



# Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - December, 2006

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## Fundamental Rule 13 – Spirit of Sacrifice

### Introduction

Speaking of the presentation of Jesus in the temple, Pallotti writes:

*"Our Lord Jesus Christ on the fortieth day after his birth offered himself to God his Father in the Temple in Jerusalem even though he had already offered (himself) from the very first moment of his Incarnation. Therefore, out of love for Our Lord Jesus Christ, we must strive to imitate him by often renewing our resolution to live a life of perfect and perpetual sacrifice. We must also prepare ourselves well for the annual renewal of the spirit prescribed by our Holy Constitutions."*

(OCC III, p.45)

Pallotti believed silence, solitude and prayer to be the fundamental conditions for growth into a personal relationship with God.

*My Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, and of all the Angels and the Saints with the infinite merits of your going apart to be with the Father, of your silence, and of your prayers, destroy all that I've done that's evil in me, and in others. And now and always, your periods of recollection will be my periods of recollection, your silence will be my silence, your prayers will be my prayers".*

OCC X, p.658)

Like Jesus, Pallotti would often withdraw into the silence of his heart and picture himself elsewhere:

- *"with Mary and the disciples in the Cenacle";* (OCC X: 86-87)
- *"I will imagine myself on the cross with the good thief, prostrate on the ground with David, fallen on the Damascus road with Paul"* (OCC X: 14)
- *In order to increase the fervour of the Spirit I will imagine myself ...in solitude with St. Anthony, St. Jerome and others, then on Mt. Alvernia with St. Francis."* (OCC X: 81,)

## Reflection.

Pallotti was hailed by Pope Pius XI as ‘the Pioneer of Catholic Action’ for his vision of the apostolate in founding The Pious Society of the Catholic Apostolate in order “that it might be perpetually in the Church of Jesus Christ as an evangelical trumpet which would call everyone, invite everyone and awaken the zeal and charity of all the faithful of every class, rank and condition; and that all may humbly, lovingly and religiously respect, venerate, serve and assist the Catholic Apostolate as instituted by Jesus Christ in His Church” (OCC I, p. 4-5). Pallotti was driven by zeal for the apostolate and thus could be thought of as a person constantly on an outward journey, a missionary outreach; but he was also a contemplative who continually sought union with God by way of an interior journey.

It is said that a tourist goes somewhere and returns unchanged whereas a pilgrim returns from a journey somewhat different, perhaps a little wiser, a little more open to grace and holier. Because we are not pure spirits and are mostly sense orientated, the environment becomes an important factor in our encounter with God.

The desert and the wilderness has long since been a special place where humanity encounters God. As seen in the Scriptures, God calls those he has chosen “leading them into the desert to speak to their hearts” (Hosea 2:14). From Moses (Ex 3:1-6) to Elijah (1Kg 19:8-13) and from John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-3) to Jesus (Mk 1:12) the wilderness is where one’s spirit is replenished and one’s apostolic endeavours are honed and sharpened. We have to revisit these sacred places often if we are to be continually transformed and reformed into the people that we are meant to be. It is there that we return to who we are at the core of our being and recognise it for the first time.

*With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling  
We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*

*T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”, Four Quartets*

We need to constantly return to our beginning, to our first love, to retreat to the centre of our being, to encounter our Lord where God is and re-establish our identity as God's children.

- ❖ Just as Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to re-establish and reaffirm his true identity as God's Son (Mt. 4:1-11).
- ❖ And as Jesus himself often withdrew from the crowds to be with the Father we too need to withdraw from our normal activities and spend some time away with God in the quiet (Mk 1:35; Mt 14:13).
- ❖ These can be days of retreat or recollection days at various times throughout the year or a quiet break in the midst of a market place.
- ❖ This desert experience is also equivalent to what saints Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross would call 'Dark Night', a negation of all external stimuli and an absence of all internal consolations. We are purified by these Dark Nights, by being vulnerable and totally dependent on God in our lives.

## **A Story**

Once the great ascetic, St. Antony of the Desert Fathers was relaxing outside his hut when a hunter came by. The hunter was surprised and shocked, and he rebuked Antony for taking it easy. "Can you be that Antony whose great and famous reputation has made me want to make your acquaintance?" Antony replied with a question: "What is that you are carrying in you hand?" "It is a bow", replied the hunter. "And why," Antony went on, "do you not always carry it bent?" "I could not do that, because the force of its stiffness would be relaxed by its being continually bent, and it would be lessened and destroyed. As a result, when the time comes it would be impossible for an arrow to be shot," replied the hunter. "Ah," said Antony, "unless the spirit sometimes relieves and relaxes the rigour of its purpose by some recreation, it would lose its spring owing to the unbroken strain, and would be unable, when need required, to follow what was right."

The Trappist monk Thomas Merton, a contemplative and mystic, showed us that true understanding depends not only on intelligence but above all on the heart. His social analysis of the world came about primarily through contemplative penetration into the heart of God; his awareness and insights into God, self, the world and others, came about through soli-

tude and silence. He tells of a spiritual awakening that came about as a result of living a contemplative life:

*In Louisville on the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the centre of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they are mine and I was theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. . . . I have the immense joy of being human, a member of the race in which God himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I could realise this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun!!*

*Only when we see ourselves in our true human context, as members of a race which is intended to be one organism and "one Body," will we begin to understand the positive importance not only of the successes but of the failures and accidents in our lives. My successes are not my own. The way to them was prepared by others. The fruit of my labours is not my own: for I am preparing the way for the achievements of another. Nor are my failures my own. They may spring from the failure of another, but they are also compensated for by another's achievement. Therefore the meaning of my life is not to be looked for merely in the sum total of my own achievements. It is seen only in the complete integration of my achievements and failures with the achievements and failures of my own generation, and society, and time. It is seen, above all, in my integration in the mystery of Christ. That was what the poet John Donne realized during a serious illness when he heard the death knell tolling for another. "The Church is Catholic, universal," he said, "so are all her actions, all that she does belongs to all. . . . Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon any occasion rings? But who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world?"*

Thomas Merton, No Man Is An Island

### **For Reflection:**

1. How much does the image 'Pilgrim' apply to your spiritual life?
2. What are the 'sacred places' from which you draw sustenance?
3. What are the 'places', physical and spiritual, to which you 'retreat' in order to draw strength for the apostolate?