

## 2. A gift received and given

Let us start, then, by exploring the dimension of *transmission*.

Etymologically “transmission” derives from the Latin *transmittere*, a verb composed of *trans*, beyond, and *mittere*, to send. It means making something pass from one place to another, from one person to another, from one time to another, from one generation to another. Perhaps one can also intend it in the sense of passing on a mission, with the mission as the object, the reality getting passed around.

The etymology already shows us that this term is vital for us, that we are dealing with a question that we perceive as fundamental, especially in the monastic life. Might not the basis of our problems today consist essentially in a problem of transmission? We get the impression that we are coming to an end, that our mission has reached its end, that it is running out, that no one will receive it. But are we concerned with transmitting it? Do we have an exact idea of transmission? In even more radical terms: Do we have an idea of transmission at all?

To say “transmit” in the sense of transmission or of tradition, the New Testament very often uses the verb *para-didomi*, with various shades of meaning. What interests us means literally “to give over, to give beyond.”

First of all this makes us pay attention to the fact that transmitting is a way of giving, a gift, and thus a form of love. But above all the idea of transmission includes a Paschal dynamism in the sense of a “passage,” since it is a gift that passes from one person to another. Even further: transmitting is passing something, where the one who transmits is ideally neither the origin nor the recipient of the gift. It is as if he were between the two, in the position of one who offers a gift that someone besides himself makes to someone else besides himself. Deep down this implies a disposition of humble gratuity, the attitude of a humble servant who forgets himself. One could say that true transmission is *a memory trained in self-forgetting*.

It is illuminating to see some examples of this sense of transmission in the New Testament.

Jesus, first of all, lived transmission in this sense, as He himself expresses in his prayer to the Father in chapter 17 of St. John. Here the object of transmission is the word of God that Christ transmits from the Father to his disciples, but the text shows us clearly that this word coincides with Jesus himself, the Word of God:

“Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.” (Jn 17:7–8)

Further on, Jesus adds in the same sense: “I have given them your word” (Jn 17:14a).

I think the entire Gospel could be read in light of the fact that Jesus lived his mission as a transmission between the Father and human beings. And what Jesus was transmitting was essentially his Person, it coincided with his Person. This is also the meaning of the *kenosis* of the Crucified One: He empties himself to let himself be transmitted from the Father to sinners as Savior, as Salvation in person, as the Incarnation of Salvation.

We should always start with that absolute purity with which Jesus gives himself to us, to the world, as one totally transmitted from the Father to men, in order to understand what “tradition” means, what “fidelity” means, what “bearing witness” means, etc. And also what “obedience” means, because the purity of the transmission that Jesus incarnates is an absolute obedience, a renunciation of conceiving of his own will as the origin of the gift of himself to human beings. Obedience that is listening, *ob-audire*, so well expressed by St. Benedict from the very first word of the Rule: *Obsculta*. We will get back to this. But it is important not to lose sight of the absolute humility with which Jesus let himself be transmitted from the Father to humanity. And the gift of the Spirit is, so to say, nothing other than the *transmission of the Son’s transmission*.

I do not know how to express it, but the point is not to explain it, but rather to let the mystery of Trinitarian Divine Love be manifest; the point is to contemplate it, to meditate on it in our heart as Mary did, to receive the one light that illumines all without creating new shadows.

Often we reduce the imitation of Jesus’ obedience to something formal and functional. Yet our vows should have no other substance than the love of Christ that lets itself be totally transmitted from the Father to humanity to bring about universal Salvation.

The first question we should ask ourselves, the first examination that we should conduct on ourselves, on our communities, on our observance, on our customs, should begin with what stands at the center of the Christian event and should remain there: that the salvation of the world is found in Christ, whom the Father transmits to humanity. Better yet: that the Salvation of the world is in Christ who lets himself be totally transmitted from the Father to humanity.

The question is whether we then conceive of our vocation and our monastic life in the light of this central element. Do we live in the monastery in service of the transmission of Jesus Christ? Do we live our monastic fidelity in service of the transmission of Jesus? Do we live it as transmission of Jesus in the wholeness with which Jesus let himself be transmitted from the Father to the world? Jesus did not live his mission as the transmission of a message, as the transmission of a morality, as the transmission of a rite, as the transmission of an example. He lived it as the transmission of his whole Person, of all that He is: God and man; body, soul, and spirit; of his whole heart, of all his divine and human relations. Do we live our vocation, do we think of our vocation in the light of and as the incarnation of *this* tradition, of *this* total transmission of Christ?