

## SPIRITUALITY

**R**edemptorist spirituality is a way of life, *a lifestyle*. In Jesus, Son of God and ‘born of woman’ (Gal 4:4), Redemptorists discover the presence of God in human life and in history as Love that gives itself freely and abundantly for us and for our salvation. Redemptorists are so taken up by this experience that they dedicate themselves entirely to Jesus and assume his mission as theirs. They want to bring all to God’s love. ‘For to me life is Christ’ (Phil 1:21).

St Alphonsus de Liguori, Doctor of the Church, insists that ‘some identify perfection with austerity of life, others with prayer, still others with frequenting the sacraments and others with almsgiving. But they fool themselves: perfection consists in *loving God* wholeheartedly’ (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*). This is the heart of Redemptorist spirituality.

Redemptorist spirituality is Christian spirituality with a specific *Redemptorist* character. It is not a system that can be put into a logical schema. It is dynamic. We may compare it to a river. The riverbed of Redemptorist spirituality is established by St Alphonsus. He gives it shape, consistency and direction. Many tributaries flow into this river and continue to do so in our days. Redemptorist spirituality incorporates diverse persons, cultures and history into its flow.

Redemptorist spirituality is guided by Alphonsus’ intuition in founding the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer: the Redemptorist is called *to follow the example of Jesus Christ*, the Redeemer, in preaching the good news from God to the poor.

The Latin term ‘*vita apostolica*’ (apostolic life) is used to describe the Redemptorist lifestyle. The *apostolic life* is a way of following Jesus that ‘comprises at one and the same time a life specially dedicated to God and a life of missionary work’ (Const. 1). Contemplation and action come together, are *intertwined*, in the life of the Redemptorist.

To follow Jesus and to give ourselves to the preaching of good news to the poor constitutes a unified process, just as fulfilling the Father’s will and preaching the good news to the poor were one and the same for Jesus. It would be a serious mistake to separate the following of Jesus (‘contemplative dimension’) from the preaching of the good news to the poor (‘apostolate’), disrupting an underlying unity that is fundamental to Redemptorist spirituality.

Certainly, our missionary spirituality demands *contemplation*. The contemplative dimension leads us to ‘share in the love of the Son for his Father and for people’. It enables us ‘to see God in the people and in the events of everyday life, to see God’s plan of salvation in its true light and to distinguish between what is real and what is illusory’ (Const. 24).

At the same time, the Redemptorist vocation of *pastoral charity* is a life of prayer. Without a lifestyle characterized by prayer, the Redemptorist cannot grow and remain faithful to the Christian calling and the Redemptorist charism.

Redemptorist spirituality is inherently *missionary*. In experiencing God’s love and mercy, the Redemptorist is driven to bring everyone to God’s love. Our own sanctification is inextricably bound to the sanctification of others. All Redemptorists are called to be missionaries, ‘whether they are engaged in different activities of the apostolic ministry or hindered from working at all’ (Const. 55). The missionary nature of our lifestyle is not based on specific apostolates but on our insertion into the mission of Jesus himself.

Alphonsus experienced God's passionate love for us in Jesus. 'If faith had not assured us of it', writes Alphonsus, 'who could ever have believed that a God, almighty, most happy, and the Lord of all, should have condescended to love man to such an extent that he seems to go 'mad' for the love of him?' Redemptorists are 'incorporated in a particular way into the mission of Christ as ministers of the Gospel, under the direction of the Holy Spirit' (Const. 47). Redemptorist spirituality demands a lifestyle of *continual conversion*, seeking to change ourselves and the world in response to God's love, ever obedient to the promptings of the Spirit.

St Alphonsus insists that the Redemptorist should seek out *the abandoned*, especially the poor. Such a priority will keep our spirituality focused. The whole of the Redemptorist lifestyle evolves around the poor.

Redemptorist spirituality leads us to live and work *in community*. God chose each of us to come together with others to live the *Apostolic Life*. In doing so we witness and contribute to the 'new' that God wants to bring about in the world, common unity among persons and nations. Community life ought to reflect the very communion of the Trinity, the 'best of all communities'.

Our traditional meditations on the Incarnation and the Passion of Jesus, on the Eucharist and on Mary were typical in the Church at the time of Alphonsus. They configured in time a Redemptorist approach to understanding God's love and the mystery of salvation.

Redemptorist spirituality meditates on the significance of the *Incarnation* in the life and history of humanity: God is among us to give us abundant life and mercy. The Redemptorist understands that all are called to enter a relationship of love with God; that, in the mystery of God's love, the poorest, the most abandoned and sinners all find the welcoming arms of mercy, forgiveness and solidarity. Jesus offers salvation to all. No one is excluded and the poor are favoured where Jesus is present.

Redemptorist spirituality seeks to understand the meaning of *redemption* for humanity today. St Alphonsus continually meditated and preached on the meaning of salvation. The Redemptorist continues in his footsteps, studying, meditating and proclaiming the meaning of the salvific and liberating presence of Jesus Christ.

Redemptorist spirituality proclaims that the *Eucharist* reveals, makes real and effective the love of God in Christ. In the Eucharist Jesus remains with us here and now. In the mystery of the Eucharist, the Redemptorist understands that *eternity is now!* Jesus is present sacramentally, waiting for us and reaching out for our love. This is the sacrament of common-union that nourishes the life and vocation of the Redemptorist.

Redemptorist spirituality finds in *Mary*, the mother of Jesus, not only his own mother but also a companion in the pilgrimage of life and a perpetual help. She is also a missionary who inspires and strengthens his own vocation. She is a fountain of love and mercy.

Jesus had an intimate relationship with his Father. He never felt alone or lost on his own. He knew and experienced his Father as always with him (Jn 8:16). He always did what the Father asked of him (Jn 5:19-30; cf. 8:28-29). His food was to do *the will of the Father* (Jn 4:34). The Father, his 'Abba', gave sense and purpose to his life as man. Jesus revealed to people the 'face' of God in his way of being, living and relating to them. He was able to make God good news for human life, particularly for the poor. His goodness and tenderness reflected the experience he himself had of God as Father. Jesus' own life style characterizes the Redemptorist lifestyle.

These are some of the fundamental aspects of Redemptorist spirituality. This *Lexicon* will include many other elements. The hope is that the guiding principles and ideas presented here will help in developing and growing in a life style that continues to fill with enthusiasm and zeal so many in the Church in the search for meaning and sense in today's world.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

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Hoegerl, Carl C.Ss.R.(ed.), *Heart Calls to Heart: An Alphonsian Anthology*, Roma: Collegio Sant'Alfonso, 1982.

Permanent Commission for Redemptorist Spirituality: *Readings in Redemptorist Spirituality* (5 Vols.), Roma, 1989.

Ulanov, Barry (ed.): *The Way of Saint Alphonsus Liguori. Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1999.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How would you describe your Spirituality, your Christian life style? What do you notice are the most important elements?

2. What makes your life style 'Redemptorist'? What means do you employ to grow in a Redemptorist life style?

3. What role do the poor concretely play in your Spirituality, in your Redemptorist life style? How do you relate to them and how do they 'form' you?

4. How do you seek to integrate contemplation and action into a unified life style?

*Felix Catala C.Ss.R.  
3900 San Juan*