



C.Ss.R

PIRITUALITY

ONE BODY (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Eph 4,4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ΕΙΝ ΓΕΙΒ (Εφ 4,4)

ONE BODY BROTHERS

Redemptorist Brothers have been an integral part of the membership of our Congregation from the beginning. Over the last twenty five years, we have seen a significant drop in the number of Brothers accompanied by a very disproportionate ratio in temporary professions between candidates seeking to be Priests and those seeking to be Brothers. Looking at the membership of our Congregation today from a statistical point of view of numbers of Brothers and Priests, we see a dismal picture of the future of the Redemptorist Brother in the Congregation. Our most recent statistics indicate that out of a total of just around five thousand Redemptorists, we count only four hundred Brothers with an average age above sixty.

Conversation on the topic of Brothers sometimes centers around a few questions: do we still need Brothers in the Congregation now that we are opening up to lay collaboration and in some cases capable of hiring people to do the “work” that Brothers usually did? Should we continue to accept candidates for Brother? What is the identity of “the Brother” in the Congregation? All of these questions and many more which are raised about the Brothers in the Congregation are in themselves symptoms of a much larger issue, which is, a misunderstanding of our vocation as men called to live the consecrated life. Giving an answer to each of these questions may help to ease the anxiety of some, shed light on some uncertainty, clarify some equivocation or even strengthen the resolve of those who believe there is no longer a need for Brothers. Addressing the concern today means framing the question correctly, asking not only: who is the Redemptorist Brother? but also: who is

the Redemptorist? If we can define a Redemptorist, then we can define the Redemptorist Brother since our constitutions and statutes from the outset, uses the word Redemptorists when referring to the members of the Congregation.



“In carrying out its mission in the Church, the Congregation unites members who live together to form one missionary body. All Redemptorists, urged on by the apostolic spirit, and imbued with the zeal of their founder, continue the tradition developed by their confreres in the past, and are ever attentive to the signs of the times.” (Const. 2)

Thus in answering the question: Who is a Redemptorist ? the first logical place to search for an answer is in our institutional documents which articulate for us, an ideal to work toward. Constitution 20 which we all memorized during our novitiate, sets clearly before us a profile of the men we are called to be. Also, the most recent General Chapter, in confronting the “signs of the times” and attempting to respond adequately to the challenges they posed, adopted some decisions to accelerate the process of restructuring, already in process for many years now. The XXIV General Chapter articulated what should be our approach to the mission today using the words, “to preach the Gospel ever anew with renewed HOPE, renewed HEARTS and renewed STRUCTURES for MISSION. Also articulated by the Chapter, is a profile of the Redemptorist today. (see Final Decisions of XXIV General Chapter 2009)

If the words in these documents put us squarely on the road to answering the question: who a Redemptorist? then we can also approach the question: Who is the Redemptorist Brother?

A Redemptorist Brother, like all Redemptorists, is called to live in community, forming one missionary body that follows Christ the Redeemer. He comes from the people of God to a life of chastity, poverty and obedience. The Brother identifies with Christ so that people can recognize in him, a person who lives for others. As a Redemptorist he is a missionary, an apostle, and a prophet; he ministers to, and allows himself to be ministered to, by the people from whom he came, especially the poor and most abandoned. The Redemptorist Brother engages in a variety of apostolates and services, all of which contribute to the mission of the Congregation. Some of these apostolates include but are not limited to: Shrine ministry, Youth ministry, Extraordinary preaching, Teaching, Media, Advocacy, Immigrant ministry, Maintenance ministry et cetera. Professed Redemptorists are men called to follow Christ the Redeemer, thus the Redemptorist Brother is the living expression of the vocation of the consecrated lay person called to follow Christ the Redeemer.

Your word is light for my feet

Mt. 23: 1-12

Take a moment to read prayerfully this passage of Scripture. Allow the ears and eyes of your mind to fully listen to what is being said and see the picture being painted. Have we turned Jesus' commandment of love for God and one another into a set of rules, rituals, practices, laws and made ourselves the new teachers of this law? Have we become the new "priestly class" for whom priesthood is an ascension to a higher social status? You are all equal, Jesus says in verse 8. As professed Redemptorists, we are a congregation of Brothers and Priests, do we approach community with the attitude of all being equal? Do we practice what we preach? "Whoever makes himself great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be made great."

Before the icon

We are approaching the celebration of 150 years of the Redemptorists taking possession of the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (OMPH). We are missionaries whose reason for being together is to "follow the example of Christ the Redeemer by preaching the word of God to the poor as he declared of himself: He sent me to preach the good news to the poor." We have had the good fortune of having this miraculous icon at our disposal as one of the visual aids to preach the good news to the poor.



