

11. Transmitting the humble love of Christ

Jesus does not launch a NGO for charity, for helping the poor, but rather the Church as a community of persons whose connection is the communion transmitted by Jesus, who died and rose to save the world, the communion that He came to transmit to us from the heart of the Trinity so that all of humanity might reach its fullness in eternal participation in the Trinitarian Communion. The point of the foot-washing is not that my brother have clean feet, that he feel some kindness, and me too if his feet stink, but that we be united in communion with Christ. For this reason the foot-washing in St. John corresponds to the institution of the Eucharist in the Synoptics. In fact, here too, as for the Eucharist, Jesus insists on “remembering Him.” The point is not just to follow an example, but to transmit the new relationship that Christ establishes with us by maintaining it among ourselves.

Jesus is concerned about leaving to his disciples the transmission of his humble love, that which creates unity, which always reestablishes communion, which is always victorious over the *diabolos* of whom St. Benedict speaks.

Remembering Christ is essential for the Church, for a Christian community, because we are not just talking about remembering or calling something back to mind, but of transmitting an event in action, the event of the love of Christ that generates communion.

Let us think about St. Benedict’s vision of monastic life. Could it not be summarized with the covenant that Jesus transmitted to us with the foot-washing? Does Benedict’s insistence on humility and fraternity not perhaps derive from this awareness?

Jesus comes back to and summarizes this covenant, or better this dispatch, at the end of the Last Supper discourses, in the so-called “priestly prayer” to the Father: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:20–23).

This passage of the priestly prayer of Jesus would be enough for grasping the whole mystery, the stakes, the importance inherent in our “living together.” Before all else, Jesus makes us understand that living together, living united, being one as the Father and the Son are one in the Spirit, is already a transmission, is like the incarnation of the transmission of Salvation to the world, of the transmission to the world of the mission of the Son and Savior.

Salvation, and the faith that receives it, are transmitted through the communion that unites the Church, that unites the members of every community. This is a divine transmission, not only because it is the transmission of the Son’s mission, but also because what is transmitted is the very love of God, the Love that is God, the Trinitarian Love, the glory of God: “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:22–23).

What can be more precious and greater than this transmission? And it is not the transmission of something that passes through our hands without leaving a trace, because communion among us is our mission, is the transmission of Christ to the world. What unites us, what we experience, what keeps us together is paradoxically what radiates out beyond us, farthest from us, to the ends of the world. That which is most intensely *among us* is also that which is transmitted most broadly *around us*. Communion in Christ is what is most central and most peripheral in the Christian experience. The glory of God, that which Jesus gives, is truly like a flame: the more it burns at the center the more it radiates heat and light around and far from itself.

Without an awareness of these dimensions of our “living together,” the community is reduced to being a cozy refuge, always more bourgeois, which will never be comfortable enough, in which, nevertheless, we guarantee our individualistic spaces (in friendships, or in work, or in external contacts, or in other doping addictions), which we will leave behind when we think we have found more comfort elsewhere. How many monks and nuns leave the monastery apparently to “better radiate Christ,” or to love others better, while their lamp has long been extinguished, because they did not want to keep it lighted with the fire of fraternal communion, of the humble and poor communal unity that maintains and transmits nothing less than the Fire of the Trinity’s love!

The awareness of this truly divine nature of the communal unity makes us love our community, our living together. The awareness that it is from here that Christ’s mission of Salvation, eternal, Trinitarian Life, passes on to the world, makes us responsible, moreover, responsible for the world and its Salvation. But not a disturbing responsibility as if we found ourselves powerless before a city that is crumbling in an earthquake. For Jesus has linked our responsibility toward the whole world to our responsibility toward our community. The range of our responsibility is the whole world, but the field in which we take up this universal responsibility is the small and daily sphere of our community. That which is lacking in my community’s unity of love is that which is lacking in the transmission of Christ the Savior to the whole world. It is on my little field that I am granted and asked to work on the world’s harvests.

This should fill us with wonder at the value of our living together, in this precise place, with these particular people, with all their limitations, and with all our limitations. After all it is the limits, all that puts the community’s unity of love to the test, that constitute our field of labor. So we must consider all of our limitations with a sort of veneration, as Jesus must have looked upon his village of Nazareth, or the poor group of his disciples. Our community is a sacred space, because in it and through it God sends the glory of his Salvation to the world.

Before making the effort to love each other, it is important to work on acquiring an awareness of the profound value of our life, of our vocation, of our communion. To work, then, on being aware of the transmission of Christ that is entrusted to us. There is no life mission greater or more important than this, even when one lives it out in the monotonous scarcity of daily life, even when one lives it out in a small and fragile community that is perhaps about to shut its doors.

I think that today, as always after all, this is the essential asceticism: the asceticism of persevering in common life, cultivating an awareness of its hidden mystery, to transmit the Savior to the world.