

STATIO MAY 2011

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

CHRIST – THE CENTRE OF OUR LIVES

I invite you during this month of May with Mary, the Mother of God, and our Father Benedict to meditate again on Christ, the Centre of our Lives under different titles of Christ.

Christ – Leader

In RB 72:12 Benedict says: “May Christ lead us all together to everlasting life.” This is Benedict’s personal experience: the person leading the community and the individual monastic is Christ. He is the Way (John 14:6) of the redeemed ones and He knows the goal: eternal life. Christ has the title of *Dux Israel*, the leader of Israel in OT. We are reminded of the Exodus. The Fathers saw always Christ in the Leader out of Egypt, through the desert into the Promised Land. This is in the mind of Benedict when he says in the Prologue: “See how the Lord in his love shows us the way to life. ..Let us set out on his path with the Gospel as our guide “ Prol 20f

Christ - the Healer, the Saviour

Christ is healing, helping, protecting, saving. Benedict wants everything to be arranged in such way that “souls may be saved” RB 41:5. *Et animae salventur*. Christ is saving each monastic for eternal life, he is the Saviour, the Healer. The last word in the chapters concerning penalties is “so that they may be healed” RB 30:5

We look at Christ the Healer as we see him in the gospel: He healed all (Lk 6:19). This is not only healing of the body. Psalm 106:20: “he sent out his Word, and cured them” is interpreted as Christ healing, who was sent “to search and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10). The “Lord who can do all things” RB 28:5, is the physician, the good Shepherd, “through his wounds we have been healed.” Jes 53:5.

Christ - the Servant

Benedict starts the chapter on the service in the kitchen with the sentence: “the brothers should serve one another” RB 35:1. These words reveal a great depth: the real topic of this chapter and of the monastic life is to follow Christ the servant in serving each other. Benedict repeats in verse 6: “Let all serve one another in love”. Though it is not mentioned directly Benedict living with the Scriptures all the time has in mind Christ saying: “anyone who wants to be first among you must be your servant, just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life” Mt 20:27; Christ washing the feet of the disciples; Christ who became a servant, a slave as we sing in the hymn Phil 2:7.

We entered the School for the Lord’s Service, Prol 45. We remain to be students our whole life; Christ is our teacher to whom we look up to learn and to practice to live as he has lived, as he has served.

The sign of washing the feet – key to our monastic daily life

The example of Christ is nowhere clearer than in the sign of washing the feet: “The brother who is ending the service of the kitchen and the one who is about to begin are to wash the feet of everyone.” RB 35:9; cf Joh 13:1-11. This sentence is surrounded by describing the ordinary household chores: cleaning the towels, the vessels. The washing of the feet is done in preparation for Sunday, not in the oratory. Benedict tells us how he understands the ordinary daily life and how to live it. The washing of the feet is like a key how to understand the common life of the monastics, and that is always according to the example Christ gave us in his washing the feet.

“You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.” Benedict guarantees the spiritual quality of the monastic everyday life, and hopefully we understand and live the life outside the chapel, in all we do, in a spiritual way.

Christ - the Patient one

Patience, *patientia*, is of great importance for our common life. Look up what Benedict has to say: Prol 50; RB 4:30; 7:35; 7:42; 36:5; 58:3; 58:11; 68:2, 72:5. Each monk will encounter difficult situations of life. He has to learn to deal with them looking up in patience to the example and help of Christ.

“Do you not know that the patience of God is leading you to repent?” Prol 37, Rom 2:4

Christ gives us the example of tolerating in greatest patience the weaknesses of body and character of each member of the community RB 72:5. This is often very hard for us, remember that Christ has accepted our weaknesses already in greatest patience, my weaknesses and the one of my fellow sister.

“Sick brothers must be patiently born with”, RB 36:5. The example is Christ. “I myself shall carry and save you”, Jes 46:4. In the Fourth Song of the Servant: “yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours the sorrows he was carrying”, Jes 53:4.

The importance of the example of Christ for our whole monastic life we find especially in the chapters on obedience, silence and humility. The Chapters 5 – 7 are a spiritual guide for a monk in stressing the example of the obedient Christ, the silent Christ, the humble Christ.

We meditated on the *obedient Christ* during the last month.

Christ - The Silent one

At the beginning of RB 6 Benedict quotes Psalm 39:2-3. Ambrosius interprets this verse on Christ. In this way Christ becomes the centre of RB 6. Ambrosius sees Christ in front of Pilate silent, not responding to all the insults and accusations. Following this Christ is the deepest motivation for the monastic to love silence, to learn when to be silent and when to speak.

In RB 6:8 Benedict refers again to Christ at the end of the chapter saying: “We do not permit the disciple to so much as to open his mouth for such talk”. We hear the Song of the Servant Jes 53:7 “He never opened his mouth”. The example of the suffering Servant at the beginning and at the end of the chapter motivates the monastic to follow his Lord.

Christ - the Humble one

Following Christ means to follow the humble servant of the Lord. Benedict leads us to Christ by his quotations from scripture. He begins chapter 7 with the example of the tax collector in Luke and then follows Ps 131/130. The Fathers interpreted these texts so that pride stands for Satan, humility for Christ the Lord.

The words to *exalt* and to *humble* remind us of Christ who humbled himself, but God exalted him, Phil 2:8-9. We think of the Passion according to John: the humbling and the exaltation in the suffering and in the death of Christ. Everyone who wants to belong to Christ has to imitate his humility, has to learn to suffer patiently. Ambrosius sees Christ as teacher of humility for his Christians.

Questions for reflection:

- How can I follow Christ better, under which aspect?
- Where can I show my love to Christ in my daily service?
- Can the example of the patient Christ help me to become more patient? How and when?
- Do I see my ordinary daily life in all aspects as part of my spiritual life?

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