

one towards one another (Jn 15:12): “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home in him. (Jn 14:23). The love of God in Christ is a reality that surpasses everything. It transforms religions, social practices and even civil institutions into apostolate; we have access to a superior reality which can be touched in our daily lives. Love for the Lord and for our neighbour is truly the synthesis of the will of God.

“ALL FOR THE INFINITE GLORY OF GOD”

For reflection:

We are called to “*solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters[, which] demands before all else an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers*” (Laudato Si’, 158).

“*Only on the basis of [a] real and sincere closeness can we properly accompany the poor on their path of liberation*” (Evangelii Gaudium, 199).

1. In what ways are we living this call already as individuals or as a group?
2. Where is there room for growth in making the Church’s option for the poor a central part of our concrete Pallottine life?
3. What attitudes, practices and structures might be in need of pastoral conversion in order to better respond to this fundamental call?

*Fr. Antonio Ferreira Naves, SAC
São Paulo - Brazil*



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - April 2017

DIALOGUE WITH THE POOR

The Union of Catholic Apostolate and the primacy of the poor

1. There are already many well-written works on this issue. I by no means claim to propose something particularly striking or new. It is simply a reflection that comes from the heart of a person in constant contact with men and women, children and the poor who seek to live in communities in Sao Paulo in Brazil, a big city that was built precisely through the work of the poorest.
2. The primacy of the poor represents the foundational core of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It also refers to the basis of the functioning of society: Who makes a shopping centre work? Who makes the banks work? Who operates the means of transportation? The churches? Who builds the houses and roads? Who maintains the state institutions? It is the workers and the poorest. But they are undermined, ignored, not being allowed access to the goods they produce, whether material or symbolic. I am writing, therefore, from the poorest peripheral regions of this enormous city.
3. A first task of the Union is precisely to listen to the poor who cry out to God. It is to the poor that Luke 4 refers. Here poverty is understood in the negative sense of the kind of poverty and wealth which should not exist. This poverty must be abolished because it is contrary to the Kingdom of God. Oppression is the result of a structural injustice and therefore produces a corresponding sin. It causes social (Muniz Bandeira), moral, economic, political, religious and environmental disorder. The Gospel is the good news communicated to the poor and the Union can and must contribute in the spreading of this good news.

There are also the poor according to the categories of Matthew's Gospel (ch. 5). Here the poor are those animated by the Spirit of God the Father and of Jesus the Son. They are blessed. They are the poor gathered in communities scattered in many places throughout the city and the countryside. They are fragile, but know about the Good News and have hope. They form the churches of the Christian communities. They are free through the word of the Gospel which they have heard. The primacy of the poor in this context is because they have heard the Word of God and seek to live it. They in turn are bearers and apostles of the word. They live in groups or in communities where they share their sufferings, crises, hopes and lives. They nourish compassion towards each other. The bible is their book. At present, they are suffering from the advance of other religious groups that produce a total inversion of the word of God, interpreting life and the world in the fear, fantasy and illusion of a God manufactured by the current market, which makes even faith a product to be bought and sold. This fear divides, dominates and deceives. As an example of this it is enough to look at the lyrics and melodies of "songs" played in the various worship services and celebrations. Their preaching would make you shiver.

4. The evangelised poor live their faith in a more intense and extensive way. They communicate it even if they have no officially recognised roles. When the poor lose community they enter into a crisis, a tragedy, losing their sense of belonging. Here is another function of the Union in service of restoring the Word to the poor throughout the world, forming a community which evangelises.

5. From these communities built on the gospel of Jesus arise the specific vocations of apostle and missionary. The poor are willing to collaborate with the Church in many areas: in catechesis, administration, pastoral care, especially those services which take care of the weakest, such as the sick, the unemployed and pilgrims of all races and languages. The latter become citizens of the city. In general, they leave no written trace, filed in an office; but they do transmit the one important thing: attitude, action and the practice of compassion towards others. They are the lay apostles valued by St.

Vincent Pallotti and reinvigorated by the Second Vatican Council, as well as by the guidelines of Pope Francis. The world will be evangelised by those who first hear the gospel and then translate the teaching of Jesus into daily life. It is also their task to direct themselves towards those who are passive among the people, individuals who see no meaning in things. They try to survive and easily become prey to the many 'wolves' who cross their path. The Union is also called to open itself to this great challenge, helping lay people to overcome this weakness and become the active subjects of their own lives. Turning in on oneself means blocking the apostolate in its most original form: in the Union, "two by two". Walking through the streets of the outskirts of São Paulo, one sees many poor victims of the cruelty of the model of the globalised society. Among them, however, there is an effort to take care of family, health and work, and to have a decent home. They are not recognised by the consumer market. The number of the impoverished is growing and therefore it is urgent to out to them. Modern coldness and insensitivity make them appear to be simply a detail, to be ignored, excluded, separated and distanced. Therefore, this movement must be initiated by taking steps towards them and breaking through existing barriers. This requires personal and long-term contact. It is not a matter of speaking about the poor. It means being with them. It takes a lot of humility. In this movement of encounter there will be insecurities, fear, doubts, but we must persevere. It is love (1 Cor 13) that is capable of awakening apostolic action. Love of neighbor is a gift of God in action following the example of St. Vincent Pallotti and many others. The Union of Catholic Apostolate is therefore an Appeal. It is necessary to prepare the way through a realistic Pallottine formation. Society is going through uncertain moments, impasses, general crisis and a growing inhumanity. We are called and summoned to go to meet this world which is torn apart. The mission is clear: Look at those who are fallen and left behind in the streets, squares and peripheries. The certainty is that God walks with us. He will be with us to the end. (Mt 25 and 28). To remain in the love of Jesus is to apply his commandment. This commandment is the love of human beings,