



# *Apostles for Today*

*Reflection and prayer - November 2008*

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## **Fundamental Rule 3 – Initial Formation**

The Rule written by St. Vincent Pallotti with the special protection of Mary, Queen of Apostles, responded to his need to conform to Canon Law in order to fulfil the common religious and priestly obligations; in point number 3 he exhorted:

*“The Novitiate, (or preparatory formation) is of a two year duration, following it the members do not make solemn vows, but according to the judgement of the superiors, they make a solemn consecration of themselves. In making it they also enter into a contract with the Congregation and promise to live in it in accordance with the Rules and the Constitutions in chastity, obedience, poverty and perseverance.”* (OOCC III p. 41)

### **Reflection**

St. Vincent in using the expression ‘they do not make solemn vows’, wanted to stress that the consecration is not the living out of a vow but rather is an expression of a permanent contract with the Congregation to live a total giving of oneself to God which would oblige all, priests, brothers, sisters and laity, to live in God and to act always for God with all ones senses and the strength of ones soul.

All the Christian virtues and, indeed, vows themselves, are ‘implementations’ and ‘visible manifestations’ of Love because the life of the Christian is to be an imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ and a personal consecration, as expressed in the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, is a perfect imitation of Jesus, poor, chaste and obedient onto death on the Cross.

St. Vincent himself affirmed: “I intend, O my God, to live, suffer and die with the selfsame uniformity with which Jesus Christ was obedient for me even unto death on the Cross.” ( OOCC X pp.292-293)

In reflecting on our own sanctification and on that of our neighbour we must think of Jesus who was poor and love him in cultivating poverty as a

detachment from earthly goods, this is especially so for the lay members who live immersed in the world, they are to know how to enjoy the gifts of the Lord without becoming overly attached to them and turning them into idols that distance one from God.

In contemplating Jesus who was chaste we should not merely limit this virtue to celibacy which is a prophetic proclamation of our definitive state after the Resurrection of the dead, but we are to also see it as part of matrimony, because conjugal chastity has its own value in the salvific mission of the Church when it is lived as a love that is selfless and a free giving of oneself to the other without selfish calculation.

In the same way obedience when lived as a willingness to allow oneself to be guided by superiors, or as lived out in marriage in a mutual donation of self, responding only to the law of Love, respecting the times and the limits of each other, becomes an implementation of that which St. Vincent spoke of:

*“...because we are all obliged to become saints, to be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect and to perfectly observe the commandment of love, we must also strive with all in our power to procure the greater sanctification of our neighbour, and to be willing to lose even the world before losing our very soul and that of our neighbour; in our consecration we make a public commitment to live these obligations”. (OOCC VII p. 284)*

St. Vincent had understood the importance of making this project a reality by leading every action back to ‘sister Charity’, as all Christians, while having diverse vocations, share the common commitment to sanctify themselves and sanctify others following the model of Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father.

It is thus essential to form oneself in the following of Christ who “... chose twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach ...” (Mc. 3,14 ), and it is vital for the Christian to live a spiritual infancy which leads to a recognition of and a trust in the Father’s love so as to become beacons of the virtues which sanctify us.

The two precepts of charity are love of God and love of neighbour, it is not necessary, therefore, to think of extraordinary phenomena, but to look to the

essential experiences of love as lived in the routine of daily life and expressed in small gestures.

The Magisterium of the Church stresses our common vocation to holiness which is lived out in perfecting charity in every ambient of life: “that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society” (Vat. II, Lumen Gentium, 40)

The community, be it a religious community, or the community of the family, is our place of growth, it is the fertile soil where we are invited to live in perfect communion, aware that we are being formed by the common activity of the Holy Trinity and that it is together that we both look at it and respond to it, each according to his or her own circumstances.

To live in community, or in a family, does not distance us from one another, but paradoxically inserts us into a new, fulfilling experience which gathers us together in the One and Triune God. When the hearts of all are turned to God, when we share the same openness to charity and holiness which is differentiated only by our human nature and the history of each one, we are in perfect communion, nothing divides us, but everything unites us, even things which appear to separate us such as the diversity of language and culture.

One single breath, because we all come from the one Breath, who loves each of us without conditions or limits, we are called to imitate him in the firm conviction and awareness that our Consecration, understood as a complete giving of ourselves to God, is not a human initiative, but a divine one; in this the words of St. Vincent provide us with comfort: “My God, of myself I can do nothing, with you I can do all. For love of you I wish to do all. To you be honour and to me contempt”. (OCCC X. 656-657)

By virtue of the death and resurrection of Jesus God commits himself to conform us to the image of Jesus, “... You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect” ( Mt. 5,48).

Formation is synonymous with conformation to Jesus and is born in the heart of God, it is to Him that we respond freely with commitment. Formation is structured on baptism which is further developed in

consecration to God through the evangelical counsels, prayer and service of ones brothers and sisters.

Formation as conformation with Jesus guides us as we become Christians who are committed in the Church, each according to his or her vocation, we are called to develop the divine potentiality which is given to us in Baptism and so evade worldliness.

To adhere to this path of holiness is equivalent to allowing oneself to be transformed by the Holy Spirit who desires that Christ be formed in us, as St. Paul affirmed: “I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake. I cannot bring myself to give up God’s gift ...”. (Gal. 2,20)

To adhere to, and to commit oneself, in the “Pious Union” is to bind together both consecration and secularity, Church and world, in accordance with the teaching of Vatican II.

### **Let us pray with the Psalmist**

Sing to the Lord a new song,  
let the congregation of the faithful sing his praise!

Let Israel rejoice in his maker,  
and Zion’s children exult in their King.

Let them dance in praise of his name,  
Playing to him on strings and drums.

For the Lord has been kind to his people,  
Conferring victory on us who are weak.

The faithful exult in triumph,  
Prostrate before God they acclaim him  
with songs of praise on their lips. (Psalm 149)

### **Texts for reflection.**

Ps. 148; Mt.5,14; 1Jn. 4,16-19; Rm. 5,5; Rm.8,19-22; Rm.8,28-30;  
Ac.2,42-47.