

3. Listening to the Truth

St. Benedict, together with the Apostles and all the fathers and mothers of the Church was concentrated on the consciousness that the truth is the word of the Lord. For this, the whole Rule asks us to listen to it, from the beginning: “*Obsculta, o filii, praecepta magistri* – Listen, my son, to the commandments of the Master!” (RB Prol. 1).

In the monastic community, which wants to be no other than a Christian community in its essence, everything is organized, given and requested in order to listen to the Lord. Common prayer, completely woven into the Word of God, the abbot’s teaching, the *lectio divina* times, reading at table or before Compline, the climate of constant silence which is nothing other than a climate of total listening and meditation, fraternal and synodal dialog to listen to the opinion of each member of the community (cf. RB 3); but also daily life made up of fraternal living together, work, welcoming guests and the poor, looking after the sick, humble service and responsibility: everything for St Benedict was a space for constant listening of the truth which Jesus tells us and which Jesus wants us to make alive, to experience, so that it can penetrate in us and among us. Because the truth that Christ tells us and witnesses, is the love of the Father and the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit which wants to become our filial love towards God and our fraternal love between us and with everyone. The truth of Christ is the divine Life of the Trinitarian Communion which through the Church becomes new life in us and between us.

But if the truth is this, why do we find it so hard to listen to it? Why are we also often like Pilate, who even in front of the Truth in person, pretends not to hear it and goes away asking himself “What is truth?”

The fact is that the truth of the Word of Christ, the truth of the Gospel is uncomfortable for us, contradicts us, asks us to make choices which contradict what the serpent whispers to us and which seems to us to be more attracting and interesting for us than the truth of Christ.

St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, realizes that the serpent is always at work and contrasts the truth that the apostle does not tire to proclaim to them: “But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts may be corrupted from a sincere [and pure] commitment to Christ.” (2 Cor 11:3)

The serpent whispers to us that it is in our interest to be great, strong, powerful, and rich. But Jesus proclaims to us that our real joy is in being small, meek, humble, poor. The serpent whispers to us that the goal of life is success prevailing over others. Jesus announces to us that the fullness of life is the Cross, losing life to give it away. The serpent whispers to us that the energy that drives us and makes us advance is pride, boastfulness. Jesus teaches us that spiritual progress is humility.

Who is right? The serpent or Jesus? Jesus invites us to experience His truth to discover in it beatitude, a fullness and peace of heart which everything the serpent whispers to us does not give us. Adam and Eve were immediately disappointed by the promises of the serpent. Instead, the promise of the Creator who made us in His image and likeness, in the image of the Trinity, who made us to be children in the Son, continues to remain valid, and only awaits our listening, our obedient “yes” to the truth of the Gospel so that that promise may be fulfilled in us, as it is fulfilled in the saints.

Jesus said one day to the Jews: “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn 8:31b-32) Jesus tells us a truth which makes us free. But free from what and for what?

For Jesus, freedom is not so much freedom to think and say what we want, but freedom to live. Fundamentally, the freedom Christ gives us is to love, to be able to give our life and also to lose it, to sacrifice it. We cannot be disciples of Christ only in thought, but rather through allowing his word to shape our whole life.

And this is the work of the Church, the Christian community, the assembly of disciples gathered together by the Lord who calls us to be with Him, around Him, loving each other to remain in His love as He remains in the Father’s love, letting us be loved by the Son as the Son is loved by the Father in the gift of the Spirit.

Pentecost gives this experience to the Church and nourishes it constantly over the centuries until the return of Jesus Christ.

The Lord, calling us to Him in baptism and then in the form of vocation He gives us, calls us always to live this experience in a community to grow as living members of his Body.

If we do not think of our community in this way, it means that we have a worldly idea of it and thus we live in the community according to the criteria of the world and not according to Christ’s truth.

St. Paul speaks of the desires of the flesh and not of the Spirit:

“Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Gal 5:19-23a).

St. James also warns against sentiments which go against the truth of Christ:

“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.” (James 3:14-18).

The two apostles present peace, which is the fruit of the Spirit, as the state of a community and heart which conquers all the inspirations of the malign, all the desires of the flesh, all the insinuations of the world. True peace is a victory for us, the victory of Christ over sin and death which becomes the victory of our heart when we allow Christ to conquer it with His presence which tells us the truth and breathes the Spirit of the Father in us.

When on Easter night, the risen Jesus appears to the incredulous disciples who are full of fear, He offers them His wounded and living presence which transforms them with the breath of the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23). And it is in this way that Christ brings us peace: «Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you!”» (Jn 20:19).

We should live every Eucharist like this, personally and as a community, and live the whole of community life as if we were always reunited around the Risen One. Then the same miracle which transformed the apostles and made them into an ecclesiastical community burning to welcome and testify the Lord who brings peace and saves the world, would come among us.