

## 19. Arriving together to destiny

“Let them put absolutely nothing before Christ, and may he lead us all together to eternal life” (RB 72.11–12).

In these last two verses of chapter seventy-two on the good zeal that monks must have, St. Benedict recaps and summarizes what the monastic, and thus the Christian, life is for him; for the monastic life educated and formed by the Rule does not mean to be anything other than going to the depth of Christian life. Thus so many lay-people also feel helped by the Rule to live out their vocation, sometimes almost more and better than we monks and nuns...

In belonging to Christ, our salvation and total fullness of life, we are led, accompanied, guided to eternal life, indeed to knowing the Father and the Son in the glory of the Trinity’s communion. At the end of the rule, St. Benedict reminds us of our ultimate destiny, but also, in the same phrase, reminds us that we are on a journey, on a path *together*. If we must reach eternal life all together, this means that we must also make the journey all together. To express the idea of “together” the Rule uses the adverb “*pariter*.” You almost get the idea of a race course where one must arrive to the finish line at the same time, in which the outcome must be “par,” in which all arrive first, or all last, but it’s the same thing. And it is as if the whole competition of the race consisted in the effort of arriving along with the others, of leaving no one behind, and above all of not wanting to arrive at the finish line without the brothers.

It is as if St. Benedict wanted to instill in us the concern for the destiny of the others precisely while we are concerned for our own. How important this is in the monastic life! There is nothing worse than being concerned and occupied with one’s own personal asceticism while forgetting the progress of one’s brothers and sisters. And this should not be true just for the brothers and sisters of one’s own community, but for the brothers and sisters of the whole Church, and also the whole human race. If we do not arrive to holiness and to Heaven *pariter* with all, it means that we will not get there ourselves.

I imagine the judgment at the end of our life and at the end of the world as an encounter with Jesus who, as he opens the door of Paradise for us, and before looking us in the face, will look around us to see if the brother and sisters with whom he will have granted us to walk will be there *pariter* with us to enter the Kingdom. If not, I imagine that Jesus will look disappointed and sad at us and will say: “But what, you arrive by yourself? There’s no one who arrives with you? Your faith, your asceticism, served only you? You didn’t progress with the others? You didn’t share your thirst for the ultimate destiny with your neighbor? With the brothers and sisters of your community? With your husband or wife? With your children? With your friends? And to say that I showed you that the love for this destiny must be shared even with your enemies! Didn’t you see that I myself did not want to return to the Father without the thief crucified with me, without Adam and Eve and the souls in

hell? Sorry, but you are not ready to enter the Kingdom, you need to do a little Purgatory, and this will consist in waiting for the brothers whom you left behind, praying and making offerings for them. When you can present yourself with them, I will open the door of Paradise wide for you and you will take your place with me in the communion of the Father. For, you should know this, in Paradise there are not individual places, nor particular galleries, but only collective places, tables where one can only eat together, spaces of communion.”

In the Rule the adverb “*pariter*” is used only four times, but all are meaningful for the mystery that we are exploring.

The first time is in chapter 20, which treats the reverence that we must have in prayer. Benedict reminds us that, if we want to ask the Lord for something, we must do it “in all humility and pure devotion” (RB 20.2), without multiplying words, but with simplicity of heart and a sense of our misery, hence it must not be a long prayer (cf. 20.3–4). Then he concludes by saying: “In community, however, prayer should always be brief; and when the superior gives the signal, all should rise together – *omnes pariter surgant*” (20.5).

Unity in prayer, and also in ending prayer, is a sign and education of our being united in the presence of God, united in recognizing our misery before Him and expressing trust that He will hear us and save us.

Then the term *pariter* is used in chapter 49 on the observance of Lent, hence again where the topic is the path of conversion that we must walk together, not only in the community, but with the whole Church. After having said that the life of a monk should always be lived in a Lenten spirit (not only insofar as it is penitential, but also a desire for Easter), St. Benedict asks that at least in Lent “all together [*omnes pariter*] keep the manner of life most pure and wash away in this holy season the negligences of other times” (RB 49.2–3).

Here too, then, there is the idea that it is together that we must be converted to share together in Easter joy.

The third passage in which the adverb *pariter* is used, also in a significant way, is in chapter 53 on receiving guests. Here, after saying that guests must be welcomed as Christ, St. Benedict asks that, once a guest is announced, the superior and brothers should hasten to meet him “*cum omni officio caritatis* – with all the courtesy of love” (RB 53.3). But the first thing that the community must do with the guest, also to avoid possible “delusions of the devil – *illusiones diabolicas*” (53.5), is to pray together: “*et primitus orent pariter et sic sibi socientur in pace* – first of all, they are to pray together and thus be united in peace” (53.4).

This act of praying together is above all a spreading of the community’s communion of prayer toward the outer world that comes to ask for peace. Peace is not something abstract, but a way of being united, of being “associated” (*socientur*), of being “associates,” companions in life and in the journey.

Being able to communicate in prayer, being able to share with a stranger the prayer that already unites the community, creates communion, exorcises the divisions that the “*diabolus*,” the “divider” foments among men. We have already seen this when speaking about the hermit (cf. RB 1.4–5).

And this makes it possible to recognize and love Christ in the guest to the point of being able to adore Him in him: “Christ is to be adored because he is indeed welcomed in them” (53.7).

So, we could summarize, in the light of these four points in which the Rule uses “*pariter* – together,” that the possibility of being led all together by Christ into eternal life (72.12) grows into a path on which we are formed to pray together, both in community and with all, and to be converted together from our deficiencies. The point, however, is always to be united in recognizing our misery, and that it is the Lord who comes to save us, leading us all to the destiny of eternal life that He alone can give us, because one can live it only in communion with Him, or rather: it *is* communion with Him.