



Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - February 2009

Fundamental Rule 6

“Since the life of our Lord Jesus Christ is the fundamental rule of our little congregation before we start any work and in all the different circumstances of the day, we should consider what our Lord Jesus Christ would think, speak or act in similar circumstances, and we must strive to do what is the most perfect in all things and always” (OCCC III, p.42).

As I sat down to write on point number 6 of the Fundamental Rule many feelings and thoughts came together and amongst these was a need to ask St. Vincent Pallotti to help me with this and to pray for the grace necessary to be faithful to what he understood by it and how he lived it. It was also an opportunity to rethink what it means for me and my life to live like Jesus in the light of the spiritual experience of the community to which I belong.

The spirituality of St. Vincent Pallotti is the lived expression of his experience of the Spirit which developed throughout his life on earth from birth to death and attained sanctity. This, in the special plan of God, was communicated in the original charism of the foundation of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. In continuing to understand and develop the charism, the Union as a whole and every member of it, discovers and follows the same spiritual path of St. Vincent.

The spiritual inheritance he left to us is abundant, superabundant, and is comprised of works and activities, writings and illuminations, prayers and letters, directories and supplications, appeals and initiatives, inspirations and commitments. On the one hand in looking at this inheritance one admires and loves, with the devotion of a child, the profundity of St. Vincent and his limitless and unique figure, on the other hand, with the same admiration and the same love, one feels gratitude to him because due to this superabundance the Lord does not

exclude anyone: one can experience what it is to be like St. Vincent at least in some thing – however big or small it may be – and like him one can give back with an act of pure love that which the Lord has already given one.

Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the Church in her saints, has shown one or other of the qualities of Jesus Christ, Son of the Father and Spouse of the Church, in order that each person and all of humanity, in the course of history might redirect themselves to re-establishing the image and likeness of the Creator. For saints such as Francis, Clare, Catherine, Dominic, Teresa, Ignatius and on up to the saints of our time, nothing was more important than reciprocating the love of “the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety” (Spe Salvi, 31). St. Vincent Pallotti felt the same and this is the very basis of his heritage. When he founded the Union of the Catholic Apostolate he wanted the fundamental rule to be the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he composed the Rule for the foundation in 33 points that recall the number of years which Jesus lived amongst us. Jesus Christ is at the centre of the Fundamental Rule and of each of its points because His very life itself is the Fundamental Rule: “*Since the life of our Lord Jesus Christ is the fundamental rule of our little congregation...*”

Point number 6 continues with expressions that are part of Pallottine spirituality, “any work”, “in all the different circumstance of the day”.

The most pressing desire of St. Vincent was always that of not limiting the Christian life to any one specific characteristic but that it include and embrace universality, it is not coincidental that the Union as a whole and in each of its parts, also embraces in its title its catholic, or universal, identity.

This universality even if it apparently gives less criteria for a sure identification and therefore is less ‘ordinary’, is not less practical, indeterminate and made up of vague intentions nor is it fickle when it comes to activity; the contrary is true because it is always Jesus who is the measuring rod for the start and the end “*what would our Lord Jesus Christ think, speak or act in similar circumstances*”. The identity of

each person and of every created thing is to place oneself before him in order to open oneself to his love.

To become Jesus means to do the will of the Father in every single minute out of love, to do it in every action and activity (“seek God in all ...”); to live the sacramental life fully; to increase charity in a life of communion; to know how to recognize and love him in every person we meet, “that no soul (person) pass by me in vain” and also to recognize him when he visits us in times of suffering and pain.

This is the path to take in order to be totally transformed in Jesus and to be able to say with St. Paul “it is no longer I who live but Christ living in me”.

To live in Christ is a path or journey that begins with Baptism and continues throughout our life on earth, on this journey we can listen to the voice of Jesus, hear him who knocks on the door of our hearts, open this door to him, welcome him and bid him enter into our lives.

In saying ‘yes’ to the life of Jesus in our own lives we become, as St. Vincent, ready to serve others in accordance with the demands of justice and of charity in so far as we are able; it also means that when we ‘become like Jesus’ the places in which we work and live are also changed because wherever Jesus enters everything is reborn and renewed.

Furthermore, the Church today points the Pallottine family towards the path of a “spirituality of communion” (NMI 43) as the privileged ‘place’ in which to live the experience of charity; it is not so much a physical place it is more the occasion and the circumstance in which the different expressions of each vocation, gathered in the name of Jesus, make him present in reciprocal love “By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.” (Jn. 13,35).

If the life of Jesus really has become our life we would meet the expectations of St. Vincent for whom charity should be exercised according to the commandment of Jesus Christ “this is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you” (Jn 15,12) (cf. OCCC I, 8).

To live like this does not mean that it is necessary to invent something new, it involves opening ones eyes and heart to what is encompassed in a Christian life which, in the final analysis, is centered on Christ himself, who is to be known, loved, imitated and lived, and through our witness, is to be presented as a “Person”, the only one capable of drawing to himself and of giving credibility and spiritual unity to the life of every person.

Point number 6 ends with a call and an exhortation which are true to the soul of St. Vincent “we must strive to do what is the most perfect in all things and always”. In our following of him, as we are being formed in his ‘school of formation’, even our sins, limitations, betrayals, abandonment, discouragement, illness and failings can become occasions for the grace of God to act in us and for his mercy to abound, it is enough that we ask Him to come and save us, the abyss into which we may have fallen does not matter. Knowing that we have been saved and are being saved continuously enables us to know what love is, it is the charity that makes everything perfect, always.

The points of the Fundamental Rule are written in the first person plural, “we should ... we must strive”; perhaps in this special historical moment of the development of the Union we are called to give greater emphasis to the bond of reciprocal charity within each community, each group, each association and in this way the life of each person will be enriched, strengthened and supported.

The fruits that will come from this will be worthy of St. Vincent, they will be perfect and forever, in gratitude we will give them to the Church and through her to humanity.

“My almighty God, Father of mercies and God of all consolations, I thank you for deigning to create us in your image and likeness, you have transformed us into living images of Charity itself, because you are the self same Charity itself.”

(cf. Regole Fondamentali, edited by A. Faller SAC)