

20th Chapter of the Abbot General M-G. Lepori OCist for MFC – 18.09.2014

"In Christi amore pro inimicis orare" (RB 4:72).

To be for others in Christ, without limits, without reservation, without any conditions, is the love of God which is manifested in the world. Asking us to love our enemies and to pray for them, Jesus has made us sharers in his love. He has not only asked this love of us, required this as a necessity and command, but gave this as a grace, as a gift of the Spirit because this love without limits, without conditions is not possible to humans. When St. Benedict evangelized us, that is, transmitted the Gospel to us and asked us to pray for our enemies, he asked us to love them because there is no greater love than to accept the other person in our relationship with God, and then share God with the other. When I pray for my enemy, as for a friend, I share the communion with God with him or her, and thus I share God Himself who is Love. But this, Benedict knows he cannot ask us if he does not indicate the context in which this love is possible, the context outside of which the love for one's enemies is impossible. This context, this dwelling is the love of Christ, the experience of the love of Christ, *"in Christi amore pro inimicis orare"*.

In this tool of good works, there is basically the summit of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus asks his disciples to be perfect as the Father, that is, to be fully children of God, thus fully *in Him*, in Christ. If, as we have seen, Jesus gives us his heart, his life, if he gives us the grace to be in Him and Him in us, the expression and the visible effect of this Christian mysticism is this unreserved love, this love for one's enemies as evidenced by praying for them:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:43-48)

I said yesterday that there are so many divisions and conflicts within communities, as in the Church, between the Churches and in the world. When I try to understand why a community is divided, why there are so many hostilities, I realize that the reason is that really we are willing to love only under certain conditions. We put conditions on loving. Often without realizing it. It is as if our decision to love, "to be for the other", and thus benevolent towards the other, was a business, a market. I'll love you if... if... if.... Only if the other meets all the conditions of my invisible contract of sale, then I will love him or her, or at least I will be nice. The trouble is that this love is born dead. Why pretend that love should depend on our conditions, this withers love at its roots. Or rather, it is like expecting that the vital lymph of a tree comes from its leaves and not from its

roots. Instead, love can only come from a root of gratuity, from a source free of charge. When we say "I'll love you if..., if..., if..." it means that we believe that we are the source of love, that love is a commodity which we can grant, if we are well "paid", if we get adequate remuneration. It is a fundamental error, a fundamental sin against charity, because, as St. Paul writes, "love does not seek its own interests" (1 Cor 13:5).

Jesus tells us that we can love only as children of the Father, as children who watch how the Father loves, who let themselves be loved by the Father, and who contemplate in everything, even in the sun and in the rain, the unconditional love of our Father in Heaven who loves all humans without any if..., if..., if... We can only love in this way "in Christ", that is, in the Son of the Father in whom our person, our life, finds itself where the Father says to the Son: "You are my Son, my beloved, in you I am well pleased "(Mk 1:11).

Our Baptism, prefigured by what Jesus wanted to receive in the Jordan, allows us to be in Christ there where the Father expresses his love towards us all, and thus allows us, as from a source of living water, to draw on all the unconditional love that he asks us to have towards our neighbor, even our enemy. There is no limit to the love we can give to everyone, because there is no limit, there is no measure, in the love that we receive in Christ from the Father, the love that is the Charity of the Holy Spirit.

When we do not succeed in reconciling ourselves with someone, in loving someone, especially the members of our community, it is a sign that we do not live enough "*in Christi amore* – in the love of Christ" as Saint Benedict says (RB 4:72). That is, we lack an adhesion to Christ, we lack life in Him, that is, we lack mysticism, or piety if you prefer the more Pauline term (cfr. 1 Tim 4:7-8). It is not just because "we are bad" – we know this already and Jesus has told us this without any compliments in the Gospel (Lk 11:13). This is not a problem, because it helps us to humbly acknowledge that "no one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18). Only "*in Christi amore*" is our evil defeated, consumed, and even transformed into humble charity. In his play, *It's Midnight Dr. Schweitzer*, Gilbert Cesbron has Brother Charles de Foucauld respond to someone who is surprised that he is following a religious vocation after such a dissipated and sinful youth: "God takes us whole and entire as we all are: he takes what is good and what is bad in us. If you throw a log on the fire, everything will burn, even the worms that eat it." (I, IX)

But you have to throw everything into God's fire, even your own wickedness, and I would say even your own goodness, your own natural generosity. Everything in us must pass through the fiery crucible of the love of Christ. Only in this way is our love reborn as His love, as the love of His Heart for the world, which is the only gratuitous and limitless love.

This is what St. Benedict shows us, asks of us, and above all gives us, saying, "*In Christi amore pro inimicis orare* – In the love of Christ, pray for your enemies" (RB 4:72).