



Apostles for Today

Reflection and prayer - November 2007

Fundamental Rule no. 24

Jesus, persecuted for his good works, is our model.

Introduction

In number 24 of the Fundamental Rule we read a meditation on how to imitate our Lord.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ coepit facere et docere (‘first of all did and then taught’, Acts 1.1), and for the glory of the heavenly Father and for the eternal salvation of all souls he went about the towns and villages of Palestine preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, curing all weaknesses and illnesses, giving sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, health to the sick, life to the dead, satisfying the hungry and evangelizing the poor, thus he always did good to everyone, and occasionally he withdrew alone to pray for us to his heavenly Father; though he was often persecuted he did all and endured all, with infinite love. Therefore for love of our Lord Jesus Christ we must maintain a life of prayer and be frequently in solitude so as to exercise the works of the sacred Gospel ministry for the greater glory of God and for our greater sanctification and that of our neighbour: and above all, according to our holy Institute, we must promote all those works and holy institutions that are ordered and admitted by our Holy Constitutions and the Pious Society, also called, of the Catholic Apostolate, instituted by our Congregation. So as to ensure that we truly strive to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ in our little Congregation, no person is to be admitted to exercising the Gospel ministry if he is not mature in holy works and in doctrine having imitated our Lord Jesus Christ in coepit facere (firstly in doing), and then go on to imitate him in docere (teaching). In order to obtain more abundant fruit from all the evangelical works in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must strive to do good to all the needy of every kind by exercising all the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, rejoicing and giving thanks to our heavenly Father if, after having done all this, we are persecuted; because this would be one of the most precious gifts for us if he deigned with such persecutions to make us similar in some way to his beloved Son on whom his favour rests.” (OCCC III, p. 53-54)

St. Vincent looks at Jesus as he walks amongst people preaching the Gospel, doing good, generously bestowing divine gifts, and despite all he is persecuted.

We, like Jesus, should not be afraid to “spend ourselves”, to go out from ourselves in helping all those in need with deeds of material and spiritual mercy, even though we may be persecuted for doing so.

Meditation

To act as Jesus did means to imitate him so as to be as similar to him as is possible.

In Jesus “*the image and likeness*” of God in human form (Gen 1,26) finds its fullest expression. Jesus is the “ideal man” and as such is the model for every person, a sure guide for our steps, an enlightened response to our weaknesses, uncertainties and unbelief, an antidote to the temptation to indulge in compromises and easy options in our lives of faith.

The rule of St. Vincent is to look at Jesus always, to imitate him at every moment: this is “*In all the various circumstances of the day, before starting any activity, we should consider what the thoughts of our Lord Jesus Christ would be, what would be the movements of his divine heart*”. (OCCC III, p. 36)

It is important to have constancy in seeking Jesus because to compare oneself with him is to live in continuous prayer.

It is essential to have an intense desire for God and for faith. St. Vincent says: “*In the soul (the person) who believes in Jesus Christ and who, with humility and trust, strives to imitate him, Jesus Christ destroys in it every deformity and weakness. Jesus Christ enters into that soul. He lives in it and he applies the merits of his most holy works. In this way that which Jesus says: he who believes in me will do those same works that I have done and will do even greater ones, will be realized*”. (OCCC III p. 37)

We constantly try to put ourselves in the limelight and we are full of self-love, so each time that we manage to empty ourselves of all this in order to be filled by Jesus our lives are lightened by charity because Jesus is Charity, by humility because Jesus was humble even to assuming the condition of a slave, by love because Jesus is, in his essence, Divine Love.

Jesus repeatedly invites us to direct our capacity to love towards others, he says: “*You must love your neighbour as yourself*”. (Mk 12, 31)

He encourages us to imitate him, to do as he did: “*Love one another, as I have loved you*”. (Jn 15,8-13)

The first duty of a Christian is to give freely that which he has received freely: in bringing the Good News, in being light for the person who is in darkness, in sharing the joy of faith in the Word of God.

The appeals in our world to a spirit of love and of charity are truly many. Poor persons who ask for help, sick persons who need moral support, older persons who suffer from solitude, young persons rendered helpless by depression or driven crazy by drugs, countries in which hunger, sickness and tribal warfare decimate so many lives.

When St. Vincent urges us to: “*strive to do good*”, he is speaking not only about a commitment to doing things, but also to being sensitive, to being attentive to the needs of ones neighbour ...

“I would wish to be perpetually in the hospitals, in the prisons and to be in every place on earth in order to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the illness of the sick;...but to do so in a manner which goes unseen. Except by God alone... I would wish to become food to satisfy the hungry, clothing to clothe the naked, drink to quench the thirst of the thirsty, liqueur to fortify the weak; soft feathers to give rest to the weary limbs of the exhausted, medicine and health to heal the sick, the lame, the crippled, the deaf; light to enlighten the blind both spiritually and corporally, life to raise up the dead, ... so that they could do the great things that they would do for the glory of my God, my Father, my Creator, my Good, my All, if they came back to this earth again ... and for this I offer myself to suffer whatever suffering, disgrace, even infinitely, but with your grace and loving infinitely but without being noticed. My God, my God, my God” (OCCC X p. 114-16)

Let us avoid remaining immersed in that superficiality which prevents us from seeing the suffering all around us. Let us ponder on the fact that charity produces miracles of consolation, even when it is made up of small things such as a listening ear, a smile, a caress.

The definitive meaning of Fundamental Rule 24.

Jesus is our vital essence. How can we truly love others, forgive those who offend us, if not with his grace? The Lord says “*Cut off from me you can do nothing*”. (Jn 15,5).

It is only with his grace that we will be able to accept that our good works will give rise to criticism, disapproval or be opposed because of prejudice, the dictates of social convention or by a lack of understanding on the part of those who live distanced from the faith.

So we conclude with St. Vincent that “*persecution would be among the most precious of all gifts*”.

Let us pray with St. Vincent

“*My Jesus, he who does not love does not live. May all the love of eternity, and if it were possible of all infinite eternities, by mine in every instant for all of eternity. For infinite eternity, may all be lost in love, and may it not be more than all the flames of love. My Jesus, may your Passion and the dolours of Mary be my book for all of eternity, all fire and flames.*” (OCCC X, pp. 226 -227)

“*Oh if I could love for ever in doing penance and being infinitely humiliated, so as to do all for the infinite glory of God and for the salvation of souls! Oh if I could only suffer infinitely for our Lord Jesus Christ, for the Father and for the Holy Spirit, oh if only I could*”. (OCCC X, pp. 231-233)

Final prayer

Herald of the love of the eternal Father
you were completely lost in Christ,
so that the poorest of the poor could experience
the mercy and the goodness of God.
You became all things to all persons just as Christ did
while here on earth.
Help us to follow your example and to see Jesus always
so that his love may live in us.

Herald of truth, all the baptized are called by God to be apostles.
Form the hearts of the faithful in the knowledge
and awareness of this call.
Make of us one flock under one shepherd
so that your peace may reign in the world.
May your blessing be with us now and always.
(Text H. Perne, 1985)