



Apostles for Today

Reflections and prayers - May 2011

God, the Infinite Love of St. Vincent Pallotti

20th meditation

**On the Obligation to Become Perfect, since we are Living Images of God,
who is Eternal, Infinite, Immense and Incomprehensible.**

Opening prayer

Lead, kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom, lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home; lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
the distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still will lead me on.
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the night is gone,
and with the morn those angel faces smile,
which I Have loved long since, and lost awhile! (Card. John H. Newman)

*"Lord, bless us all, I pray, may your hand be on our heads, keep far from us
misfortunes and sorrow." Amen.*

Reflection

In his reflection on God, Infinite Love, St. Vincent intuits through the light of the Holy Spirit, that his soul is bound to perfect itself since it is a living image of God the Father, perfect and infinite. This is done through the exercise of free will and with the help of grace. It is a journey from being an image to being a likeness: in the gift of creation the person receives the dignity of being an image of God, but the person naturally tends towards the perfection of the divine likeness through the guidance of the Spirit.

St. Vincent's way ...

He is very much aware that he is a limited creature, that he is unable to do all that he would like to do in order to correspond with God's love. This is the source of his sorrow, his inability to fully realize his desire to glorify and serve Christ.

St. Vincent's humility is reflected in how he considers himself, as an infinitely miserable being. Being thus he becomes a favourite of Jesus who, being infinitely merciful, can make up for his imperfections and render Vincent similar to himself.

St. Vincent's zeal for his salvation finds its source and its model in Christ. Just as Jesus on the Cross wished to save all of humanity, so too Vincent learns from him not to fear sacrifices for the conversion of mankind. In order to do this he asks God to allow him have the same thirst which Jesus had on the Cross; this shows the extent of his commitment to the salvation of his brothers and sisters.

An unquenchable thirst, one which is never slaked. Christ is the only model, and we too, like Vincent, are not discouraged in following him, knowing that Jesus works through us.

...our way

Following the example of St. Vincent our way is founded on the experience of God as "Abba", an infinitely good Father, and on our acceptance of his loving plan. This is brought about through conversion and faith, of which the entire Scriptures speak. The term '**conversion**' in the Bible is expressed in two ways: the first is **shuh**, which means a return, and is used by the Prophets in the Old Testament to invite Israel to return to Yahweh when they have distanced themselves from him.

The second term is **metànoia** and is used in the Gospel of Jesus when he invites persons to conversion. It does not mean 'return' because we Christians do not return to something old, rather we are called to adhere to something new. Conversion as preached by Jesus means 'a revolution of the mind', He proclaims a call to convert and to believe in the Gospel.

In conversion I do not return to God, rather I insert the dynamism of the Gospel into my life and it becomes my life model. Jesus proposes that we

make the Gospel our very lives!

Luke 15, 7: "There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine virtuous men who have no need of repentance". Jesus uttered this pronouncement immediately after having told the parable of the shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep, and having found it, happily places it on his shoulder and returns home. The 'conversion' of the sheep which gave such joy to the shepherd was that it allowed itself to be carried by the Lord abandoning itself into his hands. Often when we speak of conversion we think of it as something that we must do for God while, in reality, it is a question of accepting that which God wants to do for us.

Isaiah 40, 11: "He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes". Jesus invites us to entrust our lives to him and to allow ourselves be carried by him, the infinitely good shepherd, who will lead us to perfect pastures, accomplishing the project of happiness written in the DNA of our very existence. He never speaks of obligations and duties.

Conversion accompanies faith. At times we say "I believe, my family believes...", but, what do we believe in? In the Letter of St. James 2, 19 we read "but the demons have the same belief, and they tremble with fear". Faith is not a belief in the existence of God and in some dogmas, true faith is Gospel faith. We often ask the Lord to increase our faith, but St. Paul writing to the Romans (12, 6) reminds us that "our gifts differ according to the grace given us", in charisms, talents, gifts, therefore faith is to be exercised in order to bear fruit and to grow.

Matthew 17, 20: "If your faith were the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mountain 'move from here to there', and it would move, nothing would be impossible for you". This is true faith! When we have a problem that blocks our way, when it seems as big as a mountain, we can sometimes remain blocked for our entire lives because that problem becomes our god. If we continue to look at it, it can become ever bigger. However if we start to say "mountain, problem, illness, move yourself from here to there", we start a process or journey in which we become

aware that nothing is impossible for God and for us.

Our faith will be capable of moving mountains because within us the ability to do the impossible will abide. We will come to a stage of enjoying life and of doing good not because it is written in the law but because we are following an internal moral imperative. A rose always gives off perfume, whether it is in an elegant room or under the stairs, it cannot but give off a perfume because that is its nature. We are created to be happy and to make others happy, the true believer is not so much the person who observes the law of God, but the one who strives to live a Love that is similar to His. The true disciples of Jesus discover that conversion and faith allow one **to pass from sacrifice to gift**, each step of life becomes a precious gift offered to us, in moments of joy it comes as a sense of fullness and in suffering as healing.

In this way time will no longer be **Cronos**, a tyrannical king who kills his subjects in consuming their lives, but it will become **Kairos**, a time of blessings to weave a fabric of relationships with others.

Proposed texts for reflection and sharing:

Psalms 8, 5-7; Hebrews 2, 5-9; Luke 10, 25-37.

Final prayer: Lord, Holy Father, teach me to speak, not like a shrill trumpet, but like a gentle flute.

Help me to see myself in others, open the windows of my heart, enlighten my thoughts.

May I open wide my eyes to fill them with stars, do not allow me to close my hands in fists that ignore others.

Do not entrust me with the riches of the world, but give me wisdom of heart.

And, at the end of my days give me the greatest and most powerful gift, two strong and sure wings, formed by small drops of love, that can speedily fly above the clouds and come to You. To be like You, in You. This I ask through the intercession of Jesus Christ and of St. Vincent Pallotti, Amen.