



Apostles for Today

Reflections and prayers - May 2010

God the Infinite Love of St. Vincent Pallotti **8th meditation**

God's Infinite Love and Mercy in the Creation of Humankind

Opening Prayer

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
(Psalm 8: 1, 3-6, 9)

Introduction: *'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.'* (Gen. 1:26)

Because faith tells me that God has no body, therefore we must say that (the human) soul is created according to the image and likeness of God. Therefore, our soul is a living and intelligent being with the distinctive characteristics of being a living image of God, and of the whole God. (God the Infinite Love, Chapter VIII)

As Pallotti reflects on what being created in the image and likeness of God really means, he came up with a list of characteristics that were included in God's image and likeness. These included being:

- a living image of God
- a living image of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- a living image of infinite power

- a living image of wisdom and goodness
- a living image of justice, mercy and purity
- a living image of holiness and perfection.

Reflection

The image of the human person, with a soul created in the image and likeness of God fits in well with the image given in Psalm 8: the human being as being full of dignity and honour in the eyes of God.

Looking at this possibility calls us to an optimism and hope that goes beyond the usual acknowledging of sinfulness and failing, and believing in God's mercy and willingness to forgive. As human beings we are created in the image and likeness of God with all of these characteristics as our birthmark. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to reflect more deeply on this positive view in order to really claim it as my own, as Pallotti encourages us to do in this reflection.

Pallotti himself is aware of how hard it is to comprehend the magnitude of this grace, recognising how most people, even himself, experience 'negligence and ingratitude' in not appreciating the great gift of our souls.

At times, there is a great temptation to focus on our inadequacies and what we cannot do - the themes of negligence and ingratitude mentioned by Pallotti. However, through the course of Church history, there have also been spiritual writers like Pallotti who have been willing to address this tension.

This tension between darkness and light is the focus of a speech given in 1994, attributed to Nelson Mandela but originally written by Marianne Williamson¹: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. ...We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give

¹ John Mark Ministries: Nelson Mandela's speech jmm.aaa.net.au/article

other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

From scripture, it is obvious that letting our light shine is fundamental to we who are called to be as Christians: 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.' (Matt. 5:14) 'The Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (Acts 13:47) 'You are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness'. (1Thess 5:5)

In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*², St. Basil the Great explains how the presence of the Spirit helps to illumine this light within us: "The Spirit is the source of holiness, a spiritual light, and he offers his own light to every mind to help it search for truth...Like the sunshine which permeates all the atmosphere, spreading over land and sea, and yet is enjoyed by each person as though it were for him alone, so the Spirit pours forth his grace in full measure...

As clear, transparent substances become very bright when sunlight falls on them and shine with a new radiance, so too souls that carry the Spirit, and are enlightened by the Spirit, become spiritual themselves and a source of grace for others. Through the spirit we become citizens of heaven, we enter into eternal happiness and abide in God. Through the Spirit we acquire a likeness to God; indeed we attain what is beyond our most sublime aspirations—we become God." For, as Pallotti recognises, this is the image in which we are created.

The Franciscan author Richard Rohr sees the implications of accepting that we are made in the divine image: "the enormous breakthrough is that when you honour and accept the divine image within yourself, you cannot help but see it in everybody else, too, and you know it is just as undeserved and unmerited as it is in you. That is why you stop judging, and that is how you start loving unconditionally and without asking whether someone is worthy or not."³

² From the Office of Readings Tuesday 7th week of Easter

³ Richard Rohr; *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. Crossroads Publishing 2009. P. 159

In other words, recognition of the being made in the image of the divine, leads to a fuller manifestation of the divine image in the lives of the faithful. We are all called to come closer to the image of the divine in whose image and likeness we are created. This continues to be an ongoing process, punctuated with times of ingratitude and negligence but also nourished by prayer and practice. As the Lent I preface to the Eucharistic prayer states: ‘As we recall the great events that gave us new life in Christ, you bring the image of your Son to perfection within us’.

Pallotti interprets our being made in the image and likeness of God as a call to holiness and perfection. However, it is only through our clumsy, less than perfect attempts at love, justice and mercy that we can be transformed more into the image of God in whom we are created. And so, we can pray with Pallotti:

Prayer

“My God, my most loving Father, my most merciful creator,
it is impossible for me to understand the value of my soul
created in your image and likeness,
because I cannot arrive at knowledge of you.
But how much more impossible it is for me ever to understand
that divine love and mercy with which you deigned to create me in your
image, although you know with your infinite love and mercy
how little esteem I have for such a great gift.
Therefore, it is also impossible for me to understand my wretchedness.
But, through your infinite mercy,
through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ,
through the merits and intercession of Mary,
and of all the angels and saints,
I firmly believe and I am certain that you will grant me the gift
of perfect contrition and of always remembering your infinite love and
mercy, and of always esteeming my soul and the souls of my neighbours
and of being grateful to you for such an infinite gift. Amen.” (God the
Infinite Love, Chapter VIII)