



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)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

I – 03 Following Christ in love

If the essence of our vocation is to walk in the footsteps of Christ, then it also becomes a story of love. It would be good if each of us would try to recall the most wonderful chapters of this story. Perhaps we might rediscover our initial enthusiasm, but also the fatigue and disappointments of other moments, and perhaps even the joy of finding Christ again in another light, and discover how important it is to love him today, despite everything.

One day – when, how? – we decided to make our life a life of discipleship. We did it because in Jesus we caught a glimpse of a different way to live and the true meaning of freedom. We heard words totally different from those of any other. While familiarizing ourselves with his Gospel, we also discovered the absurdity of our life and the death to which we would be doomed if it were not for the Christ. Not even sin, experienced a thousand times over, was enough to make us stop following him.

With the passage of time we learned two things: Christ continued to call us and to exert his



appeal. He did it in a thousand ways, from the events of daily life to the silence of prayer. We also learned that it was not enough to place our feet in his footsteps. It was crucial to enter into a loving relationship. Christ was the incarnation of that God who asked us to love Him in return, with all our heart, with all our soul, mind and strength (Mk 12:30). A jealous God.

If the mission of the Redeemer is the reason for our dedication (CSSR Constitutions, Chapter III, Article 1), then faith assumes, in our life, a certain tone in which the vows, living in community and the acceptance of a rule of life indicate the rhythm and harmony. Our way of life is called to become more and more that of Christ. Our spirit is called to make more and more room for the Redeemer. To welcome him, to embrace him, to love him

As the third millennium moves forward, we understand that being a Christian can no longer be simply a sum total of good habits. The days for living the faith this way are numbered.

And if something new is to be born, will it be us, consecrated people, Redemptorists, lay people, mindful of our baptism, who will indicate the way forward: where it is precisely love that points out the way, to give us that appropriate craziness for opening new and perhaps unexplored paths?

It will not be the mountain of our limitations that will stop us. Like Christ, our common priesthood, established in baptism, will have no talents or merits to offer, but rather our own human weakness. Indeed, it was through obedience and from what he suffered, that Jesus was made perfect, becoming the cause of salvation for all (Heb 5:8-9).

Your Word is light for my steps

Now let us read **John 1:1-18**. At the discretion of the leader, a period of silence or sharing may take place, bearing in mind, among other considerations, these two simple points:

- *Both Redemptorist spirituality and Christian spirituality in a broader sense, make the incarnation not only a central mystery to contemplate, but a kind of filter with which to read reality. It is truly sad to live and think of the faith as a search for an abstract or distant God,*

overlooking the fact that “God was made flesh,” and continues to do so in the seemingly mundane events or circumstances of our lives, in our weakness and helplessness, in the people we meet, in the small and large events of the news and in the signs of the times.

- *If God became one of us, the best way to approach him is to listen to our own truth, to encounter our deepest humanity. Bringing our desires to light, exposing them to the grace of God is itself the best way to meet God in the person of Jesus Christ, and to understand that the Gospel continues to be the answer we are seeking.*

Before the Icon

The way in which our Lady of Perpetual Help clasps Jesus in her arms has been interpreted in different ways, all legitimate, if we draw closer to this image with a contemplative attitude. Here we want to emphasize the most basic and obvious fact: it is the embrace of a child to its mother, a child and a mother beyond the ordinary.

Among the most beautiful words that have been written about this embrace are included those of an atheist philosopher, the Frenchman, Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1940 he was interned in a concentration camp in Trier, Germany. Looking toward Christmas his fellow prisoners asked him to write the text for a play. This gave birth to a work with the title: *Bariona or the Son of Thunder*. We quote a few lines which have Mary as the protagonist:

What should be painted on her face is a worried awe, which has not appeared but once on a human face, because the Christ is her child, flesh of her flesh, the fruit of her womb. She has carried him for nine months, and will give him her breast, and her milk will become the blood of God. And in certain moments the temptation will be so strong that she will forget that he is God. She embraces him in her arms and says: my little one! But then she feels overcome as by a religious horror for this voiceless God, for this terrifying child. (...) But then there are other moments, quick and difficult, in which she feels that Christ is her son, her little one, and that her son is God. She looks at him and thinks: this God is my son, this divine flesh is my flesh, it is made from me, he has my eyes, and the shape of his mouth is the shape of my own and he looks like me: it is God and he looks like me. No other woman was destined to have her God for herself alone. A tiny God, whom she can take in her arms and cover with kisses. A warm God who smiles and breathes. A God who one can touch and who lives.



