

7. The dynamism of stability

Can we conceive of our stability, our vocation to monastic stability, in light of Christ's mission of salvation, like Mary's standing at the Cross?

For St. Benedict, what should keep us linked to the monastery is essentially the preference for Christ: "*Christo omnino nihil praeponant* – Let them put absolutely nothing before Christ" (RB 72:11). It is continuing with this preference, remaining in this fidelity, that permits Christ to lead us all together to eternal life: "*qui nos pariter ad vitam aeternam perducat*" (72:12). In the same phrase the subject changes: if *we* absolutely prefer Christ to everything, *He* leads us to eternal life. Adhering to Christ, we adhere to his mission of Salvation, which consists in leading all of humanity to eternal life. To use a saying of Dom Jean Leclercq, it is like making a vow of stability on airplanes. If I buckle in on my seat, the pilot can take off and carry me quite far...

If I truly want to go far with Jesus, in his universal mission, my first concern must not be to run, but to stop in Him, to fix myself in Him. He is and remains the subject of his mission's dynamism. This is the awareness that St. Paul had: he could move only to the degree that remained fixed in Christ, to the point of recognizing himself as "crucified" in Him (cf. Gal 2:19).

But St. Benedict already recommends this dynamism of stability where he speaks for the first time of the absolute preference for Christ, in the enumeration of the instruments of good works: "Prefer nothing to the love of Christ" (RB 4:21). As for Mary under the cross, standing there in exclusive love of the Lord means preferring the gift of Jesus' life to everything else, even to one's self. Preferring Jesus is necessarily preferring his love, and his love is a universal love that gives its life for the Salvation of all.

There is another instrument of good works that expresses this mystery of stability in the dynamism and spreading of the Savior's mission: "*In Christi amore pro inimicis orare* – in the love of Christ to pray for one's enemies" (RB 4:72).

I find that the two prepositions, *in* and *pro*, in and for, offer us the summary formula of what it means to "endure in transmission." The duration, the monastic stability, means remaining in Christ, being in Him, living in Him, and to practice and live this stability, we are granted and asked to live in the monastery, in community. But one who lives "in Christ" enters right away into his mission of love, is taken with the gift of his life, of his life *for us*, of his life *for all human beings*, for all sinners, for enemies. The life of Christ into which we fix ourselves is a *vivere pro*, a "living for" others, for all others, including enemies.

You could go through the whole Rule to find that in all the aspects and moments of life in the monastery, in the end this is what we are given to seek, to ask for, to practice, to experience, to express: *to live in Jesus for all*.

Deep down monastic stability is like a heart that remains alive and life-giving only to the measure with which the movement of interiorization provokes the movement of diffusion, and that of diffusion provokes that of interiorization. At the end of each movement, the other movement becomes necessary. The heart cannot just fill itself with blood; it must expel it, send it into the body in such a way as to be filled back up with it again and push it out again. And we note that it is in the movement of interiorization that the heart expands, and that it is in the movement of diffusion that the heart reduces itself, contracts.

In one of his Homilies on the First Letter to the Corinthians, St. John Chrysostom very clearly describes the stakes of our stability and permanence in Christ:

“Upon this then let us build, and as a foundation let us cleave to it, as a branch to a vine; and let there be no interval between us and Christ. For if there be any interval, immediately we perish. For the branch by its adherence draws in the nourishment, and the building stands because it is cemented together. Since, if it is divided internally it is doomed to fall, having nothing whereon to support itself. Let us not then merely keep hold of Christ, but let us be cemented to Him, for if we stand apart, we are condemned to perish. It is written: ‘For they who withdraw themselves far from You, shall perish’ (Ps 73:27)” (8.4)

In the Rule, this concern for total inherence in Christ, of adherence to Him without the smallest space, becomes an ascesis of all the human faculties and in all the spheres of life. The spirit, the soul, the body; the will, the intelligence, the memory; work, rest; the use of words and the observance of silence; relationships between brothers and sisters, with the older and the younger... There is no dimension of our human and religious life that is not, for Benedict, a field for work to cultivate in us an ever greater adherence, ever closer, to God, to Christ, and to his love. Stability is indeed a standing there to work in the vineyard of the Lord, to work to become shoots attached to the vine of Christ, to bear much fruit, His fruit.