

3. Transmitting or trafficking?

I confess that, at times, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart,” as St. Paul writes (Rom 9:2), when I see that, quite often, in the communities or individual monks and nuns whom I visit and try to accompany, as also in the priest and lay Christians, I do not perceive the fundamental concern for living one’s own vocation in order to transmit Christ to the world; when I see that the concern to transmit does not coincide, or no longer coincides, with the concern to transmit Jesus Christ.

The younger people at times do not concern themselves with any transmission: for them receiving is enough and, if they give, what is important for them is that everyone recognize that what they give comes from themselves, is their work, their talent, their ability, their generosity. Now and then they have brilliant projects for transmitting to the world what would be its salvation, but without Jesus. Like the world, like everyone, we offer the world “salvations” where Christ is not present, where Christ is not involved, is not transmitted.

The older people are often anxious and troubled about the transmission of the observances, traditions, buildings. They want it all to “survive.” It is as if they wanted to transmit the monastic life without transmitting Christ, who is the only meaning of the Christian monastic life.

I am generalizing, of course. Everywhere and always I find people young and old who truly live their vocation with the sole concern of loving Christ and transmitting him through their life, their witness, often silent and helpless, but certainly fruitful, whatever may happen in the present or in the future. But one gets the impression that these are just exceptions, that those who truly have Gospel transmission at their heart are suffocated by a crowd occupied with other matters.

Perhaps these are precisely the tendencies that are often opposed in the monastic life: those who live it in transmitting Christ and those who live it merely “trafficking.”

You know that St. Benedict did not really love trafficking and commerce, even if he was aware that they are indeed necessary to the life of the monastery. In chapter 57 of the Rule he warns the monks who practice an art not to distort the true transmission for which they have been consecrated. He asks the haughty monk, proud of what he does, not to “transit” in his art anymore: “*per eam non transeat*” (RB 57:3). And when the products of the monastery are sold, the monks responsible for the “transaction” (“*per quorum minibus transigenda sunt*,” 57:4) must guard themselves from all fraud. He asks that they sell at a lower price than the secular “so that God be glorified in all” (57:9; 1 Pt 4:11). He shows us that our transactions, our dealings, that is, all that we transmit as something made by us, must remain subordinate and serve to transmit the glory of God in his beloved Son.

In the same sense the abbot too is invited not to concern himself “with transitory things [*transitoriis*], earthly and fleeting” more than with the salvation of the souls of the brothers (cf. RB 2:33). Let us not forget that the “salvation of souls” is not mainly a state that souls must reach or gain, but is Christ himself, the Savior, whom the abbot is called first of all to represent, transmitting him to the brothers through his teaching and his example, so that they be united to Jesus, not preferring anything at all to Him, who leads us all together to eternal life (cf. RB 72:11–12).

Here I would simply like to underline how important it is, starting with these passages of the Rule, to distinguish between *transmission* and *transition*. When a superior and the respective community are concerned with “transitory things” (RB 2:33), this means that they place their effort on the level of what passes away. Transition could be defined as a “static movement,” a movement without change. You pass from one situation to another, from one time to another, from one generation to another, without change. The exterior changes, the others change, but we do not change. You pass through history without too many disturbances. It is like a rich, noble family who manages to transmit its patrimony and property from one generation to the next without being touched by the movements of society and history. Like a cork stopper that always remains on the surface of the water, whether the river runs calmly or passes through clefts and over cliffs. But this is not transmission, because what is being passed on is nothing other than one’s self, one’s own goods, one’s own patrimony, not a gift that is received and that is given in our turn. The gift of Christ the Savior does not “transit” through time: it is transmitted in his Body that is the Church.

In this sense it is always edifying to meditate on how the first disciples of Jesus lived out transmission.

One can say that the transmission incarnated by Jesus, the transmission of His Person from the Father to humanity, was communicated to the disciples, to the Church. And it is transmitted in the Church, from disciple to disciple, from one generation to another, up to the end of time.

In the first place, the disciples’ transmission through the Church reproduces the content and form of Christ’s transmission, that is, it transmits the Person of Jesus, his presence, his life, his word, his action, his love; and it transmits it with the same humility, with the same detachment from self as lived out by Christ. St. Paul, all the Apostles, the Evangelists, it is always as if they were concerned to tell us: “We simply transmit to you what we have received, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior, whom we ourselves have received.”

It is not a coincidence that St. Paul expresses the meaning of his life as a transmission of Christ when he speaks of the Eucharist: “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (1 Cor 11:23–24)

St. Paul also transmits the *kerygma* because he received it: “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. [...] Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” (1 Cor 15:3–5, 8).

Paul always transmits a present and living Christ, a risen Christ whom he has met and whom he meets. He does not transmit the sacraments as rites, or the *kerygma* as simple doctrine. He transmits the present Christ who speaks to us, who makes all the Scriptures come to life.