



Apostles for Today

Reflection and prayer - January 2009

Fundamental Rule 5

In number 5 of the Fundamental Rule St. Vincent Pallotti calls us to live **“Perfect common life”**.

“They must live a perfect common life. Therefore, anything that the member acquires after having made solemn consecration, is acquired for the congregation. Only inherited property is excepted. however this are to be administered and used as indicated by the holy constitutions, and may be disposed of by a will.”
(OCC III, p. 41-42)

Reflection

Every Christian community is made up of persons with their unique qualities but also with their weaknesses, an ideal community does not exist. The community is a gift of the Holy Spirit, it is a place where one becomes a brother or sister (“Fraternal Life in Community” 11), a place of formation and of growth, of forgiveness, patience, a place where Christ is present (Mt 18, 20). Community is where one lives a life that is based on sharing and is in contrast with the individualism and selfishness of our time.

St. Vincent chose as his model for a common life the community of the Cenacle, the first community in Jerusalem, and also the community formed by the holy family of Nazareth. There one grows together with others in faith and love, one’s capacity for the apostolate is developed and the criteria for the apostolic mission are chosen together.

St. Vincent was convinced that authentic apostolate in the Church cannot exist without the activity of the Holy Spirit. He saw this was true for Jesus, he was moved by the Spirit to fulfil his apostolate which was the work of salvation; he also saw it in Mary who, in opening herself to the Spirit, became the mother of the Apostle of the Father and also of the disciples of Christ; in the Cenacle she remains in prayer while waiting for the Holy Spirit. We know just how important the meaning and value of the Cenacle was for Vincent. While he was still a seminarian he expressed his desire to

always be in the Cenacle with Mary and with all creatures in order to receive the fullness of the Spirit.

“Wherever I find myself, I intend to imagine myself to be with all creatures in the Cenacle in Jerusalem where the apostles received the Holy Spirit. I shall remind myself to renew this desire often. Just as the Apostles were there with Mary...”(OOCC X, 86).

While Vincent was forming the base for his foundation he found himself immersed in misunderstandings and trials, however in the community of the cenacle filled by the Spirit, he discovered the true nature and the ideals underpinning his foundation: *“Having finished writing the rule for the Pia Casa di Carità, while reading how the Blessed Virgin and the apostles after the coming of the Holy Spirit, were moved to preach the most holy Gospel in the different regions of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ placed in my mind the true idea of the nature and work of the Pious Society, its general aim is the growth, the diffusion and the spreading of piety and the catholic faith”* (OOCC III, 27).

Thus the Cenacle becomes the place where Christians, with the grace of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Mary, listen to the Word, share reflections and experiences, examine their lives, pray and prepare themselves for the daily commitment and the apostolate.

According to Vincent an essential norm which permeates community life is mutual love as lived by Jesus, who loved even unto giving his life (Jn 13, 34-35), *“By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples”*. Vincent insists: *“Pray to God that he will give you the precious virtue of charity”*. This is an essential aspect of an evangelizing community, it requires “unity in charity”, working as a community for salvation. Vincent recognized the validity and worth of the activity of the individual, but he also recognized from his experience that *“the good that is done individually is limited, uncertain and often of short duration, the efforts of the most generous individuals cannot achieve anything great, either in the moral or religious order, but if they unite and work for a common goal ... the concentration of their efforts and their unity will obtain abundance, certainty and long lasting results”*(OOCC V 228).

What is important for St. Vincent is the sense of community (OOCC V, 228; IV, 124). His vision of the Church is based on a pluralistic unity which is expressed in a diversity of means, of gifts and of charisms. It is only the Holy Spirit who creates unity in love, a reciprocal acceptance of diversity, who can liberate humanity from the constant temptation to seek worldly

power which seeks to dominate all and render it uniform. To accept the diversity of others is enriching, it is not a danger.

A characteristic of the community which lives the joy of sharing life and mission is the welcome it extends to others: *“The entrance of a new member to the Community is to be greeted in the same way that the birth of the Saviour was greeted, because the new member of the Community will be one who will be a true imitator of Jesus Christ ... and the Community, like Bethlehem, is the city of bread since it is rich in spiritual food which are all the means necessary to ... cooperate for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls”*(OCCC II, 15).

The first Christians *“... were assiduous and united in prayer”*. Prayer was the principal activity of the early Church, in prayer she received the gift of unity from the Lord and in prayer she allowed herself be guided by his will. Before he becomes a man of activity, Pallotti was first of all a man of prayer, his effectiveness came from his intimate communion with God. He wrote: *“Since prayer is a powerful means of ensuring the success of each apostolic activity ... no person, of any age, sex, state or condition is excluded from being part of the Catholic Apostolate...”* (OCCC IV, 358). He had *“the gift of praying a great deal”* (OCCC X, 265). A Word gushed forth like a spring from his meditation on the Gospel, this Word was light for his actions and his behaviour, so much so that he wrote the *“Daily practical memorandum”* (OCCC III, 34-39). This is a path to becoming a community which lives the Gospel in the pursuit of holiness. We are invited to become aware of an interior desire to live common life in a new manner: by being open to others, in sharing work, difficulties, sufferings, joys, living in an atmosphere of true fraternity born of faith and nourished by the Word.

The community is united by the one Bread and the One Chalice (cf. Jn 6, 56). The Community at Jerusalem lived this reality: *“They remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.”* (Acts 2, 42). We too can live this reality by celebrating the Eucharist as the central moment of the day, and by seeing the community as an instrument to create communion.

The mystery of the Eucharist is the mystery of the life, passion and death of Jesus. Jesus was sent by the Father and he realizes the Eucharist fully in his self giving. St. Vincent, a man of communion, said: *“God who became man also made himself food for my soul, he wants to nourish me with his essence and his divine nature, because in the Eucharist not only is the Incarnate Word present, but also*

the Father and the Holy Spirit: God...leads me to trust that he fills me with favours, gifts, mercies ... for the good of ... my neighbour" (OCCC X, 451-454). Therefore the gift received cannot be kept for oneself, it needs to be turned into giving, into evangelizing activity, the Eucharist is "*...the source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel*" (PO 5). We need to place the Eucharist at the centre of all our choices and set out again from "Emmaus" (Lk 24, 13-35) so that our missionary commitment may be credible.

The ecclesial Community, with Mary's attentive presence, grows as a family renewed by a powerful outpouring of the Spirit and ready to take on the challenges of a new evangelization. It contemplates the merciful face of Jesus in others, especially in the poor, the needy, in those who are far from faith and from the Gospel. The Community is not afraid to proclaim Christ who is "*the Way, the Truth and the Life*" (Jn 14,6); it is not afraid to show with joy that the person of Christ is both the centre and the content of the good news. When all is said and done the decisive element of the proclamation is the witness of a lived life. Only the believer who lives that which he or she professes with the lips has a hope of being heard. The apostolate of the community is made up of words and deeds, but above all of witness.

Texts for reflection:

Acts 1, 12-14; 2, 42-47;
Rm 12, 3-18; Mk 3,13-19; 34-35;
1 Thes 4, 9-12; 1 Cor 13, 1-13.

Let us pray with the Psalmist:

"How good,
how delightful it is for all to live together as brothers:
fine as oil on the head,
running down the beard, running down Aaron's beard
to the collar of his robes;
copious as a Hermon dew falling on the heights of Sion,
where Yahweh confers his blessing, everlasting life."
(Psalm 132).