



February 2021

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND ITS HORIZON

From the Letter of Saint Paul the Apostle to the Romans (1, 8-17)

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you – but thus far have been prevented –, in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith”.

From a letter of Padre Pio to Erminia Gargani

My dearest daughter,

May the most sacred heart of Jesus transform your heart more and more to the point of making it perfect and worthy of him.

I received your letter and I reply with a delay of a few days, in order to warmly greet your soul which cannot see how fond mine is of it, never ceasing to continually ask many graces for you from the Lord both at holy Mass and in public and private prayers. But I “especially” ask for divine love for you. This is everything for us; this is the honey that must sweeten all our affections and actions, my good daughter.

“Oh Lord, my beloved daughter, how happy our inner kingdom is when this holy love reigns within it! How blessed the faculties of the soul are when they obey to such wise a King! No, my good daughter, under obedience to him and in his realm, he does not allow serious sins to dwell, or attachment to the most venial sins. It is true that he allows them to reach the frontiers of our souls, he allows that even the worst temptations may wonder around the fortress of our souls, but he does so, so that we are to practise the virtues requested in that specific fight, as through practice they are strengthened and refined, becoming thus suitable for entry into the heavenly Jerusalem, for the construction of the mystical building. It is equally true that he allows the master spies (venial sins and imperfections) to circulate freely in his kingdom, but this is merely to show us that, without him, we would be prey for our enemies.”

From what I have said up to now, you will have realized how much I disapprove of that discouragement and dejection of spirit that occurs within you as a result of the sight of your sins, along with that of the imperfections into which you fall without wishing it, or rather, into which you find you have fallen along with the many spiritual struggles which the enemy would like to win.

You are to valiantly fight temptations with strong souls, and fight them along with the Supreme Chief. When you fall, do not stay there prostrated in body and spirit. Humble yourself greatly, but without being discouraged. Lower yourself without degrading yourself. Wash your imperfections and falls with sincere tears of contrition, without lacking trust in divine Goodness, which will always be greater than your ingratitude. Resolve to make amends without being presumptuous, but your strength must be in God alone. Finally, confess sincerely that if God were not your breast-



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plate and shield, you would be imprudently pierced with every kind of sin. And it is for this reason that you must always keep yourself in the grace of God with perseverance in carrying out your spiritual exercises, and let this be your foremost concern.

On the other hand, my beloved daughter you are always to have courage, and if some languor or weakness of spirit comes upon you, run to the foot of the cross, place yourself amidst the heavenly perfumes and you will undoubtedly be comforted and invigorated.

Many times a day I present your heart to the eternal Father and that of his beloved Son, and I unfailingly present it to him during holy Mass. He would be unable to refuse it because of this union through which I make the offering. I suppose, that at your end, you do the same for me. Always recommend me to God, and ask him for the grace that I may no longer be exposed to further trials in the militia. Have you been charitable and made the novena to our Lady of Pompeii for me, along with everything else?

You are also asking me about the state you would like to embrace. For the moment, I reserve judgment in this regard. When you go to San Marco consult with the Father Provincial, as regards the religious state and tell him everything.

I leave you in the Heart of Jesus; let us find each other often, in him.

I take my leave of you in the holy kiss of the Lord and, in him I cordially bless you.

Padre Pio, capuchin.

CATECHESIS

A question: How can we serve for the coming of the Kingdom of God?

One of the great difficulties of the modern man is accepting that the world belongs to God. Secularism does not always mean atheism, indeed there are many who accept the idea of a transcendent, invisible world; but it becomes difficult to come to terms with this reality, just when we speak of a God who wants to guide us to live better on this earth

"Submission" to his will is also experienced by many believers almost as a burden. Respect for the moral principles that come from the Bible has become the object of free interpretation, so that the commandments and precepts of the Lord prevail - even among believers - the "in my opinion" or the concept of a democratic ethic: "everyone does it, so it's not wrong".

Faith asks us to know how to look beyond, how to overcome the limited walls of our egos by looking at the world as a wonderful gift from God. "Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (*Sal. 1,8*)

The horizons of faith

When we contemplate the horizon, we can even make a good start to a day; the richness of colors, the clear sky and the crisp air can be a great inspirations as to do well and do more. Let us try to look with this same optimism at the horizon of the Christian community, of our community, of the reality of the Church in which we live.

Let us look beyond the small problems of our sacristies, which at times are under the influence of difficult relationships and trivialities and pay little honour to us as Christians. Beyond these small problems there is a world that belongs to God; and although, due to our short-sightedness, we fail to see His work, He never ceases to love this world and to improve it, as He has been doing in every time of history. The great victory of the devil is to isolate us from this world, to push us to see it as sick and irreparable for its vices and its wickedness. We fall into the same error, just as those who say that God does not exist or those who want to detach the world from its authority.

The Father who is in heaven, who is love and providence has placed us in this world; understanding its limits, perceiving its sufferings and contradictions is none other than the first step of our mission, that of helping each one to discover what God is already doing for us.



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"Send your Spirit to renew the earth" is not just any prayer, but it is the invocation of a Church, the mystical body of Christ, the people of God, which becomes aware of the inner strength received on the day of Pentecost.

If we did not have faith in the action of the Spirit, the cry of the poor, of the suffering, of the sick, the social and family unrest could overwhelm us, could feed pessimism and distrust in man and in society to give adequate answers to man's needs. .

In the same way, however, it is wrong to think that, by merely remaining in the Church and by praying, the Spirit solves man's problems, intervening with one prodigy after another. The Scriptures present us with a God who continually prepares man's heart, makes it mature and grow in his environment, guides him along his paths by accepting hesitations and forgiving betrayals. The new heart is a gift that God makes within a slow journey of faith, of which we are protagonists, but also companions. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses interact with their time, with their territory, they engage and pay in first person, like every prophet did, like the Lord Jesus did in the first place.

