

## 9. Forming seniors who console the world

To console the wavering human being of today, it is not enough just to offer an exterior stabilization, that is, walls, discipline, work, schedule, etc. Not just a community that keeps company, that alleviates the solitude of bachelors and unmarried women, that drives many people to ask to enter the monastery at an advanced age. Because the instability that modern man suffers from is the incapacity to affix his heart, his thought, his feelings, his will, to a beautiful and good reality, present and eternal.

It is clear that our monasteries are called, today as always, to welcome people who want to enter or simply seek contact with us, to help them escape from an acedia that has become a culture, has become the dominant state. It is with respect to this that we are called to be transmitters of the liberation that Christ, with his presence and the love that is his as Redeemer of man, always comes to offer to men and women of all times. But this implies that we let ourselves be formed first of all by the wisdom of life that the monastic tradition and in particular the Benedictine tradition transmits to us.

When we read and present the Rule of St. Benedict, we distinguish that which is of value for us today and that which no longer has such value. I am, furthermore, always surprised by how little is no longer valuable in this text that is fifteen centuries old. And at times we realize that what was not valuable fifty years ago has become valuable again today. For example, a few years ago, while visiting a community confronted, like almost all communities, by the problem of this or that brother who abuses the Internet, I understood anew the importance, at least symbolic, of the two elders whom St. Benedict makes responsible for going around the monastery during the *lectio divina* of the community, “to see that no brother is so apathetic as to waste time or engage in idle talk to the neglect of his reading, and so not only harm himself but also distract others” (RB 48.18).

These two mature brothers thus become guardians of their brothers’ souls, because acedia is a sickness of the soul. We must take this image seriously, we must take it seriously as a community and in our communal relations. We are “old,” we are “monastically” mature, when we have and share the concern that our brothers and sisters not fall into acedia or not remain imprisoned in it.

Today we must ask ourselves if we have and if we form “mature” members who know how to accompany the dissipated and dissipating persons whom the current world produces *en masse* and who are often tossed toward us by the waves of the fluid society, like those shipwrecked on an unknown beach. Are we these “matures ones,” do we form ourselves through our whole monastic tradition, for this human, stable, pacific, benevolent maturity that can indeed transmit this true consolation to the human being of today?

We should always meditate on the figure of the more mature and complete monk whom St. Benedict describes in the Rule: the old man placed at the door, the porter of the monastery described in chapter 66, which originally must have been the concluding chapter of the Rule. I already spoke of him in another Formation Course, and on various occasions. The topic is a monk who is truly interiorly stable, who can stay at the “periphery” of the monastery without running the risk of being dissipated. A monk who is capable of welcome and of a benevolent and blessing relationship with all. A monk who knows how to speak to the heart of people, to respond to their search for meaning and love. A monk ardent with charity. All this is described by St. Benedict in relation to the porter (RB 66.1–4).

We can ask ourselves if our communal life, if our observance, if our discipline, if our adaptations to today’s situation, if all this now and always forms in us and in our brothers and sisters this human and spiritual maturity. And we can also ask ourselves if we are taking care to put these monks and nuns in the place where the monastery is in relation with the world. The “periphery” of which Pope Francis speaks is often not found a thousand kilometers from the monastery: it is at the door of the monastery. And today the door of the monastery is no longer the physical entrance of our buildings, but the virtual, digital entrances which are sometimes in our cells and a little bit everywhere in the monastic enclosure. Are we also concerned that at *these* doors there be a wise old man whose maturity keeps him from being dissipated? Are we concerned that we ourselves be so mature in our being at these “doors”? We know that often it is not so, but the contrary!

Might not the interior stability that belongs specifically to this Benedictine conception of monastic maturity be the true means of useful, necessary, urgent transmission of the salvation of Christ that we are called to offer to the world today, even if we feel ever more fragile and precarious?

In fact, if we think back to chapter 27 of the Rule, we understand that in the end there is a single thing that we can and must transmit: *consolation*, a true consolation, an accompaniment that gives courage and confidence back to the shipwrecked man whom the current world produces and wants to toss outside and far from itself. The thousands of refugees who we believe come from a world different from our own, are in reality a mirror and a reflection of our rejects, the shipwrecked whom our world produces.

The need for stability, for duration, that the wavering humanity of today cries out to us for, is perhaps for us a great opportunity that the Holy Spirit offers us, to come back to awareness of the value of our vocation and of our mission. For we understand that the commitment of our vow of stability, the fidelity we cultivate, the permanence we work at, are not for us alone, but are a good to be transmitted to the world, a gift that we are called to share.

But this transmission cannot happen except through our persons and communities. The issue is not transmitting values, proposing a way of life, a discipline, but a lived experience that is transmitted solely from person to person, or better: which is transmitted solely by transmitting, by granting, by consigning to others, to the world, our very persons and our communities.