



Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - May 2008

Fundamental Rule 30

Jesus, infinite love, wishes that the sinner convert and live

St. Vincent Pallotti wrote:

Our Lord Jesus Christ in his final agony wished to suffer the greatest anguish of all, namely, that of being abandoned by his Father, so that the sinner convert and live even though he deserve to be abandoned by Grace because of his sins. Therefore, for love of our Lord Jesus Christ we should be ready and happy to bear each and every suffering in order to obtain the conversion of poor sinners. This too must be one of the characteristics of our Union (OOC III, p. 79-80).

Through this point of the Fundamental Rule, St. Vincent invites us to enter into a journey of conversion and to accept God's saving gesture of reconciliation and of pardon. The response to the offer of salvation is born of God's infinite love and mercy for the person. The salvific gestures with which God shows his mercy and his great love for the human sinner are the passion, death and resurrection of his Son and the sacrament of baptism. Through the sacrifice of his Son on the Cross God makes the sinner just, and in baptism he gives him in Christ his love.

We should remember that the activity of God in the Paschal mystery of Christ is born of his gratuitous love. This is how St. Paul describes this love of God for us sinners:

“The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us. We were still helpless when at his appointed moment Christ died for sinful men. It is not easy to die even for a good man – though of course for someone really worthy, a man might be prepared to die – but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.” (Rom 5: 5-8).

God's merciful ways become real in the welcome he extends to the sinful person, even though he has a radical aversion for the sin.

The sinful action, even though it may signify a rejection of the love of God and indeed of God himself, cannot annul the divine-human relationship of communion with which the person was called into existence. God's fidelity to his loving project is a guarantee of his benevolent attitude towards the person even though he/she is a sinner. God desires reconciliation and this is both made manifest and fulfilled in Christ's Paschal mystery. In the death of Christ on the Cross God shows that he has taken sin seriously and has directly confronted it: the death and resurrection of Christ is God's response to the sinner.

St. Vincent saw sin as a refusal to respond to the gifts of God:

"You, o God, source of grace, know that all of my life has been an opposition to your gifts ... My God, sin, indeed each and every sin, is infinite evil ..." (OCCC X, 295-296).

The mercy of God is shown very clearly in that God does not condemn the sinner, rather he welcomes and loves him/her so that he/she may convert and live: *"God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins he brought us to life with Christ"* (Eph. 2: 4-5).

Mercy calls to conversion

St. Vincent Pallotti shows us the way, he teaches us the Christian attitude towards the sinner:

"love, patience and gentleness must increase ... they should not approve of what he does, or says, but they should feel pity for him, and with Christian compassion and with committed charity and industrious love they should cooperate in his conversion" (OCCC I, p 299).

It is fundamental that one rediscover the relationship with God as a story of God's fidelity in the face of man's infidelity; God seeks out the person, he wishes to be reconciled with him/her and to save him/her.

There is a great deal of thoughtlessness in the attitude of people with regard to sin. A true sense or consciousness of sin is lacking today, a greater awareness of God's merciful love is necessary.

The love of God for sinners is expressed clearly and with tenderness in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15: 11-32). It is said that the Father is anxiously awaiting the return of his younger son, he runs out to meet him, he embraces him, kisses him, pardons him, he takes from his hand his list of sins, he celebrates the return and he gives him back his sense of being a son, and

through his affection, he transmits to the son a desire to take up his life again (v. 20-32).

The Father is not content to merely welcome his son who came home, with love; he wants a feast, a celebration and he organizes it to honour him.

The celebration was a great banquet (Lk. 15: 22). The food for this banquet is, according to Pallotti,

“...the true and glorious body and blood of Jesus Christ, ...” (OCCC XII, p. 188). *“In the Eucharist it is not merely the divine Person of the Incarnate Word who is present, but the Father and the Holy Spirit are also there. Thus He (God), mercifully nourishes me, and destroys my infinite evilness...”* (OCCC X, 451-452).

“God destroys in me all my sins and all the consequences of my sins. He becomes nourishment so as to transform me into Him to the point that I am like God, and being one with God, all that is me is totally annihilated, and God is all in me” (OCCC X, 698).

A community of reconciled sinners

St. Vincent, when faced with the experience of knowing himself to be “nothing and sin”, also had deep experiences of God’s mercy, he savoured the joy of forgiveness, the outpouring of mercy and all the expressions of God’s loving favour.

Pallotti could address God as “my mercy” because he had lived experience of the mercy of God, so much so that he would exclaim: *“My Jesus, my judge, who died so as not to condemn me to death!”* (OCCC X, 668)

We Christians are called to show that we have experienced the grace of God’s mercy, a mercy which creates new attitudes and relationships. While there is condemnation of sin and of injustice there is a welcome for the sinner, mutual forgiveness, a refusal to judge ...

Conversion is both a necessary and on-going attitude in the life of the Christian. A Christian is one who converts to Jesus Christ, who reveals the Father, a Christian lives life in a new manner which is to see reality with new eyes, eyes that know oneself to be a sinner, but one who is saved, a child of God, who is loved and forgiven.

While on the path of conversion St. Vincent Pallotti wrote:

“...take courage in God, and with trust in the intercession of the Mother of Mercy resolve to convert and indeed, convert ...”(OCCC 13, p 699). For Vincent *“...the Marian month was experienced as a most efficacious means to obtain conversion and the sanctification of many souls”* (OCCC I, p 239) and he invites each one of us to a true conversion:

“...be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. O children of the Church if one is a sinner, turn to Mary and never lose confidence.” (OCCC XIII, p 699); and “...the more you see that the conversion (of a person) is difficult the more you should increase your prayers, and you are to do it with great confidence and you will be able to prepare (the person) to die as a sincere and holy penitent” (OCCC I, p 298).

Mercy and conversion are inseparable. God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he/she convert and live!

The Word of God leads us to reflect ...

- Lk 15: 3-7 - Lk 10: 29-37 - Lk 7: 1-50
- Lk 15: 11-32 - Jn 8: 1-11 - Lk 19: 1-10

Topics for reflection (personal or as a group)

- 1- What is my attitude towards those who are far from the faith or who live in a disordered manner? Do I put into practice the invitation of Jesus to show mercy in fraternal correction?
- 2- Mercy is the fundamental characteristic of God which Jesus revealed to us. Do I accept God's mercy as the path to a new life of conversion?
- 3- How often do I approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation, do I receive it with a true desire to be renewed?
- 4- Is the forgiveness that the Lord gives to me a cause of joy and does it lead me to a greater commitment for the good of the community?

Prayer to the Queen of Apostles

O holy Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles and advocate of the human race, we humbly pray to you: intercede for us with your only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, so that with the grace of the Holy Spirit we may be courageous in increasing, spreading and defending faith and charity.

Answer our prayers. In your mercy accept our petitions. Deign to obtain for us the grace, so that *having fought the good fight, having finished the race we may keep the faith*, and so may be among the ranks of the holy Apostles to receive the crown of righteousness (cf. 2 Tim. 4,7-8), through Christ our Lord, Amen.