And the Word became flesh

Jesus feels the distrust of man on his skin, experiences his ambiguities to the point of accepting his unjust condemnation, but he does not stop, he continues to proclaim his kingdom to the end: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you ». (Lk 11,20). He casts out demons, he performs wonders, his word is accompanied by extraordinary signs. Word and sign are the two faces of that mystery which takes place in the heart of every man: Jesus loves us, he gives his life so that his kingdom can enter our hearts; sometimes he accompanies this coming with signs to make us understand the richness and abundance of his mercy. It took place at the time of his coming in the flesh, but this mystery is repeated in the Church which is the missionary of his kingdom and - at times - witness of his miracles: word and sign have become inseparable.

For this reason, I am sorry that the figure of Padre Pio, like other saints of our time, is relegated to the field of the extraordinary, he is seen as a mysterious phenomenon and we are unable to accept the great message that the Spirit gives us through his person.

The positions are opposite: one approaches the miracles or stigmata of Padre Pio with the inquiring eye of the non-believer or one is curious and believes without being able to go further.

Padre Pio is a gift to the Church of our time to push it - like so many other gifts - to open its horizons, to hear the need of faith of today's man. The answer that the Spirit gives us through Padre Pio is that of which Pope Francis speaks, but which was already present in many speeches of Pope Benedict XVI: to conquer not by proselytism, but by attraction.

"The Church does not proselytize", says Pope Benedict XVI. "It develops rather by" attraction ": just as Christ" draws everyone to himself "with the power of his love, culminating in the sacrifice of the cross, so the Church fulfils its mission to the extent that, associated with Christ, it fulfils all its works in spiritual and concrete conformity to the charity of his Lord ”.

We are the face of Christ

Padre Pio's "worldwide customers" were the result of his attraction, which has a very specific origin. In the letter addressed to Nina Campanile of November 1922 (4 years have already passed since the stigmatization, a large crowd has arrived in San Giovanni Rotondo, the first persecutions have begun), Padre Pio reflects on his existence, on his youthful doubts and on his sufferings and then he speaks of the triumph of God in his history: "You arose in the end ...".

Precisely in those years the accusations that will accompany the whole life of the friar were being formalized: he wanted to proselytize, he wanted to use the "so-called" stigmata to attract people. In reality Padre Pio was well aware that he was a poor instrument in the hands of God.

This is the difference between proselytism and attraction: I let God work in my life, I let him guide me in evangelization and in my missionary choices. In a catechesis Pope Francis comments on the conversion of the Ethiopian, the episode in which the deacon Philip, met "by chance", explains to



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him the texts of Isaiah regarding the mission of Christ, and asks himself: "Who pushed Philip to approach the carriage? It is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the main actor in this act of evangelization. "Father, I'm going to evangelize" - "Yes, what are you doing?" - "Ah, I announce the Gospel and I say who Jesus is, I try to convince people that Jesus is God". My dear, this is not evangelization, if there is no Holy Spirit there is no evangelization. This can be proselytism, advertising ... But evangelization implies you are being guided by the Holy Spirit, that it is He who pushes you to proclamation, to proclamation with witness, even with martyrdom, even with the word ".

Discernment implies giving space precisely to this action of the Holy Spirit, but we have all experienced a little bit how this word is inflated and can be exploited in a more or less conscious way. It is easy to be convinced that the Spirit wants to ask us to do something, just as it is easy to be convinced that - given the age, the difficulties and, why not, the failures - the Spirit tells us not to do anything anymore. Alone, we can read God's signs as we want.

A page of the Acts of the Apostles has always struck me: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell". (15.28-29). It is the decisive moment in which the Church opens itself to the Gentiles and decides not to impose circumcision; it is a very important moment of discernment in which two actors have an active part: the Holy Spirit and the apostolic community. To avoid excesses in extravagance and protagonism, as well as authoritarianism, escapes into the sacristies that estrange us from reality, it is necessary that the right role be given to the action of the Holy Spirit and to the discernment of the community. Preparing ourselves for the mission means making our Groups truly disciples of the Holy Spirit, but also open to discussion and discernment. Beyond sterile complaints and trivial denunciations, it is necessary to strive in the search for a dialogue that is also handing over one's point of view to the community, which will have to find the ability to pray, to discern and advise for the best.

Men and women missionaries

The path of the Church in recent years gives us the direction of our discernment: to go beyond our small horizons, to have the same ability as Padre Pio of looking at reality with people's need for God, with their unspoken questions. We do not have truths in our pockets to hand out, but in our hearts we have that hope that we must nurture, that certainty that God is able to save the world at any moment. We also begin to put our mission into practice, by living it ourselves as apostles of hope, promoting meetings on the meaning of Christian hope, inviting the brothers and sisters we know to pray with us to hear Jesus' prayer more closely: "Thy kingdom come".

PRAYER TO SAINT PIO BY MONSIGNOR MICHELE CASTORO

O Glorious Padre Pio, humble servant and faithful disciple of the Lamb, you followed Him unto the cross, offering yourself as a victim for our sins. United with Him and filled with his love, you bring the good news of the resurrection to the poor and to the sick, showing the merciful face of God the Father.

Oh tireless man of prayer, friend of God, bless those who work and support your Home for the Relief of Suffering, so that they may be beacons of light in this tormented world and spread the perfume of your charity in all directions.

Oh Saint of Paradise, obtain for us from our Almighty God health of body and soul, peace in our families and consistency in our Christian lives, so that through you we may come to merit eternal life.

Amen.