

5) “...and the man became a living being”

“God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that He had done in creation.” (Gen 2:3).

The story of the creation of man in the book of Genesis does not finish here. There is a second account which, I think, will be useful in its own way in identifying Saint Benedict’s vision of man.

“When no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up- for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground, but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground- then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there He put the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [...] The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:5-9, 15).

In this second account, the man is drawn from the dust, and all his nobility is contained in the divine breath which God blows into his nostrils. There is in him earth and spirit, and the spirit is given to him to remain as dust, in his flesh- in that which in him is misery, poverty, and fragility. We will have to ponder this when we regard the fundamental importance of humility in the anthropology of Saint Benedict.

But in this second account, two other important elements also appear: the garden and work. If man was created and placed in the world in a general fashion in the first account, he receives here a kind of dwelling which is a gift of God, yet also a place of work. The gift must be cultivated; it is a seed which must be grown and cared for. This could be an insight to gather the meaning of Saint Benedict’s “enclosed” monastery and the great importance Benedict gives to daily work, not only to earn a living but to become ever more a human being in the image of God.

There is also in this account the proof of freedom in obedience: “And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’” (Gen 2:16-17).

How many times and in what ways is this proof of freedom proposed to us by the Rule? It would be interesting to understand it, and to understand that it is precisely this primordial proof that we are speaking about when our freedom is called, by the nature of our vocation, to submit itself to this.

The second account of creation also offers us a development of the theme of the creation of the woman, one which could perhaps help us to deepen the meaning of the polarity of the sexes for us in the monastery- all the more so, since this account introduces the extremely important topic of solitude for us: “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of

the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called woman, for out of man this one was taken.' Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed" (Gen 2:18-25).

It is evident that here we must also consider the story of the temptation and fall which follows immediately, in order to understand many aspects of the vision of man which inspire the way Saint Benedict proposes to us of living the fullness of our humanity and redemption through Christ our Savior.

Man is made for God, for a God who expresses Himself in the plural, the God whom we know is Trinity. Man is made in the image of God, in His likeness: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness'" (Gen 1:26).

It is from here that one must always begin to seek to comprehend the mystery of man, and to understand how this mystery is contemplated and affirmed in the Rule of Saint Benedict.

We have already insisted quite a bit on the affirmation of the dignity of every human being in the Rule. But we must investigate more deeply the theme of the image and likeness: is it present in the Rule, and if so, how?

The terms *imago* and *similitudo* are not found in the Rule, but the awareness that God is our model is present everywhere.

From the very first lines of the Rule, the aim and meaning of the Rule are affirmed in these terms: "[...] in order that you may return through the labor of obedience to Him from whom you had moved away through the sloth of disobedience" (Prologue, 2).

This phrase makes us recognize immediately that the figure on the road of Saint Benedict's Rule is man exactly as Scripture reveals him to be: the *Adam* of Genesis, the man who distanced and removed himself from the One who had formed him. I assume that this phrase from the Prologue makes direct allusion to the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:18-20). But the insistence on the obedience/disobedience dialectic makes us understand that, at bottom, original sin and the expulsion from the earthly paradise are what are presupposed here. This reminds us that expulsion and return are played out with respect to the image of God. The challenge of the Rule, of the entire path proposed by Saint Benedict, is the return of man, who had been lost in the "region of dissimilitude," to his nature as the image and likeness of God, a return which is, at the same time, a return to God and a return to his very self. For if man is the image of God, he cannot fully be himself, be fully man, unless he finds himself in the presence of the light of his divine Model.