



Apostles for Today

Reflection and prayer - October 2007

Fundamental Rule no. 23 **Solitude, prayer, a life of mortification** **and humility in order to overcome temptations**

Introduction

Knowledge of the Fundamental Rule brings us back to the source, that is, to the experience St. Vincent had at Camaldoli in 1839. He himself described it in his Spiritual Testament¹ in 1840:

“Having arrived at the Holy Hermitage on July 10th, God in his mercy, inspired me to be seriously attentive right from the beginning to the reordering of my poor spirit ... Then ...I began to write the Rules for the Pia Casa di Carità established in Rome by the Pious Society (Union) of the Catholic Apostolate ...

Having finished the writing of the Rules for the Pia Casa di Carità and while reading in the Life of the Blessed Virgin of how the Apostles after the coming of the Holy Spirit were led to preach the holy Gospel in the diverse areas of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ put into my mind the idea of the true nature and the works of the Pious Society (Union) “ (OCCC III, p. 26-27).

This experience gave rise to the Fundamental Rule; point number 23 of the Rule is the subject of our meditation for the month of October 2007:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, before beginning to preach His heavenly doctrine for our spiritual welfare, withdrew into the desert where He prayed and fasted for forty days, and He humbled Himself even so far as permitting the devil to tempt Him three times. Out of love for Our Lord Jesus Christ, we must strive to imitate Him.

¹ OCCC III, p. 23-33

1. ***in love of solitude***, to which we must frequently aspire. For this reason our houses are called 'retreat houses', and we should also make good use of the ten days of Solitude prescribed by the Constitutions:
2. ***in a life of prayer***, praying especially, with great fervour and diligence, all the vocal and mental prayers that are also prescribed by the Constitutions:
3. ***in a life of mortification***, observing the Fast days of the Church, and all the fasts, abstinences and penances prescribed by the Constitutions
4. ***in a life of deep humility and trust in God*** learning to practise the difficult art of overcoming all temptations".

(OCC III, p. 52-53)

Meditation on a biblical episode

Our Holy Founder in the text *Daily Practical Memorandum*² invites us to ensure the identity of the Union, which has as the "...*Fundamental Rule of our little Congregation the very life itself of Our Lord Jesus Christ*" (OCC III, p. 35-36). Let us place ourselves into the episode in the life of Jesus Christ (Mt 3,13-4,11) from which point number 23 comes.

Jesus came to the Jordan: I invite you to meditate, watching how he arrives. John recognized him (cf. Jn. 1,29-34): now accept the grace to know Jesus, together with John the Baptist. Jesus presented himself for baptism at the hands of the precursor: try to see and to feel all that is taking place. Jesus came up from the water: He did not confess his sins like all the others were doing, He is Holy; renew in your heart the memory of the sanctifying grace of your holy baptism. A voice was heard from heaven: "*This is my Son, the beloved, my favour rests on him*" (Mt 3,17): meditate on the words of the Father, which he pronounced also for you, in Christ. And then ... *Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days* (Lk. 4,1-2).

We take notice of the decisions which were taken by Jesus, they are a victory over temptations gained for us by Him "*in the wilderness*": *Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God* (Mt 4,4); *You must not put the Lord your God to the test* (Mt 4,7); *Be off, Satan! For scripture says: 'You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone'* (Mt 4,10). So should it be, and so it is, right from the start of every faith journey.

² OCC III, p. 34-39

The example and the teaching of our saintly Founder

“Our Lord Jesus Christ before he began his heavenly preaching for us, withdrew into the Desert ...”: the events which are described in the wilderness took place *for us* and we participate in them together with St. Vincent, as experienced at Camaldoli: *“... our Lord Jesus Christ put into my mind the true idea of the nature and of the works of the Pious Society”* (Union).

Our saintly Founder had an experience similar to that of Jesus when He was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, and where he was tested by the devil. He indicates for us four aspects or elements which *“form in my mind the true nature”* of the life of the Union. They are:

1. **a love for solitude** ... this is not a flight from people, nor an unwanted solitude; in the holy retreats the members should practise this “going off to a lonely place” following the example of Jesus who as the “Beloved Son” “lived in the Holy Spirit for forty days in the wilderness”;
2. **a life of prayer** ... the Founder has left us a clear principle: *“therefore, even if it is not with perfect and uninterrupted compliance [but] at least with a right intention, the life [of the member] will be a life of prayer”* (OCCC II, p. 63). Here we see that we should have the intention of growing in our faith, of going beyond saying: “I do have faith, help the little faith I have! (Mk 9 24), that is, to pass from a prayer that requests – “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lc 11,1) – according to the principle of “*ius credendi ius orandi*” (the standard (law) of prayer determines the standard (law) of belief) ... to a “deep humility and trust in God”;
3. **a life of mortification** ... our saintly Founder is, for us, an example. Already in 1816 he wrote: *“In all of my actions, and always, I intend to combat my body which has rebelled against reason, and to humiliate and to mortify the spirit that has rebelled against God, thus ensuring that the powers of my soul, the feelings of my body and my entire self concur so as to give glory to God ...*(OCCC X, p. 74).

In 1846 in the Rule for the Society of priests and brothers, he wrote:

“So as to live in perfect observance of the holy Law of God, of the Church, of the Rules and of the Constitutions ... we are obliged to strive to create in ourselves a spiritual building with the holy virtues as exercised by Our Lord Jesus Christ ... we, out of love for our Lord Jesus Christ, from the moment of our entry into the

Congregation until death, with the most perfect mortification of all of our passions, are obliged to live and to die in the practise of a life of sacrifice". (OCC III, p. 42-43);

4. **a life of continuous deep humility, and trust in God** ... Vincent's deep desire to imitate Jesus Christ in his spirit of humility and trust in God shines through in his letter to Fr. Parenti: "Live in a constant mistrust of oneself and of one's strengths; in perfect trusting abandonment in God and have no fear, because God will support all when we do all, sure that we cannot do anything without God" (OCL II, p. 56).

In a letter to Mons. Piacentini we find a concrete indication to help us trust in God: "He who trusts in God is not confused. Therefore, if you are confused, it is a sign that you do not trust. Look at God, and look at yourself; you will never encounter God without mercy, nor yourself without need of it. God is always favourable to your poverty, and your poverty is the object of the goodness and mercy of God". (OCL III, p. 126)

To be an apostle according to *Fundamental Rule 23*

Firstly: to live a balance between ensuring "*the reordering of my poor spirit*" and allowing Jesus Christ to "*put in my mind the true idea of the nature and the works of the Pious Society (Union)*".

Secondly: to acquire and to assimilate the four characteristics of the imitation of Jesus Christ as they were meditated above.

Thirdly: "*for us*", without this one cannot "*be an apostle*". The more we live in communion with Jesus Christ convinced that He has done all "*for us*", the more we will fulfil our call to be apostles.

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