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DISCIPLESHIP: A CALL TO FOLLOW CHRIST THROUGH IDENTIFICATION WITH THE POOR (2/2)

3. DISCIPLESHIP: A VICTORY OVER ALL FEARS

It is interesting to note the context surrounding the fears of the first disciples in the gospel. If we take the context of the storm in Mt. 8.23 and following verses we see that they are afraid of 1 – the mission, (as in Mt 10.26 and Lk 12.4); 2 – they are afraid of the appearance in the lake (as in Mt 14.26 and Mk 6.50); 3 – they are afraid of the ascent to Jerusalem (as in Mk 9.32 and Lk 9.45) and 4 – they are afraid of Jesus during the appearances after the resurrection (as in Lk 24.37 and Jn 20.19). (6)

Fear of the mission:

DLS knew quite well that to become a Brother of the Christian Schools was not an easy commissioning. In his beautiful meditation for the feast of the Nativity he stresses the idea that this vocation gives no room for misunderstanding or wrong interpretations. He knew quite well that a wrong appraisal of a chosen state of life makes it unbearable. In other words, once we know our real commissioning there is nothing to fear.

"In choosing our present state we should have prepared ourselves for abasement, like the Son of God when he became man, for lowliness is the characteristic of our profession and our employment. We are poor Brothers, forgotten by the world and esteemed of no consequence. Only the poor come to us, and they have nothing to offer but their hearts prepared to receive our instructions." M 86.2.

On the other hand, how can we be afraid of our mission when it is characterized with glamorous titles by the holy founder all drawn from the Pauline vision of discipleship. "Ministers of God," "ministers of Jesus Christ", "ambassadors of Jesus Christ", we have nothing to fear because "the strength of Jesus Christ helps you to overcome all the obstacles opposed to the salvation of the children." MTR (3rd or 195.2).

Fear of the appearance in the lake:

When Jesus walked on the water the disciples mistook him for a phantom. "It is a ghost, they said, and in their fear they began to cry out." Mt 14.26. To walk on the water is an attribute reserved to God in the Bible (c.f. Job 9.8). Nevertheless, the apostles failed to recognize him.

Fear to go up to Jerusalem:

On his way to Jerusalem with his disciples Jesus sets out to announce his Passion. At least three times in Mark's gospel. There was an atmosphere of fear among them: "Though they

failed to understand his words, they were afraid to question him." (Mk 9.31) and "at these words they were overwhelmed with grief." Mt. 18.23.

Fear of the appearances after the resurrection:

First of all there is a fear to get out and proclaim the resurrection. The doors were tightly closed because they were afraid of the authorities. Here they are "clandestine disciples" like Joseph of Arimathea... As in the appearance on the lake they fail to recognize Jesus the Resurrected (c.f. Lk. 24.37).

The real fear the disciples should have is the fear of being tempted by false messianic power (cf. Jn. 6.14) and the eagerness to take the first places above all (cf. Mk. 9.33).

In this context we hear from Jesus: "Where is your courage, how little faith you have" Mt 8.26 and "Do not be afraid." The key teaching about the storm is that those who have embarked themselves on the journey to discipleship have no right whatsoever to be afraid, in spite of the irrationality of the surrounding events. What is at stake is the unconditional fidelity of God. As well as discipleship is the unconditional commitment of the disciple so is the commitment of Jesus towards the believer.

Fear is incompatible with discipleship because it is a lack of faith. We will never attempt our "exodus" or our "ascent" to Jerusalem if we doubt of the recognition of his resurrection. Any fear would jeopardize these elements altogether.

Nevertheless, the Brother cannot conceive discipleship without hardships which threaten his faith in his mission. DLS tries in several meditations to convince him to be like "the grain of wheat which dies and produces much fruit" Jn 12.24. "Do not be surprised, he says, if you meet with trials and opposition in the exercise of your ministry. The more you suffer the more resolute you should be to acquit yourself conscientiously of your work. Rest assured that God will then shower his blessings upon you in abundance." M 136.3.

Through his meditations on the apostles and evangelists DLS follows the same pattern: he explains to the Brothers what is persecution for the sake of the Kingdom and how to overcome its fears. "Have you as much love of suffering as St. Andrew had for the cross on which he died? Do trials, afflictions and persecutions which you have to sustain in the exercise of your ministry augment your zeal and, far from discouraging you, lead you to endeavour even more ardently to make Jesus Christ known and loved? M 78.3.

The third aspect that we wanted to emphasize was true discipleship as a victory over all the disguises of fear. Fear to react against the status quo which crushes the poor daily, fear to be tagged as reactionary, communist or marginalized religious, fear of leaving Jesus the Messiah for false prophets and philosophies of redemption of the poor... No wonder if discipleship requires thus a patient and constant discernment.

4. DISCIPLESHIP: SHARING THE MYSTERIES OF CHRIST WITH THE POOR AND IDENTIFYING WITH THEM

The first fact that seems clear to DLS when he speaks to the Brothers is that these men are gathered around him for

a specific service. He recalls to them how the gracious gift which is transforming their lives is not for themselves. "Be-seech this Divine Spirit to make known to you the gifts with which God has favoured you, so that you can communicate them" M 189.1.

