflection:

Luke 2, 21, 22-38; 39-40; 41-52: John 1, 1-18; 2, 1-12; 19, 25-27: Ephesians 1, 15-23.

Let us pray with St. Vincent. “My God, my infinite mercy, in your same infinite mercy and through the merits and intercession of Mary, most Holy, and of all the Angels and Saints, and through the merits of the entire Church of Jesus Christ, I firmly believe that the infinite merit of the dependency exercised by Jesus in relation to Mary most Holy and St. Joseph, his foster father, destroy in me from this moment, for ever and always with new increases of perfection multiplied infinitely every moment, the spirit of independence and all its awful consequences, and give me all the infinite merits of the same dependence of Jesus and of all the thoughts, words and works of his dependence, and all of this multiplied various times and with your glory, as if it had been communicated and would be communicated to all creatures, past, present, future and possible, and all infinitely multiplied every moment, infinitely, for all of eternity. Yes, my God, more, more, infinitely more, infinitely more times! My God: all in eternity.” (July, 1839, OCCC X, p. 343-4)