



Apostles for Today

Reflections and prayer - April 2009

“In unison they began to sing, glorifying and blessing God ... may you be blessed, Lord God” Dan. 3, 51-2.

This month we will relive the greatest mystery of our faith, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. In March we reflected on our Pallottine spiritual journey as one of a continuous moulding of ourselves to Jesus Christ. We propose to continue this theme taking as our text the “Benedicite” of St. Vincent Pallotti. The text is found in vol. X of the Complete Works in pages 488 – 496; it was composed by Fr. Vincent between 1849 and 1850, a short time before his death.

This prayer-reflection was composed in Latin and in it Pallotti shows one of the characteristics of his personal spirituality, the imitation of Christ and transformation in Christ; he often prayed like this “My Jesus (...) give me your life, and with your life may I always work and exercise all the roles and functions of the Gospel ministry” (OCC X, 679). Another characteristic of his spirituality is an expression often used by him in the context of formation, that of “neither too much, nor too little”. “It is as if Pallotti intended to say that neither a situation of excessive want, nor a state of excessive satisfaction favour the development of the person. Formation is best when it is an experience of times of want and dissatisfaction as well as times of fullness and happiness.” (*Ratio institutionis of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate*, Rome, 2004, num. 71).

“Neither too much, nor too little” was the balanced rule of St. Vincent’s life, he lived according to this principle in all aspects of his life, in his relationships with others, his use of material things, his relationship with his own body. It also emerges in his self examination which he always did within the context of his close rapport with God, the Trinity of persons.

We see this balance clearly in his Benedicite. It is a long prayer of blessing; he joins with all of creation in blessing God for all his benefits, for all his gifts, but above all for the gift of Jesus Christ and for the salvation given to us in him and in the work of salvation. The text is firmly rooted in Sacred Scripture, he frequently quotes verses from the Gospels and from the writings of St. Paul, the central thread running through the prayer is the Canticle from

chapter 3 of the Book of the Prophet Daniel; the quotations from the Canticum run through the Benedicite like a refrain.

Let us meditate on it together:

“Lord Jesus eliminate me and put yourself in my stead. May my life and every one of my actions be destroyed and your life be my life... May your death be my death, your resurrection be my resurrection ... May the life of the Most Holy Trinity be my life.

I am a sinner from the moment of conception (Ps 50,5) I lived in my mother's womb without faith, hope and charity, but the merits that our Lord Jesus Christ acquired in the womb of his Mother Mary, through the charity and mercy of God, are my merits.

You waters above the heavens, bless the Lord (Dan 3,60).

I was born a son of anger (Eph 2,3) but Jesus Christ's poor and humble birth made me a son of God, a friend of God, an heir of God, a coheir with Christ (Rm 8,17), the merits that Jesus had from his infancy can be my merits.

You showers and dew, all bless the Lord; winds bless the Lord (Dan 3,64).

I grew in age, in malice and in ignorance, but Jesus grew in age, wisdom and grace ... but the very merits of Christ's growth destroy my malice and all my ignorance.

And you fire and heat ... cold and heat, o bless the Lord (Dan 3,66).

I did not do that which I should have done and that which I should have omitted I did not omit ... but the actions, the virtues and the obedience which Jesus showed to Joseph and his Mother Mary, through the charity and mercy of God are my actions, my virtues and my obedience.

And you dews and sleet ... frost and cold, o bless the Lord (Dan 3,68).

I received baptism but I did not profit from it as I should have. In confirmation the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, came down into me, but I always disappointed him. However, the baptism of Christ is my baptism, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit in Christ is now also my fullness.

And you frost and snow ... night-time and day, o bless the Lord (Dan 3, 70)”.
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Here we see that Vincent Pallotti appreciated and valued all the natural gifts both physical and personal which were given to him by God; however, at the same time he recognizes that they are limited, he sees their imperfections in comparison with the person of Jesus and all of his human and divine perfections. He gives thanks for the gifts he had received, he acknowledges the times and ways he has not corresponded fully to them, then he expresses his confidence that the merits of Jesus will make up for all his faults and render his gifts perfect through the application of His merits to them. The *Benedicite* is a hymn to life; to human life; to divine life; to Jesus; to salvation; to the numerous and varied graces of God. Vincent knows what God was calling him to and he was living his call in all the complexities of his life. He suffers because he sees his faults and he understands them clearly as he compares his life with that of Jesus.

Continuing his prayer Fr. Vincent examines all that he had done and affirms that in his own eyes and in the eyes of others what he had done appeared to be good. When his life was judged by human criteria he had certainly lived well, but, when he compares himself with Jesus he sees with greater clarity the imperfections of his actions, he does not lose his optimism and his hope because he knows, is aware and is convinced that “through the charity and mercy of God” the activity of Jesus has become his activity and his activity is thus purified, healed, and, in Jesus, acquires a value.

“To me and to men it seemed as if I fasted, prayed and kept vigil ... but ... through the charity and mercy of God, Christ’s fasts, vigils and prayers are my fasts, vigils and prayers.

And you darkness and light...night-time and day, o bless the Lord (Dan 3,72).

To me and to men it seemed that I did good ... (but) I did not instruct the faithful as I should have, I did not preach the Gospel of Christ to all creatures ... but Christ’s deeds and preaching of the kingdom (Lk 10,9) are my deeds and my preaching.

O let the earth bless the Lord, give glory & eternal praise to him (Dan 3,74)”.

Fr. Vincent continues in the same vein:

“To me and to men it seemed as if I brought back dispersed sinners to Christ’s flock ... that I healed the sick ... that I evangelized the poor ... that I had instituted something good” and he recognizes with sadness all that he has not done.

His final meditation is on the Eucharist: “Because of my wretchedness and my godlessness I have not ever profited from the incomparable institution of the most holy Eucharist; but through the most holy mercy of Jesus Christ I have been filled with every grace ... and the fullness of the virtue of Jesus Christ’s very sacrifice has been given to me, even if I am the most unworthy of all creatures past, present and future.”

A footnote to this text in the Complete Works reads: “Cf. Daniel 3, 86 ff. As can be seen the composition is interrupted. The final 3 verses of the ‘Benedicite’ are not quoted.” And, Fr. A. Walkenbach, SAC, wrote “Pallotti did not finish writing the final points of the Benedicite ... death snatched the pen from his hand. The Church continued to write the Benedicite right to the very end ...” and she did so through her recognition of his holiness and by raising him to the altars of the Church (Cf. Bayer e Zweifel, V. Pallotti, Scritti Scelti p. 296).

We also can walk in the footsteps of St. Vincent composing our own Benedicite, either as a community of St. Vincent’s foundation or as his spiritual sons and daughters.

Suggestions for personal meditation:

Daniel 3, 51 - 90; The “Benedicite” of St. Vincent Pallotti.

Sharing of experiences

Do I share with others the tension experienced in my life between “what I would like to be” and the “actual reality”; am I aware that “We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us.” (2Cor 4,7)?

In what spirit do I embrace the gift of salvation that Jesus is bringing to fruition in me and in all in this new and eternal Easter resurrection?

Let us end with the prayer of St. Vincent which expresses our limitations and our total trust in God:

*“My God, by myself I can do nothing
with You I can do everything
for love of You I want to do everything
to You be glory and to me dishonour. Amen” (OCCC X, 657).*

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