



Apostles for Today

Reflections and Prayer - February 2007

Fundamental Rule 15 – Consacration and Separation

Pallotti teaches us:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, after the stay in Egypt, following the indications of God his Father, came to live in Nazareth so as to fulfil the prophecy which said ‘he will be called a Nazarene’ which means one consecrated to the Lord, and separate from the world: therefore, for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must strive to preserve and perfect in ourselves the spirit of solemn consecration which we make at the end of novitiate.”

(OCC III, p. 46)

Reflection

I would like to apply these words of St. Vincent to all those persons who follow his ideal of life in their state or condition of life. I have often asked St. Vincent: “what don’t **you** speak of yourself? ...we always speak about you, we write, we study, we know almost everything about you, we know where you were on a given day at a certain time and what you did there, and yet I would still like to hear your voice telling me who you really are”. Invariably I hear a voice in my interior which says to me: “my life speaks for me ... look at how I lived”. I often think that the characteristics of the parents are seen in their children, not only in their physical features, but also in the style and way of living. An answer to the question, who was St. Vincent, should somehow be evident in us. In all of his activity I have always felt and seen his love (‘do everything for everybody’), always courageous, creative and persevering. Having seen a ‘son’ of St. Vincent living like this I felt that I too wanted to live in this manner. In learning from Vincent I discovered that love is the fundamental constituent of his works and the necessary stimulus to be apostles. St. Vincent showed us this in his own life, he also proposed it to all Christians, those of his own time (his Appeal of the month of May ’35) and he continues to do it today.

Consecrated and Separated:

Consecrated to God and separated from the world

This is the spirituality of today's Church even though it may strike us as strange. How can one reconcile being an apostle today with this radical call of separation from the world? At the very beginning of my own experience (one of many that flourishes in the Pallottine family) I wanted to immediately put into practice the ideal of a lived charity in the situation in which I found myself which, at that time, consisted of school, the family and my friends. Following on the first burst of enthusiasm I quickly realised that it was a demanding and exacting road and at times it seemed impossible. The desire to follow the Gospel of Jesus, the person of Jesus, was very strong, but at the same time I became aware that all that surrounded me was not open to Him. I used to share this experience with others (by the grace of God I continue to do so today), we confided the difficulties with one another; while at the same time difficulties also arose among ourselves. So was born, in a natural manner, the need to ask God, in prayer, and especially in Mass, for the strength and light to follow his way. We liked less and less the style of life of the society in which we lived, we did not accept the models that society tried to impose, but, at the same time these very models were also attractive to us. Thus there was always the possibility of slowly and imperceptibly going back to being as we had been before. I became aware of the treasure I had received and that this treasure had to be defended with all the means at my disposal.

The primary 'means' was my community. The stronger the bond of charity among us, as desired by St. Vincent, the stronger I felt going into the 'world'. It was not so much an attitude of disapproval of the world, but rather an effort to preserve the treasure, the pearl of great price, which is life in Christ.

Today, I believe that the antidote to 'the world' is to be strongly anchored in the Christian community. A community that is built on love, in which the inevitable divisions and diversities are not allowed to separate brother from brother. A community founded on dialogue, on a sharing of both ones life experiences and the spiritual ones, on a sharing in the sacraments, a community of the lived Word of God, a community of ecclesial communion. A community founded on the cross of Christ, which knows how to transform the inevitable difficulties in love. All of this will generate genuine concern for all other persons, to bring also to them the Christ

who has been encountered in life. This is true for each and every type of community, the religious, parochial, lay and family community. The task that awaits us as members of the UAC is to bring everywhere that Christ who is present in our families, in our communities. This is especially true for us laypersons as our own experience of the ‘world’ has shown us the injustices, the corruption and the indifference that hide in society. How much good there is for us to do! Every morning as we go to work, or in our activity, or also in our own homes, there is someone who is waiting to be loved by Jesus; it is up to us to take the initiative and do it, drawing strength from the community.

Meditation

I would like to place alongside the words of St. Vincent several passages from various sources which express how the relationship with the world has been perceived from the time of Jesus.

“He was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God”. (Jn. 1, 10 – 12).

Even though the world may reject it Jesus still offers himself for the salvation of the world. Jesus also said to them:

“I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark; he will have the light of life”. (Jn. 8, 12).

St. Paul spoke strongly about all that is erroneous and hostile to God in the world but at the same time he emphasised the responsibility that Christians have to transform it. In order to do this he felt it was necessary to preserve intact within oneself and in the community the message of Jesus, defending it from every attack, so that it would not be contaminated by internal divisions nor by the temptations and persecutions that come from outside:

“Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do”. (Rm. 12, 2).

I would like to present a short passage from the beautiful letter to Diogneto (2nd. Cent. AD) which shows how the first Christians saw this

relationship with the world. Having explained that Christians live their lives in the world like all other persons, but, with a different ideal which shapes all their activities, we read:

“In short, to put it in a nutshell, Christians fulfil the same function in the world as the soul does in the body. The soul spreads into all the members of the body; in the same way Christians are scattered in all the cities of the world. The soul lives in the body, but it is not of the body; in the same way Christians live in the world but they are not of the world”.

The Church of today, as the Pope affirmed in his message on Christmas Day 2006, looks at the world and its achievements with appreciation and recognition, but she cannot but observe:

“In this post-modern age, perhaps he needs a Saviour all the more, since the society in which he lives has become more complex and the threats to his personal and moral integrity have become more insidious. Who can defend him, if not the One who loves him to the point of sacrificing on the Cross his only-begotten Son as the Saviour of the world?”.

Let us remember that when God created the world “he saw that it was good” and following the creation of man “indeed it was very good”. Do we want to restore the world to being something that is “very good”, under the guidance of Jesus and with our charism?

Let us pray together to the Father to give us this ability to separate from the spirit of the world and be true apostles in every place on earth.

*Lord, may we live like Mary. She was both mother of a family and wife; she lived daily life amongst people and nobody was aware of her extraordinary experience, but she brought Jesus to the world. So too we, without doing spectacular and conspicuous things, wish to love you and love one another, so that you may be our protection and we may be your apostles in every moment of life. Give us the courage to say **no** to that which offends you and offends the human person and to always say **yes** where Faith and Charity are to be rekindled and spread. Amen*

Let us listen, like Isaiah, to God who says: “See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light; can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness, paths in the wilds”. (*Is. 43, 19*).