If the mystery of the incarnation continues to reach us in so many ways, as in the Eucharist in the first place, then the words of the atheist Sartre make us think of a loving relationship with the Christ such as we find in the saints. It is enough to mention, among all these, St. Alphonsus. The mystics have lived this relationship in their own flesh and described it in their visions. In this case we can also think of the Venerable Maria Celeste Crostarosa. But this relationship still continues to question every baptized and consecrated person.

Drinking from our own well

“Poor Jesus Christ! If he is not loved by one of the brothers of the Congregation, who has received so many graces and such special lights, by whom will he be loved? My God, and to what purpose do so many holy communions serve? And what have we come to do in the Congregation, and what are we to do if we do not become saints? Are we to deceive the world, which considers all of us to be saints, and to make laugh those who will know our imperfections on the Day of Judgment?”

It is one of the most noted passages – and perhaps among the most forgotten – from a letter that St. Alphonsus wrote to the priests and brothers of his Institute on August 8, 1754. Our founder was concerned about what he saw around himself, so many signs of what was for him a clear fact: many neglected the logic of the “narrow gate” that Jesus placed as a condition for entering the Kingdom. These signs made him exclaim: “*poor Congregation! What will become of her in fifty years?*”

For us Redemptorists today, many more than fifty years have passed. We are still here, numerous and at the service of the Church. Our charism has recorded a splendid development, especially by sharing it with so many lay people who seek our spirituality and our mission. Perhaps the questions and concerns of Alphonsus are no longer our own. Perhaps we interpret them in a moralistic sense, or as an expression of an obsolete language and outdated mentality.

Yet the love of Jesus Christ continues to be the central issue of our discipleship, as well as of our baptism. It remains the true goal for which to aim, the same one that the liturgy describes thus: that “*amid the uncertainties of this world, may our hearts be fixed on that place here true joy is found*” (the XXI Sunday in Ordinary Time, opening prayer). This is no small challenge, in a world like ours, where idols are created in the same way as images are multiplied.

For *Consecrated Life*, initial and ongoing formation is nothing more than this: “*a path of gradual assimilation of the sentiments of Christ toward the Father*” (no. 65). And our vow of perseverance should tend toward this: to choose and re-choose Christ. Only the Spirit who gave life to Jesus in Mary's womb can make us aim for such ambitious goals.

In conclusion

You may finish by praying for Africa and Madagascar, with the concluding words of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation dedicated to this continent:

*O Mary, Mother of God
and Mother of the Church,
thanks to you, on the day of the Annunciation,
at the dawn of the new era,
the whole human race with its cultures
rejoiced in recognizing itself
ready for the Gospel.
On the eve of a new Pentecost
for the Church in Africa, Madagascar
and the adjacent Islands,
the People of God with its Pastors
turns to you and with you fervently prays:
May the outpouring of the Holy Spirit
make of the cultures of Africa*

*places of communion in diversity,
fashioning the peoples
of this great Continent
into generous sons and daughters
of the Church
which is the Family of the Father,
the Brotherhood of the Son,
the Image of the Trinity,
the seed and beginning on earth
of the eternal Kingdom
which will come to its perfection
in the City that has God as its Builder:
the City of justice, love and peace.*



ONE BODY is a service offered by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality
seraflower@gmail.com – sfiore@cssr.com

Translated by Joe Dorcey C.Ss.R.

The graphic in the header is the work of Biju Madathikunnel, C.Ss.R.