



Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - April, 2007

Fundamental Rule 17 – “Jesus prayed always”

Introduction.

Our monthly reflection continues to be oriented by the 33 points of the Fundamental Rule which St. Vincent Pallotti left to us. This month we come to point 17 which speaks to us of Jesus’ relationship with the Father.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed always. Every year on the feast of the Pasch he went with Mary his Mother most Holy and St. Joseph to the Temple in Jerusalem to fulfil the duties of a perfect Israelite. Out of love for our Lord Jesus Christ we must strive to imitate him in his life of prayer. We must, with great perfection and fervour, perform all the exercises of piety that are practised in our houses and indicated by our Constitutions, as well as all other acts of internal and external worship. In order to draw greater benefit from them we should, at least once a month, give an account of ourselves to our spiritual director.” (OCCC III, p. 47)

Reflection.

Prayer is a gift which is based on faith in God. Prayer is the living relationship of children with their infinitely good Father, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. A life of prayer consists of being continually in the presence of God and in communion with Him. Such a life of communion is always possible because, through Baptism, we have become one with Christ (cfr. Rm 6,5). Prayer is Christian in so far as it is communion with Christ which extends into the Church which is His Body. The dimension of prayer is that of the Love of Christ. Humility is the necessary disposition to receive gratuitously the gift of prayer because, of ourselves, “we cannot choose words in order to pray properly.” (Rm 8,26) (cfr Catechism 2565 & 2559).

St. Teresa, responding to a question on what prayer is, said: “Prayer is nothing other than an intimate relationship of friendship, in which one often lingers, one to one, with the God of whom one knows oneself to be beloved” (St Teresa of Jesus, *Story of a Soul*, p. 8)

These references will, I believe, help us to understand better that which St. Vincent wanted to describe in point 17 of the Fundamental Rule. The phrase *“Jesus prayed always”* indicates to us that Jesus’ attitude could not be other than what it was because his communion with the Father was both constant and perfect. He himself affirmed: “To have seen me is to have seen the Father” (Jn. 14,9); “The Father and I are one” (Jn. 10,30).

Jesus’ relationship with the Father was not just one of personal intimacy, individualistic, rather he showed himself to be faithful to the Jewish prescriptions of his time travelling to the Temple in Jerusalem each year for the Solemnity of the Passover. His attitude invites us to consider that true spirituality is lived in community, in communion with ones neighbour. The communion with Jesus that we live in prayer must imbue all our activities with love. Love of God is expressed in love of neighbour (cf. I John 4,20).

Jesus is the model for our prayer. On watching him at prayer his disciples were so struck by it that they did not hesitate to ask him *“... teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples”* (Lk 11,1).

Seeking out a solitary place was another of the characteristics of Jesus’ prayer: *“In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there”* (Mk. 1,35). He did the very same when he wished to celebrate the Last Supper with His disciples in the Cenacle and when he withdrew to the Garden of Gethsemane.

St. Vincent took the prayer life of Jesus as an example for himself. He was convinced that he had to go to Jesus every day and ask of Him: “Lord, teach me to pray”. In the course of his day he felt that it was almost an obligation on him to reserve certain times for prayer and meditation.

St. Vincent was a man of constant prayer, he prayed everywhere and anywhere. His spiritual diary is a virtual river of prayers. In his prayers he did not borrow words or feelings, rather they were born of what was happening in his soul and they expressed what he was experiencing and feeling. He attained a remarkable level of contemplative prayer; his life was prayer and his every action was a conscious and deliberate glorification of God.

From the above we understand that spirituality does not consist of performing devotional spiritual exercises but is, rather, a transformation of

ones life through reflection, meditation and contemplation of the Word; the love of God which is experienced in prayer is made visible in ones actions and interaction with others.

Many years ago I read an article on the necessity of prayer and on the motivation to pray. I was struck by the following reflection: “Sometimes we experience the temptation to say ‘I do not feel the need to pray, there is no reason to pray, everything is going well in my life’. The author’s conclusion was very clear, ‘when we contemplate Jesus, the Son of God, deep in prayer with the Father in order to be sustained and able to respond faithfully to his mission, we will then have enough reasons to pray.’”

We pray with St. Vincent Pallotti

St. Vincent, in his prayer, is completely absorbed in God. Let us pray with him.

“My God, in every moment you nourish me with your Wisdom and you destroy my ignorance. You nourish me with your inaccessible Light and you destroy all my shadows. You nourish me with your infinite Perfection and you destroy my life which is a monstrosity of imperfections. You nourish me with your infinite Being and you destroy my brutish life, my loathsome self, a sinful man, and by a miracle of your Mercy, even though I have merited infinite times to lose God forever, God himself with all of his Nature, Person and Attributes made Himself all mine, he becomes my nourishment and he nourishes me always, so as to transform me into Himself and make me one with Him. Therefore, I am all in God and God is all in me; and with His eternal nature he brings me to all times and in his immensity he brings me to all places and I experience myself as eternal and immersed in Him. Oh Wondrous God, oh Infinite Mercy”. (cf. OCCC X, 696-698)

The Word helps us to reflect further

- Mk 6, 30-32
- Mt 5, 23-24
- 1Thess 5, 17-21
- Mt 7, 7-11

In this Lenten season let us meditate together on the Passion of Jesus in the spirit of Vincent Pallotti. On contemplating the Cross he experienced the Infinite Love of God for us. Vincent assigned one period or episode of the Passion of Jesus to each hour of the day.

CLOCK OF THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

In this meditation one could also reflect on the sorrows of Mary in her suffering at each of the stages of the Passion of her Divine Son.

1. Jesus takes leave of Mary and goes to celebrate Supper with the disciples.
2. He washes the feet of the apostles and institutes the Sacrament of the Eucharist.
3. He leaves the apostles and goes to the Mount of Olives.
4. He prays in the garden.
5. He begins to agonize.
6. He sweats blood.
7. He is betrayed by Judas and is bound.
8. He is led to Annas.
9. He is sent to Caiaphas and is buffeted (slapped).
10. He is bound, receives blows and is mocked.
11. He is led before the Council and is called culprit deserving of death.
12. He is brought before Pilate and accused.
13. He is mocked by Herod.
14. He is led back to Pilate and Barabbas is chosen before him.
15. He is scourged.
16. He is crowned with a crown of thorns and presented to the people.
17. He is condemned to death and led to Calvary.
18. He is stripped of his garments and crucified.
19. He prays for those who crucified him.
20. He commends his spirit to the Father.
21. He dies on the cross.
22. His side is pierced with a lance.
23. He is taken down from the cross and given to his Mother.
24. He is placed and left in the tomb. (OO CC XI, p. 361-2)

Themes for reflection. (personal or in a group)

1. How can I organize my life of prayer following Jesus' model?
2. What space do I try to give to meditation and contemplation of the Word of God in the course of my day?
3. What feelings does the prayer of Pallotti, quoted above, stir up in my heart?