



Apostles for Today

Reflection and prayer - July 2008

Fundamental Rule no. 32

“Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this he breathed his last.” (Lk. 23,46)

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the point of death said, ‘Father into your hands I commend my spirit’ (Lk 23:46). Therefore, for love of our Lord Jesus Christ we must profit also from this lesson he gave us on eternal life. We do so by commending always our souls into the hands of our heavenly Father by our good deeds, and by regulating our whole life well, observing steadfastly the Holy Law of God, of the Church, and of our holy rules and constitutions. In this manner we will always be well prepared for death and at the moment of death we will be able to say with confidence “into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit”. In this way our life must be a life in preparation for death by always commending our souls into the hands of the heavenly Father.” (OCCC X. p59)

Reflection

As Vincent Pallotti writes, to “commend ones spirit” is a life long journey where at the end of our earthly life we freely open our hands to meet the hand of God. Jesus gave us the example of a life lived to the full and at the point of death he could surrender His Spirit into the hands of his Father.

In our life we often experience, in those close to us, their capacity to expand when facing their own mortality and continue their journey ready to place their hands into the hands of their God. I am reflecting on the lives of two such people, Anita and Michael, both of whom have walked closely with their God, following the charism of Vincent Pallotti. They both have cancer and for them the actuality of death is indeed a reality. How do they respond?

While acknowledging their pain and physical suffering, the ongoing gifts they have displayed in their lives: Joy, Freedom and Hope, continue to shine through. On a walk with Anita recently, when discussing the reality of mortality, she shared her belief that at the time of death Jesus would walk towards her to welcome her. Michael lives his life, openly discussing

his imminent death and its reality. He continues to be the joy filled and spirit filled man I have always know, open to people and their various ways of expressing their faith. He draws inspiration from the book “What is the point of being a Christian” by Timothy Radcliffe, particularly the second chapter “Learning Spontaneity” (It is from this book that my reflections are drawn). Anita and Michael live their lives as Vincent Pallotti writes “in this way/manner our life must be a life in preparing for death”.

Our lives are indeed a preparation for our moment of death and Jesus is the one to lead us to this point to open our hands freely to our God. Jesus’ life demonstrated for us the virtues to enhance the fullness of life. In this reflection, I will focus on the three of the virtues Joy, Freedom and Hope, three virtues I see clearly lived through Anita and Michael.

As Vincent Pallotti writes “In order to arrive at genuine joy, it is necessary to pass through genuine suffering”. This belief is also expressed by Timothy Radcliffe when writing of Jesus’ death. He noted that it could appear that at this time in His life, Jesus is putting the joyful times behind him however Jesus journey shows us that we can only enter joy if we are touched by the hurt of others (and our own hurt as well). He goes on to say that the opposite of joy is not sorrow but the numbness of heart that makes us incapable of any feeling, recognising that indeed sorrow can sometimes hollow us out, so that we are capable of even deeper joy (P63-4 T. Radcliffe, ‘What is the Point of Being a Christian?’).

How do we live this joy as Christians? A joy Radcliffe suggests causes people to wonder about the “secret” of our lives? (ibid p. 68) Vincent reminds us “if cheerfulness and joy are lacking few will be attracted to follow Jesus Christ.” Julian of Norwich believes that “The fullness of joy is to behold God in everything”. To be truly Christian we must have this spirit of Joy coursing through our veins. We are called to be Easter people, people of the resurrection, people on a journey believing that with Jesus all things are possible.

We are called to live lives of freedom. In freedom we see Jesus reaching out to all those he met: beggars, saints and sinners. Jesus broke with convention and claimed freedom for all. He spoke to and met with the Samaritan Woman, the Tax Collector, the Prostitute, the Woman caught in Adultery, in a spirit of love and openness, He did not condemn. He met and accepted them in the moment, giving them the freedom to

make decisions for their future life direction. In his own life, Jesus' freedom showed the true face of God. Jesus' freest act was at the last supper when he gives away his life "This is my body given for you"(ibid. p 46).

How do we live freedom as Christians?, a freedom and spontaneity that embrace all those we meet, recognising God's unconditional love for all. Again Vincent gives us some direction when he says "binding as little as necessary, freedom as much as possible, and above all cultivation of the Spirit." When speaking of us on the journey today, Radcliffe notes that we are called to be with all people and together we discover the freedom of the road and glimpse the goal of all our journeying (ibid. p. 42) Freedom does not mean that rules and commands are not necessary, Vincent writes, "as little as necessary". This true freedom can never be taken from us, it is the freedom that is deep in our being, our call is to cultivate this great gift.

We have heard stories of people imprisoned for many years yet their deep freedom was not taken from them. Again we look at the words of Vincent Pallotti, "God mercifully frees me and makes the love of God live in me, stay in me, operate in me" indeed this deep free spirit is one in which we are secure. It is this deep freedom that allows people to go into situations of imprisonment, to outwardly at least, loose their freedom. Nelson Mandela, a man recognized as one who gave many years of his life to free his people, emerged from his prison cell a deeply free and empowered man. He writes in "The Long Road to Freedom", "I found that I could not even enjoy the poor and limited freedom I was allowed when I knew that my people were not free. Freedom is indivisible; the chains on any one person were the chains on all of them, the chains on all my people were the chains on me".

We are called to be people of Hope; The Indo-European root *spei* gives us an understanding of hope as meaning 'expansion'. In hope we expand. A further understanding of hope from Vaclan Havel is "hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out". It is this sense of hope that we live for, that deep belief that if we walk with our God – in light and in dark times – that eventually, perhaps waiting even until death, there will be clarity. Jesus at the moment He was about to be handed over to death, could have been deemed as hopeless. It was however at this time

that Jesus broke the bread with his disciples, giving the sign of a vibrant new hope.

Anita's diagnosis of cancer was something she would not freely choose, yet in freely choosing it, her illness has drawn her to depths she would never have gone, in essence a new and different life, an ongoing belief and hope in her God. Joan Chittester writes that "hope isn't based on fuzzy dreams of the future; it is grounded in remembering how we made it through the past with God's help".

It is interesting to note that hope is frequently described in light metaphors: a glimmer of hope, a ray of hope. Hope is often discovered in unexpected places, Jesus' death, leading to resurrection, illness leading to fullness of life, disappointment leading to new horizons, imprisonment to resulting deep freedom. Indeed life, death and resurrection in our lives, the cycle goes on. Hope has been described as "creating a quality of soul". We journey towards a "quality of soul".

So with joy, freedom and hope we move towards reaching out to the hand of our God and at the end of our life commit our hands into the hands of God. The following prayer, which was a favourite of Fr Walter Silvester, SAC, in effect says it all.

"You know the way for us,
You know the time,
into your hands I trustingly place mine
Your plan is perfect
born of perfect love,
You know the way for us,
this way is love"

This prayer is said at 9.00am and 9.00pm by many UAC members in Australia, I invite you to join us as we commend ourselves into the hand of God on our daily journey and at the moment of death.

Please note quotes of Vincent Pallotti taken from the booklet "Caritas Christi Urget Nos – Reflections of St Vincent Pallotti". The author acknowledges the use of quotations from the perpetual calendar produced by the Pallottine Fathers Milwaukee.

Quotations from various other authors, individuals gathered from the Website: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com>