



Apostles for Today

Reflections and prayers - September 2011

God the Infinite Love **Meditation 24 (OCC XIII, pp. 147-151)**

Jesus Christ, our Lord and also our older brother.

Prayer

“My Jesus! My most loving redeemer and very, very dear older brother”. You who came in the name of the tenderness of the Father to share in your flesh the condition of the humble of the earth, I offer you my heart, ready to listen to you.

Open my eyes to see your marvels clearly,
Open my ears that I may hear your brotherly voice
Open my spirit to understand your Word
Open my lips to sing your praises.

Reflection and meditation

Saint Vincent Pallotti invites us to remember that the Heavenly Father gave us Jesus “so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers [and sisters]” (Rm 8:29). Although abandoned and rejected by us sinners, God gave us his divine Son not only as redeemer, but also as an older brother. “In so doing, he wanted to revive very deeply and very significantly our faith in this intimate, true, close relationship which could be called supernatural parenthood through which we enter into our rights as children of God, heirs of God and co-heirs of Jesus Christ”.

Through our baptism, we have been adopted by God, we are therefore adopted sons and daughters of God. This is not only a way of speaking, but a reality which touches our very being. Are we conscious of this adoption? Do we really live it out?

This adoption gives us the right to call God Father, Abba. Do we do this? Do we know how in our prayer to address God as a close, loving and just Father?

Or do we simply recite the Our Father “by heart”, without reflecting? Let us pause for a moment to respond to these questions in the depths of our hearts. As sons and daughters of God, we are given the grace to be heirs of all that he possesses. Everything that belongs to God belongs to me, God opens his house to me, the house of God becomes “my house”. My place is in the heart of the Blessed Trinity. Saint Vincent says to us: “Our eternal, infinite, immense, incomprehensible inheritance is God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and all of the infinite attributes of God: infinite power, infinite wisdom, infinite goodness, purity in essence, infinite mercy, justice in essence, holiness, perfection...” (OCCC XIII, 149). Our inheritance is magnificent, but we must know how to benefit from it and direct our lives in a way that allows us to carry out the duties which it bestows on us: goodness, purity, mercy, holiness, perfection... We must aspire to this with all our strength by putting ourselves into the hands of God, by relying on his Word, by following his commandments... Thus our fraternal bond with Jesus will be all the stronger because “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, my sister” (Mt 12 :50). Mary, the Mother of our Brother and therefore our Mother, will always be with us on this path, will lead us to the House of the Father. The Saints of God are also there to guide us by their example, to support us with their prayers.

This grace through which God has made us his adopted sons and daughters also makes us brothers of Jesus Christ, who is the older brother and natural son, while we are the adopted children, “sons in the Son” as the Church tells us. How many times in our prayer have we addressed Jesus as our brother? Are we aware that he who is our Saviour has by the grace of God become our brother? And even if we owe him the respect and love due to a Saviour, something which could put some distance between us, we have the right and the privilege of having him as such a close brother. He is the eldest, the first-born, the “older Brother” in whom we can confide, whom we can ask for help, the “older Brother” with whom we can share our joys and sorrows, the demands and the workings of grace in us.

It is with Jesus, our older brother, that we must learn to become sons and daughters. It is not so much about imitating his actions, but in the filial relationship he has with his Father who is also our Father.

I believe in Jesus, our brother, and I believe that he calls me too to become a brother. A brother for him, a brother for my neighbour. As Jesus surrounded all of his brothers, above the least ones, with his care, we too, as brothers and sisters, must take care of our brothers and sisters: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). It is to this that we will have to give an answer on the last day. Do we ask Jesus to teach us how to show love and mercy to our brothers and sisters? Do we ask him to enable us to say to every person, if not in words then at least through our whole way of being, “You are my brother, you are my sister”?

“It is a dogma of faith that if we live without mortal sin, we become children of God... not only living images of God, but also [his] adopted children”, Saint Vincent Pallotti tells us. And he continues: “We are co-heirs of Our Lord Jesus Christ because He is our true first-born brother since we are adopted sons [and daughters] of God” (OOCC XIII, 148-149). We are therefore living images of God, adopted children of God and Jesus Christ is our true older brother – but we must live without sin. Nevertheless, we fall, we fall often... Saint Vincent was fully aware of this: “My Jesus... when did I ever love and respect You as my most beloved first-born brother? Rather, how many times have I betrayed you? How many times have I encouraged others to betray You with my numerous and terrible scandals? I have betrayed you... with grave damage to my soul” (OOCC XIII, 150-1). He also knew that Jesus is “Mercy in essence” and trusted him completely: “I firmly believe that... you will condescend to restore to me the precious right of being an adopted son[/daughter] of God, heir of God, and [your] co-heir. In this way I will enjoy with You the incomprehensible heritage of the glory of heaven for all eternity” (OOCC XIII, 151).

Are we aware that we “deprive ourselves” of this precious right when we delay or hesitate to ask forgiveness of God in the sacrament of reconciliation? Finally, truly living out this adoption changes our view of the society in which we live. Sometimes we risk closing ourselves off in our individualism and our egoism, and our contemporary world encourages us to do this too often. Sometimes others’ differences frighten us. But when we look at them as brothers and sisters belonging to the same family, having the same Father as us, it is perhaps easier to overcome prejudices and build a new society, a

greater harmony, that deeper communion for which Jesus, our brother, prayed to our Father and his Father.

The refrain of the WYD hymn for Madrid 2011 is as follows:

“ Jesus, you our brother
Friend who sets us free,
Christ and Lord, strengthen our faith!” (internet sources)

The theme of our meditation for September has therefore led us along paths on which young people have also set out this summer. Jesus, you our brother, make us fully conscious that you are “our true older brother” and strengthen our faith.

Texts for reflection and sharing:

Mt 12:46-50; Mt 25:35-40

Jn. 1:9-12; Jn 20:17

Final Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven
You make us your children.
You make all human beings brothers and sisters,
And Jesus to be our older Brother:
He shows us by example.
As he has forgiven us, we want to forgive.
As he has consoled us, we want to console.
As he has loved us, we want to love one other.
Send us your spirit of love
That we may burn with love.
Amen.

(Fraternité de Jérusalem)