

5. The value of our traditions

It is beautiful and comforting to see how Jesus, who is the word-spring of God in person, the source of the Light of God, succeeds precisely as a spring in piercing through closed and imprisoned traditions. You can read in this way, for example, the meetings and dialogues of Jesus with the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:7–26) or with Nicodemus (cf. Jn 3:1–21). But in the whole Gospel, Jesus' proclamation is exclusively aimed at revealing that the only tradition that he came to transmit and that he asks us to transmit is his mission of Salvation for the world, which has its eternal source and fulfillment in the God who is Love.

The conversion of Paul consists in nothing other than his incarnating in his whole life, his whole person, all his talents and weaknesses, and even his death, the transmission to the world of the Son of God's mission of Salvation.

Throughout his entire life Paul will watch with the greatest attention to make sure that, among Christians, the Pharisaic or pagan traditions not reappear, traditions opposed to the transmission of Christ or capable of emptying it of meaning. He writes, for example, to the Colossians: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ" (Col 2:6–8).

For him and for the Church, there is only one criterion for discerning traditions, customs, rites, beliefs, observances, all that can be transmitted: whether it all helps or impedes the transmission of the living Christ, sent from the Father to save the world.

The true tradition must always continue to be a trans-mission, but not of our mission, or the mission of this or that stylish prophet, but rather the mission of Jesus Christ, sent from the Father, not "to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:17).

We cannot live our monastic transmission, we cannot examine it, and least of all revive it, except by returning to the transmission of the mission of Jesus, a mission in action, in which Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, continues his coming into the world as the one sent by the Father to save it.

This foundation of our vocation on the salvific mission of Christ helps us catch the profound and living value of our traditions; of our truly authentic traditions, not those which are ultimately only exterior ornaments. In fact all our truest traditions, those that do not lose their importance, or should not lose it, plunge their roots in the salvific mission of Jesus. This means that these traditions are not only linked to the life of Christ, but transmit his Salvation to us and help us transmit it to the world.

Let us take perhaps the strongest example: obedience, one of the most traditional values, virtues, and vows of the monastic life, even if it is hard to transmit it to new generations.

What was Jesus' obedience? For Him, obedience consisted in letting himself be sent by the Father to save the world. Without Christ's obedience, there is not salvation for the world, no salvation for us.

This means that our participation in the obedience of Christ "even to death, and death on a cross" (Phil 2:8), enables us to share in the salvific mission of the Son of God who saves us and the whole world. Religious, monastic obedience has this profound and universal value. It is transmission of salvation in Christ. If one lives this dimension, every act of obedience that is asked of us gives even to the smallest detail of daily life an absolute value, which is a value of love, because there is no greater love than accepting and transmitting the Salvation of the world.

In the school of the hymn of the letter to the Philippians 2:6–11, St. Benedict had this sense of obedience, and he seeks to transmit it to us. He knows that Christian obedience coincides with humility, that it consists in forming humility according to every instant and circumstance of life. Here we should review chapters five and seven of the Rule, but also all the other chapters, precisely in light of this desire to share in the salvific mission of Christ, which is a desire of transmission.

I limit myself to citing the second step of humility, in which the monk, "loves not his own will nor takes pleasure in the satisfaction of his desires; rather he shall imitate by his actions that saying of the Lord: *I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me*" (RB 7:31–32; cf. Jn 6:38).

We understand that the model of Benedictine obedience is not just the obedience of Jesus, but *obedience within the mission of Jesus*.

This changes everything, or would change everything, if we were aware of it. This awareness would enable us to live obedience in a dimension of transmission, and of transmission not of a value, of a virtue, of an example, of a discipline, but of universal Salvation through and in Christ Jesus.

I have used the example of obedience, but this profound and living value of our traditions and observances is valid for everything, for every aspect of our life and of our vocation. This is valid for poverty, for fraternal life, for prayer, for silence, for work, and for the way we are invited to live out in the monastery every aspect of our humanity: sickness, for example, or responsibility, sin and pardon, etc. We are asked to live by adhering to the salvific mission of Christ, which coincides with the transmission of his Person by the Father to the world.

We should not look for another value of our tradition, of our traditions, that is not founded explicitly on the mission of the Son of God and Savior. In fact, especially considering the difficulty of transmitting our vocation to the young, we run the risk of wanting to give other values to our tradition, other justifications, other foundations, certainly quite beautiful and noble ones, but which could make us forget, as often happens, that the only meaning of our vocation is the Son of God who let himself be sent into the world to save all human beings, all sinners, starting with us, as St. Paul would say (cf. 1 Tim 1:15).