

STATIO APRIL 2011

CHRIST – THE CENTRE IN THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT Part I

CHRIST – THE CENTRE OF OUR LIVES

Each one of us “set out on this way of monastic life, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us to his kingdom” Prologue 21

The one who is calling us and whom we follow is Christ. The Rule is a *Christ-Rule*, centered on Christ.

In the Rule we never find the name *Jesus* or Jesus Christ, we do not hear about the holy Trinity or Mary, not about Christmas or other feasts. The whole monastic life is centered around the Pascal mystery, the person in the centre is *Christ, Dominus – Deus*, Christ – our Lord and God. As Benedict started with Christ in the Prologue, so he closes with Christ in RB 73:8: “with *Christ’s help* keep this little rule.” If we follow the teaching of Benedict then Christ is present always and everywhere; we live in the presence of Christ 24 hours a day, in the monastery with prayer and work and leisure, traveling, during holidays or any business. The monk learns to live what St. Paul says: “it is no longer I, but Christ living in me.” Gal 2:20

I invite you for this and the next Statio to meditate **Christ** under different aspects as presented by Benedict. I was inspired by Michaela Puzicha OSB, *Erbe und Auftrag* 1/11

Christ – Lord and God

The title Christ is the real name for Benedict. We find it in the beginning Prologue 3 until RB 73:8. When hearing the name *Christ* the whole salvation mystery becomes present. The titles *Deus / God* and *Dominus / Lord* are mostly reserved for Christ. The Apostle Thomas adores the Risen Lord exclaiming: *My Lord and my God*, Joh 20:28. The titles for God in the Old Testament are given to Jesus Christ. When we read *Lord* or *God* in the Rule this refers to Jesus Christ most of the time. (look up Prologue 33 and see the context).

We sing our *Suscipe* according to RB 58.2 with a psalmvers. Benedict adds: *Suscipe me, Domine* – receive me *Lord*, as you have promised... Christ, the Risen and Glorified one is present as Lord of the monastic community and the whole church. The concern is whether the novice *truly seeks God* meaning Christ. To Him the novice raises his prayer for acceptance. He/she promises the vows *In the presence of God and his saints* RB 58:18. These words we find with Cassian, where they clearly refer to Christ. Of course Christ is in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. I suggest that you read the Rule as lectio meditating on the texts where you find the words *Lord, God* addressing Jesus.

Prefer nothing whatever to Christ RB 72

The spiritual testament of Benedict is chapter 72 and here the most important is this: *prefer nothing whatsoever to Christ*. We heard these words very often; it should be a sentence to call us always back to the essence of our life over and over again. This is the most important in the life of a monk, his centre, his love. If this is not the centre of my life any longer (and the danger is always to lose the centre!), then something is basically wrong.

The love of Christ must come before all else RB 4:21

This is a parallel sentence to the last one. Benedict uses the word *amor* for love, he changed the word *delectio* as it is found in the Rule of the Master. *Amor* is the personal love relationship between Christ and the monastic. You can read the *love of Christ* in two ways: the love which Jesus has for you and the love which you have for Christ. First it is the love Jesus has to me that carries and inspires me, not the moral imperative to love him. This is my answer. “the son of God who has loved me”, Gal 2:20, as Paul says. The love of Christ to

me and the relationship to him has an eminent value. This is the foundation of the Rule and the foundation of the life of St. Benedict and the foundation of my life.

Christ - always present

The presence of Christ is already expressed in the Prologue in the dialogue between the Lord Christ seeking his workman. This dialogue ends with the promise of the Lord: Here I am, *ecce adsum*. Prol 18. This promise is valid, *even before you ask me*, always.

RB 7:14 and 23 speak of Christ, God always present. Our thoughts are present to him. We think of the Desert Fathers and their teachings about the spiritual battle against the thoughts. We had more on this topic recently with Fr. Fidelis. Christ does not leave us alone, he is present as our helper not our controller.

Christ – our helper

Christ always present is experienced especially as one who is my helper and protector. The last verses of the Rule RB 73:8-9 confirm this. *Adiuvante Christo – deo protegente, with the help of Christ, under the protection of God*. How many times do we implore in praying the psalms God as our helper and protector! Benedict wants that we close each day with Psalm 91 in Compline where it says: *My refuge, my stronghold, my God in whom I trust*. Christ is our helper against all powers of darkness.

Benedict teaches us to start each time our Divine Office crying: *O God, come to my assistance, o Lord make haste to help me*. Ps 70:2. According to Cassian this prayer is the one to be repeated over and over again by the monk. And he says: the one who is calling his protector constantly is convinced that he is present all the time. And when a situation is very difficult we are comforted with *trusting in God's help* as motivation to obey in love. RB 68:5.

Christ obedient

RB 5 on Obedience gives Christ as example and reason for our obedience: *I have not come to do my own will but the will of him who sent me* (John 6:38, RB 5:13). This is the theological centre of RB 5 and the monastic is shown that her obedience has to be motivated by the life of Christ whom we follow. RB 7:32 again says: *the monk shall imitate by his actions the saying of the Lord: I have not come to do my own will but the will of him who sent me*. Then again in RB7:34: the monk *submits to his superior in all obedience for the love of God, imitating the Lord of whom the Apostle says: He became obedient even to death (Phil 2:8)*

Reflections

- How much do I grow so that Christ becomes really the centre of my life in all situations?
- How far can I say: all my life is truly searching God, Jesus Christ?
- What else do I search for? What hinders me to search truly God?
- Where do I need to go more into the depth?
- Is my obedience motivated by the obedience of Christ, especially when it is difficult?

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