



Apostles for Today

Reflection and prayer - October 2008

Fundamental Rule no. 2

Fr. Vincent Pallotti wrote the Rule for his companions in 1846, and in point number 2 exhorted them:

“We must all live in perfect observance of the holy Law of God and of the Church, and do so in perfect chastity, obedience, poverty and perseverance in the Congregation (Union), and in observance of the holy rules and constitutions.” (OCC III, p. 41)

Reflection.

Fr. Vincent had found in the Law of God as revealed in the Scriptures a sure guide for his person and life. He was convinced that the Church, the body of Christ, had a central role to play in guiding and accompanying all her members in their lives of faith. He was wise enough to know and acknowledge the limitations of his own learning and intelligence in the face of revelation, but he never ceased to increase his knowledge and awareness by a constant search to know God, the mystery of God and the continual activity of Christ in his Church. He urged his companions, as he would us today, to study the Law of God and that of the Church, as part of our journey into the fullness of Christian life. As the Psalmist exclaimed “Happy those who walk in the Law of the Lord, who seek him with their whole heart ... and walk in his ways. You yourself have made your precepts known to be faithfully kept.” (Ps. 119, 1-5)

In 1839 he wrote a long meditation of his experience of God’s activity which he calls “An incomprehensible triumph of the Divine attributes” (OCC X, 289-358), this text ends thus: “... for God, who is infinite mercy, and through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, through the merits and intercession of Mary and of all the Angels and Saints, and through the merits of the Church of Jesus Christ, has deigned to make me the Miracle, the Trophy, and the Abyss:

- of his Omnipotence, which is infinitely merciful;

- of his Wisdom, which is infinitely merciful;
- of his Goodness, which is infinitely merciful;
- of his Charity, which is infinitely merciful;
- of his Justice, which is infinitely merciful;
- of his Clemency, which is infinitely merciful;
- of his Purity, which is infinitely merciful;
- of his Holiness, which is infinitely merciful;
- of his very infinite Mercy itself, and of all the infinity of his divine attributes which are infinitely merciful.

My God, my infinite Mercy, I believe I have understood very little, I believe I have said very little in comparison to all that you have given to me, and which you desire to give me perfectly, and for all of eternity, infinitely multiplied; so much so that I do not understand nor will I ever understand.

God became man so that man could become God.

God loved the world so much that he gave his only son (Jn. 3,16).

Will he not give us everything with it (Rm. 8,32)?

To the eternal, invisible and only God, be honour, glory, praise and gratitude for ever and ever (Cf. 1Tm. 1,17). Amen

God, God, God, Mercy, Mercy, Mercy.

I submit all to the sense of the Church and to the judgement of the Holy Mother Church, and as the Holy Roman Catholic Apostolic Mother Church teaches, believes and professes, so too do I believe and profess now and always, and so may God help me together with the Blessed Virgin and all the heavenly courts.”(OCCC X, 356-58)

Vincent was convinced that God was transforming him and making him like unto God himself in his various attributes. Meditation on the law of God, contemplation of God and his activity, a listening ear to the teaching authority that Christ entrusted to the Church, these were all part of his spiritual path.

It is interesting to note that in point number 2 Vincent proposed for his companions that they promise ‘perseverance’ in the community along with the more traditional promises, or evangelical counsels; he

thought that a promise to persevere was a way of expressing ones desire to love freely but within the context of stability and continuity. “In the thinking of Pallotti, perseverance represented an never-ending project in every stage of a person’s life. Quoting Luke 2,40 ‘the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom and God’s favour was with him’, he felt that for all those who would enter his community the consecration of oneself to God would always be incomplete and would entail a permanent project of growth in holiness and in evangelical perfection, in accordance with the Rule and the spirit of the Society.” A second reason for the introduction of ‘perseverance was “for Pallotti perseverance was essentially a virtue of relationship...imitating the Holy Family of the House of Nazareth, in perseverance through the bond of love of God, which is strong as death ... this suggests that at the heart of the commitment to perseverance throughout life is a commitment to bonds of relationship rather than to mere obligations.” (Cf. SAC Renewal 2000 [6]).

At the heart of perseverance is the recognition that “Jesus Christ is the divine model for all of humanity” (*OOCC II, p. 541*), that he is the model for all persons, but is especially a model to be imitated by those who wish to “comply with the loving and merciful desires of his divine heart in evangelical works”, such a person is to imitate Jesus perfectly, and one aspect of this imitation is ‘perseverance’, Jesus persevered, he was faithful to the tasks and commitment undertaken for the good of humanity. St. Vincent outlined five reasons for imitating Jesus and they all centre around fidelity to oneself and to others. In persevering we: (1) do not obstruct the road to holiness of others in our community; (2) each make our unique and personal contribution to the apostolic works of the community; (3) ensure that the works of the community for the good of souls can continue and will not cease because of lack of ‘man-power’; (4) do not defraud those who are associated with our work through their spiritual and material support; (5) are not unjust with ourselves, we do not deprive ourselves of eternal happiness in the kingdom of God. (*Cf. Ibid. p. 541-43*).

He urged us: “pray frequently with humility to the Lord for the grace of perseverance, aware that all our efforts will come to nothing without humble, confident and persevering prayer.” (*OOCC VIII p. 95*).

We may have the feeling that we are tossed about in a world of rapid change, we may sense an impermanence, a rising sense of uncertainty, all around us. Our times are certainly characterized by such movement. We are not immune from the effects of this. Our faith urges us to engage with this world, to cooperate with the desires of the heart of God for this world, for this we need to meditate on the Law of God ‘day and night’ as the Psalmist does. The Church prompts us to Proclaim the Gospel of Hope and to do this “calls for steadfast fidelity to the Gospel itself ... increasingly centered on the person of Jesus.” Such a proclamation requires that we be “credible evangelizers whose lives ... radiate the beauty of the Gospel; and that “holiness is the essential prerequisite for an authentic evangelization capable of reviving hope.” (*Cf. Ecclesia in Europe, Post-Synodal Exhortation, June 2003, 44-49*).

Let us pray with the Psalmist:

Happy the man who never follows the advice of the wicked,
or loiters on the way the sinners take, or sits about with scoffers, but
finds his pleasure in the Law of the Lord,
and murmurs his law day and night.

He is like a tree that is planted by streams of water,
yielding its fruit in season,
its leaves never fading;
success attends everything he does.” (Psalm 1, 1-4)

Texts for reflection: Psalm 119 ‘In praise of the divine Law’; Jeremiah 31, 31-34; Luke 5. 1-11; 1 Cor. 13, 4-12.