



Apostles for Today

Reflection and prayer - June 2008

Fundamental Rule no. 31

It is accomplished

Our Lord Jesus Christ close to death said “ Consummatum est” “it is accomplished” (John 19,30): therefore, for love of our Lord Jesus Christ who did all he did in order to save us, we are to use profitably all the means that God has given to us in the Congregation- and in the Union of Catholic Apostolate – and which must be nurtured right up to the moment of death with ever increasing perfection, we are to do all for the greater glory of God and the sanctification of our souls and those of our neighbour, without ever neglecting any of the works, great or small, that God wishes to entrust to us. (OCC III, 58)

A - Introduction

It is accomplished. These words of Jesus, the last of the seven words spoken by him on the Cross, reveal the feelings of his heart and are like his last will and testament and are therefore very precious and dear to us. In the course of time they were heard and meditated on by countless Christians and even set to music by some composers, among whom was F. Joseph Haydn [1732-1809], a contemporary of Pallotti. These seven last words were also commented on by St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and popularized by the Franciscans in the form of meditations on the seven wounds of Christ as an antidote to the seven mortal sins. It was from this perspective that our Founder inserted them into the *Fundamental Rule* of the 33 points.

It is accomplished: these words have two meanings. *It is accomplished* signify the end of earthly life and the encounter with death. This is exactly what the Evangelist John conveys: “and bowing his head he gave up his spirit” (John 19,30). But these words also have a deeper sense, that of having brought everything to its fulfilment, of having realized completely the mission that the Father had entrusted to him. “My food, - Jesus had said previously – is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work” (Jn. 4,34).

It seems that Vincent Pallotti was referring to this second meaning of these final words of Jesus when he wrote in number 31 of the *Fundamental Rule*: Our Lord Jesus Christ close to death said “ Consummatum est” “it is accomplished” (John 19,30): therefore, for love of our Lord Jesus Christ who did all he did in order to save us, we are to use profitably all the means that God has given to us in the Congregation- and in the Union of Catholic Apostolate – and which must be nurtured right up to the moment of death with ever increasing perfection, we are to do all for the greater glory of God and the sanctification of our souls and those of our neighbour, without ever neglecting any of the works, great or small, that God wishes to entrust to us.

B – Reflections on two texts from the writings of St. Paul

1. “There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength” (Phil. 4,13)

The year of St. Paul will be inaugurated in June 2008. We know that this apostle occupies a privileged place in the life and writings of St. Vincent Pallotti. Indeed, Vincent referred often to the letters of St. Paul even though he did not always do an exegesis on the texts.

“The holy collector of texts did not have time to comment on them. He must occupy himself with more urgent matters” observed Fr. Francesco Moccia (OCC XII, p. IX). Nevertheless, St. Paul’s presence vibrates in the writings of Pallotti and particularly in the short phrase with which Vincent opens his Spiritual Diary: **“There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength”** (Phil 4,13). It is true that a person cannot save himself or herself but can and must cooperate with God as “a useless servant”. He or she must do all, “all, all, infinitely all, if possible” (OCL I, 19), for the greater glory of God and the sanctification of ones own soul and that of ones neighbour, without neglecting any of the works, great or small, that God entrusts to us. This conviction would lead St. Vincent Pallotti to see the Apostolate as a collaboration between the person and the grace of God. He expresses this dynamic in what appears to be a paradoxical formulation which recalls that of the great mystics: “God will sustain and strengthen all”, he wrote to Francesco Parenti, ‘when we do all, convinced that we cannot do anything without God” (OCL II, p. 56). Vincent will say the same again in a very simple manner in the *Rules for the Seminaries and Monasteries*, for which he

suggests the following exercise: “On awakening all will get up ... and with holy water make the sign of the Cross and express their trust that they will be strengthened by the power of God, enlightened with the wisdom of the Son, and sanctified with the virtues and the love of the Holy Spirit. They will say *‘by myself I can do nothing .. with God I can do all things ... for love of God I wish to do all ... to God be honour and contempt to me’*” (OCCC II, p. 305-306). With this movement of collaboration between God and the person St. Vincent shows the essence of his thinking and his own personal practice, he was both a mystic and an apostle.

2. “I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith” (2 Tm 4, 7)

If one wanted to sum up the life and the apostolic activity of St. Paul one could do it with the sentiment expressed by him in his second Letter to Timothy: **“I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith”**, this is Paul’s equivalent to saying *“It is accomplished”*. One could say that for St. Paul the expression “I have run” means first of all that “I have finished my journey to the ends of the earth” as the Lord asked me to do, but also “I put all my strength and my talents at the service of the Kingdom of God”.

Examination of conscience

- What does “I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith”, mean to me?
- Do I really put all my strength and my talents at the service of the Kingdom of God?
- Do I strive to use all the means that God offers me in the Union of Catholic Apostolate in order to commit myself to work for the greater glory of God and the sanctification of my brothers and sisters?

To be an apostle today in the spirit of no. 31 of the Fundamental Rule

It is said that the Union of Catholic Apostolate, the original foundation of Vincent Pallotti, like the composition of his contemporary Franz Schubert [1797-1829], is similar to his “unfinished symphony”. The Union of Catholic Apostolate is an incomplete work, first of all because the Founder died prematurely without being able to complete it, but also because the time was not right as the project of a universal apostolate was ahead of its time. Furthermore, it seems that the Union was meant to be incomplete because it is not a fixed model established once and for all, but it is rather a prophetic sign of the reality of the Kingdom of God, a parable

of apostolic unity. As a consequence of this the Union must always remain “in a state of continual incompleteness”, always open to the needs of the Church and the world, and also to be “faithful to the future”. This is the true and specific identity of the UAC as intended by the Founder: “I pray now and always, and I intend to pray even after my death (...) that you in your charity and your religious fervour (...) will be committed in the permanent institution and in the rapid and most profitable propagation of the pious Society as if you were elected by our Lord Jesus Christ to be its Founder” (OCCC III, 28-9). Therefore from its very foundation the Union of Catholic Apostolate was presented as being both a “high-point” and a “beginning”. It is a “high-point” because it was thanks to a gradual process that the ideas of Pallotti were clarified and defined; but it is also the “starting point” of a foundation which is open to the future in which the first steps of the Founder were the prelude to an “unfinished symphony”.

It can be said that the Union of Catholic Apostolate, the “unfinished symphony” of St. Vincent Pallotti, like that of F. Schubert has just two movements: ‘allegro moderato’ (moderately quick) and the ‘andante con moto’ (at a walking pace with motion). The Union expects that every generation of Pallottines will supply the third movement of which the entire symphony is usually composed and which is the ‘allegro vivace’ (a lively and bright marching tempo)! So it is up to us to continue the completion of this foundation with the conviction that Vincent Pallotti “... has left us as our heritage not only that which he had already undertaken but also that of which he dreamt” (Pope Pius XII).

Let us pray

Lord,
teach me to discern
the things that I can change
from those that I cannot change.
Give me the courage to change the former,
and give me the strength to support
the latter.

(From the prayers of St. Francis de Sales)