It is thus clear that discernment is not enough. Interiorisation of the mysteries of Jesus is the first step before sharing them with others: "Let it be clear to you that in order to be filled with God as much as your state requires it from you, you are obliged to speak very often with God." M 80.2. It is only after such a deep and faithful dialogue that the Brother will grasp his call to discipleship as a call "to engender children in Christ and also to make Jesus live anew in their hearts." M 157.1.

It is interesting to note with Bro. Miguel Campos, that "the Meditations for the Time of Retreat start with the recall of the creative action of God and end up with the Heavenly Jerusalem. The Brother's daily work takes thus its full dynamic and historical meaning within the plan of salvation and the sharing of the mysteries of Christ. (7)

The plan of salvation and the sharing of his mysteries take place in the Church which is built by the Brothers' discipleship. The Brothers do the utmost to sanctify it, to purify it with the word of life, so that she may appear before him full of glory without stain or wrinkle. They make present the mystery of Christ in its growing in the Church, through the instruction of the children. (cf. MTR 9th or 201.2). For DLS there is a clear and simple convergence between his spirituality and his ecclesiology: it is true discipleship which daily builds the Church in the Brothers' hearts and in the hearts of the poor entrusted to them.

"You are laying the foundations of the building of the Church when you teach the children the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the mysteries of Christ on earth... Happy are you to be honoured by the Church which singles you out for such a holy and high task." MTR (7th or 199.1).

For the Brother-disciple there is no sharing without identification. Through hours of loving contemplation he realizes that his call is not to live for the poor, nor to live with the poor but to live like a poor person with the poor for the sake of the Kingdom he is suppose to build.

Building the Kingdom the Brother renews and synthesizes the relationship of sonship between God and the people, the relationship of brotherhood between people and people and the relationship between people, nature and history. This building gives the Brother a wider sense to his discipleship. It is not just social work for the benefit of a neighborhood. There is a redemptive-cosmic dimension to discipleship when it comes to share all the mysteries of Christ with the poor.

To make this sharing successful it needs a complete identification with the poor which goes beyond the consecration and exclusive attachment to God. God does not need human beings for himself. That would be a pagan conception of consecration; he needs, in fact, instruments to make the promises of the Kingdom visible among human beings. Hence "consecration" means basically "mission". As religious we are "reserved" for the poor, consecrated to them and identified with them through Jesus. (8)

Who are these poor we are identified with? The "Declaration of the Brother in the World today" has an enlightening position which avoids two extremes. First, the rigid interpre-

tation of a poverty based solely on pure economic grounds and, second, a loose interpretation which defines the poor so broadly that we are encouraged to do nothing except to maintain the status quo with an easy conscience.

There is a poverty of frustration, product of injustices, physical and social handicaps, personal insufficiencies or failures. "The Brother is also called to wage war against the poverty of frustration." (9)

DLS charism and concern for the poor are not different from the concern of the Church expressed at Medellin and Puebla. Obviously, the situations encountered by DLS are not those of Latin America but the patterns taken by poverty are almost the same regardless of time and political regimes. It is only the formulation of the problem and the wording of its theological appraisal that have changed. Some refuse to call it "theology" and prefer instead the term "politics".

DLS did not enter in such niceties. He lived the concerns of the Church through persecutions and abuses. His identification with the under-dogs of his time disturbed l'ordre établi. It was "politics" too when his religious enterprise chalanged the official schoolmasters and the archbishops.

Acting as DLS the Brother will be able to bring in the Kingdom, to live the eschatological dimension of his vocation and, for those confided to him, he will be the simplest and the best "exegesis" of God's word.

The gospel completely oriented to the poor starting from the Beatitudes and ending with the last judgement lesson in Matthew 25, the charism of the founder living with the Brothers for the last three hundred years and the signs of the time, all these three elements advocated that we speak today about discipleship as "option for the poor".

The word "option" has a very interesting military connotation. Its meaning in this context points out to a high degree of urgency, calculated strategy and forcible results... The crucial impact of the "option" for the poor on the future of the Church highlighting this urgency is the basis of this essay. It calls the Brother to true discipleship oriented to the poor because, paradoxically enough, the option for the poor is not optional. It does not depend on personal inclination, good will, a personal charism or socially concerned people only... (10)

The reality of Christ, the Poor person par excellence, is unique and means an essential element of our faith. It is in his solidarity for the poor that we realize our encounter with him. (11) It is through his solidarity that our discipleship overcomes all fears and is able to share his Cross and his mysteries with them.

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(6) Castillo, José María, *El seguimiento de Jesus*, Ediciones Sigueme, Salamanca 1986. Spain. p. 134.

(7) Sauvage and Campos, *op. cit.*, Quotation from the French original – portion omitted in the English translation. Edit. Beauchesne, Paris 1977. p. 94-5.

(8) c. f. Boff Leonardo, *Vida Religiosa y Secularización*, from CLAR, n. 18, p. 14. CLAR: Latin American Conference of Religious.

(9) *A Declaration of the Brother in the World Today*, De La Salle Brothers. 1968. art. 29.5.

(10) cf. Pixley Jorge and Boff Clodovis, *Opcion por los Pobres*. Ediciones Paulinas. Madrid 1986. p. 273.

(11) cf. Galilea Segundo, *El Seguimiento de Cristo*, Ediciones Paulinas, Bogota 1986. p. 33-41.