



Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - January, 2007

Fundamental Rule 14 – Suffering and joy in persecution

Introduction

St. Vincent Pallotti meditating on the life of the Child Jesus, wrote in the Fundamental Rule:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ persecuted by Herod, submitted himself to the suffering of the flight into Egypt and of his stay in that country. We must, therefore, for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, accept every suffering with love and with a holy joy through it all, always and in every circumstance, whatever the circumstances of the persecution are”.

(OCC III, p. 46)

Pallotti contemplated the sufferings of Jesus right from the time of his birth in a meditation which we find in the book *God, the Infinite Love*:

“... Our Lord Jesus, in order to give us the grace to imitate Him, humiliated Himself infinitely in the mystery of the incarnation and by being born in the pain and humiliation of the manger, and by living a life which was humble, poor, suffering, persecuted, laborious, beneficent and scorned. This is the reason why He condescended to have Herod seek Him with the intention of killing Him at birth. In order to drink the bitter chalice of the mystery of the Cross to the last drop, Jesus subjected Himself to the hardships of the flight, to residence in Egypt and to His return to Nazareth. Here He lived in ... obedience to His heavenly Father, and in perfect subjection to Mary, His Virgin Mother and to St. Joseph, his foster father.”

(God, the Infinite Love,, med. XXIII)

Reflection

Suffering, in itself, is to experience evil, but Christ has made it into the greatest definite good, it is a good that leads to eternal health. It is true that it is not easy to understand and to accept suffering without grounding oneself in the suffering of Christ. He himself accepted suffering for the world he created and for all of humanity out of love and in obedience to his Father.

Christ alone can present himself as a strength in suffering, he gives both an answer and meaning to the questionings and queries that mankind asks regarding suffering. He responds, not merely with his teachings in the Good News but, above all, he provides an answer in his own suffering from his very birth right up to his death on the Cross.

Many texts and discourses during the public ministry of Christ bear witness to the way he accepted suffering readily because it was the will of the Father for the salvation of the world.

All the teaching of Jesus testifies to the love he had for his Father as shown in his obedience. However, they also attest to the reality of his suffering. In the Garden of Gethsemane, in Matthew 26,39 ..., the prayer of Jesus clearly shows both his love and the reality of his suffering. The words of Jesus affirm completely, with both humility and simplicity, the human truth of suffering; to suffer is to experience the evil before which a person shudders, shakes and trembles ... suffering reached its peak in the passion of Jesus, and here it was intrinsically bound up to love.

The witnesses to the passion of Christ, the Christians, are at the same time witnesses of his resurrection. This sends us back to the letters of St. Paul, (Phil. 3, 10-11): “All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death, that is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead.” The witnesses of the passion, Cross and resurrection of Christ were convinced that: “We have to experience many hardships before we enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14,22).

St Paul the Apostle is himself a witness of this. He experienced first of all **the power of the resurrection** of Christ on the road to Damascus, it was only later while he still in the paschal light that **the communion in Christ's sufferings** came. Writing to the Romans (8, 17-18) and in other

texts, St. Paul, affirms that we are coheirs with Christ as we share his sufferings so that we may also share his glory. Indeed, those who participate in the sufferings of Christ, are also called, through the sufferings themselves, to participate in his glory.

Those who participate in the sufferings of Christ have before their eyes the paschal mystery of the Cross and the resurrection of Christ, in which at the outset Christ descends to the very limits of human weakness and impotence. He died nailed to the Cross. But, at the same time, in this very weakness his elevation is realised and is confirmed in the power of the resurrection; this means that the weakness of every human suffering can be raised up by the power of God which was made manifest in the cross of Christ. In effect suffering is also a call to show the moral dimension of the human person, his or her spiritual maturity.

Biblical texts for reflection:

“One of the scribes then came up and said to him, ‘Master, I will follow you wherever you go’. Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’” (Matt. 8,19-20).

“Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.” (Matt. 5, 11)

Testimony

The experience of being persecuted, of fleeing from one’s own country and of not being safe in one’s own country was a reality for some Pallottine Sisters who have been exercising the apostolate for many years in a country in Africa. Some years ago two of them had to flee to another country and the Lord used this situation to bring hope to thousands of refugees who were living in a refugee camp; they looked after the sick, they nourished the children and they were a sign of the love of God present in that situation. In time, a Pallottine community was established in that area and today the Sisters continue, with the same courage and dedication that comes from faith, to be close to those who suffer, to the refugee families,

to the young people to whom they teach catechesis, and together with them they hope and pray for peace. The presence of Pallottines in this area where the inhabitants live in fear and without social and political stability is very significant. To revive faith, to rekindle charity, to promote reconciliation and union with others becomes the basis for their apostolate.

Invitation to prayer

For those who find themselves in difficulties, who experience exile, who lack their own home and who live with insecurity.

Lord Jesus, as your parents fled to Egypt in obedience to the angel's command, watch over all families who have been forced to leave their homes and communities. Keep them free from harm on their journeys, and bring them in safety to the place where you would have them be. Amen.

Lord, you care for us, and for you nobody is a stranger and nobody is so far away that you cannot help them, you are the Lord of life and not of death, make us understand each day that you have borne our sufferings, you have taken our pain on yourself, so that we can welcome you and serve you in our neighbour, especially in those who suffer; grant us to experience this same love of yours, to have the same respect and the same joy that you have for them. We ask you this through our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and always. Amen.

With St. Vincent Pallotti we pray:

“O my Jesus, my mercy, do you know when I will be sure of being truly one with You? When you will have given me the grace of rejoicing always when I am scorned, calumniated, experience opposition, when I am opposed, in pain and in the greatest sufferings and when I suffer bitterly in times of praise, of consolation and in the affluence of earthly possessions. My Jesus, the most lively and complete participation in all of your painful life and in that of Mary most holy and of all the Saints would be my greatest happiness. (OOCC X, p. 220)