It is said that before an icon is originally written, its writer prepares himself through prayer, acts of penance and fasting in order to seek divine guidance for the work his hands are about to bring to life. An icon, more than a masterpiece of art to be admired, gives us a window into heaven; It relates to us a story of faith to be prayed, a story to be shared. The icon of OMPH is a visual stimulus which gently invites us into the story of our redemption through the word made flesh, who paid the price for our salvation and the mother who, in faith, said yes to the word becoming flesh through her and who so compassionately cared for the Incarnate Word, her son, up to the point of His death on a cross. In the icon, Mary is saying to us "you can come to me when you are

confused, alone, scared; bring to me whatever you are feeling, whatever you are struggling with. I will lead you to Him who is one with the Father.”

When a story catches our imagination, it remains with us and moves us to share its contents with others so that they too may experience the feelings and emotions, all of which are the raw material for human action. The icon of OMPH has an incredible story to tell, a story which over the years has moved millions to the truly human but divinely inspired action of loving God and one another. As we sit before the icon and reread the story, may we become excited like little children listening over and over again to their favorite bedtime story. May this excitement provoke us to retell the story over and over to everyone we meet, giving them an experience which will help feed their Christian imagination; and may we continue to strive to be worthy of being caretakers of this remarkable treasure.

Drinking from our own wells

Sante Raponi, reflecting on the Redemptorist Brothers at the start of our Congregation writes “In the first foundation of Scala, alongside the Founder and the small group that accompanied him, we find Vito Curzio, the first among the Redemptorist Brothers. This presence of a layman alongside



the priests, probably was not intended or planned by the Founder, but came about naturally by force of tradition, not of course underestimating the providential circumstances which led Vito Curzio to follow Alphonsus. From the outset, we find lay people alongside the priest, whether in the classic pre Tridentine orders or post Tridentine institutes, up to this day.

Following Vito Curzio we have a number of Brothers who helped shape, define the spirituality of and give identity to our Congregation. We know of Saint Gerard Majella, his life and writings; of Brother Francesco Tartaglione whose superhuman efforts are credited with getting the first Redemptorist Rule approved, getting books written by Saint Alphonsus printed and sold, in order to keep the confreres fed and the Congregation growing. Whenever missionaries were sent out to begin a mission in foreign lands, there were always Brothers on these pioneering teams; among the last group of Spanish Martyrs to be beatified is a Redemptorist Brother. The list of Brothers and their contribution to making the Redemptorists who we are today goes on and on.

Saint Alphonsus himself struggled with the presence of Brothers in the Congregation. From a reading of the evidence we have, we see this struggle was mainly due to the social structure of his time. He always referred to the Brothers as “my brothers” but saw their role in the Congregation as “serving and working” growing in the virtues of humility, obedience, patience and certainly, avoiding all forms of pride. Alphonsus saw the Brothers as being equal to the Priests, but equality for him undoubtedly carried a particular character specific to his time. There is a story told of a Brother novice, while washing dishes with Alphonsus tried to keep Alphonsus from getting too dirty by taking the most dirty pots away from him. Alphonsus is quoted as saying to the Brother novice “do you think that maybe I am better than you are?”

If we today, struggle with the presence of Brothers in the Congregation, it may be because we have not fully embraced the meaning of mission, of following Jesus Christ the Redeemer, of preaching

the good news to the poor and most abandoned, of freely choosing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience: the consecrated life. Nowhere is it stated or can even be implied today, that someone needs to be ordained to respond to this call. Certainly, being ordained will help fulfill some of the “Sacramental” tasks associated with responding to this call; a sufficient but not necessary condition. Our missionary call to Evangelize, to go out to the periphery to seek the lost and abandoned, is a call which goes out not only to the ordained but to all the baptized. The call to be a Redemptorist therefore is not an invitation to a particular “work,” but rather a call to a particular way of being on mission in our world today, always ready and available to take on what is demanding, to share in the mystery of Christ and to bring to people the good news of plentiful redemption.

Conclusion

Let us end our reflection joining in solidarity with our brothers and sisters and praying the words prayed by hundreds of millions of devotees from the early days of devotion to Our Lady through the icon.

O Lord, Jesus Christ who gave us your Mother Mary, whose renowned image we venerate, to be a Mother ever ready to help us, grant we beseech you, that we who constantly implore her motherly aid may merit to enjoy perpetually the fruits of your redemption. Who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.



ONE BODY is a monthly text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality. For more information:
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