



# C.Ss.R. SPIRITUALITY

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 ΛΕΙΒ (Εβρ 4,4)

## One Body – 10: CHASTITY

### *Introduction*

The religious vows find their origin and meaning in the sacrament of baptism. It is in baptism that we, as Christians, are rooted in Christ and receive our common faith. This is the very basis of being disciples of Jesus Christ.

The vow of chastity as such, even though it relates to a very specific way of life within the religious life, cannot be interpreted separately from the other two: poverty and obedience and, in our Redemptorist life, from the oath and vow of perseverance.

The vow of chastity as such cannot be equated purely to the celibate way of life proper to some diocesan priests (in the Oriental Catholic churches married man can be ordained and continue their family life). Its meaning is deeply rooted, just like the two other vows, in choosing the way of undivided love for God.



Chastity invites those who follow Jesus to a “transparent life” which means a life that is totally and entirely dedicated to God. And as its practical expression it chooses the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why the religious vows are also referred the Evangelical Counsels.

Evangelical chastity – an undivided love for God and a transparent way of loving God – cannot be defined only from the negative perspective of something “not allowed” or “forbidden”. Unfortunately, this is often the way that many people understand celibacy or the vow of chastity. It embraces a certain way of living and behaving; a certain *modus vivendi*. But behind the concrete rules and mode of behavior involved, there is the question of love and dedication, passion and desire for God and God’s Kingdom. Living the vow of chastity is more than “doing or not doing something”. It is about “being” transparent, clear, detached from anything that could possibly block or shadow that love of God which the religious person feels in his or her heart and the love which he or she responds to God with.

*The word of God is a light for my feet*

The Bible often shows us that the love between God and a human being does not tolerate any mediocrity or middle way. Such love is an undivided love, transparent and pure. In the Bible, God is presented as being faithful to His love for human beings but also as a jealous God who will not accept any division. In our love for God there should always be a deep conviction that it is God who has first loved us. Love is the very basis of knowledge of God because God is Love.

Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins (1 John 4, 8-10). (cf. C. 56)

How easy it is for us, no matter how old we are, to recognize ourselves in the dialog between Jesus and the anonymous young man (cf., Mt 19, 16-24), and then with Peter and his companions (cf., Mt 19, 25-30). The “rich” young man seeks a perfect life and Peter, together with his companions, are expecting a kind of “recompense” for following Jesus. Jesus in both cases is consistent and clear. In his answers and statements he emphasizes that the love of God does not consist in obeying the precepts (young man) and that the love of God in following Jesus is not measured in human logic but in a Divine one (Peter and his companions). Jesus reminds us that it is not “doing things” that makes us perfect or grants us a reward, but what really matters is “who we are” in God’s eyes and before the world as “His followers” (cf. C. 58).

However, we must not forget another dimension of that same love. Jesus was very clear in His definition of the expected response to God’s love, the response that is definitely preferred and wanted by the Father. “You cannot love God, whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor, whom you do see” (cf., 1J 4, 20). All Jesus’ words and actions show the primacy of love for a living person, who crosses our way, rather than observing any rules and laws. Of course, if we understand His teaching correctly, we can see no contradiction between both, no competition. How striking is the scene of the Last Judgement, as portrayed in the Gospel of Mathew. Jesus does not bother to mention all these activities or thoughts which are “prohibited” in the context of the vow of chastity. There is only one principle in the final judgment: “Whatever you did to those least ones, you did it to Me” (cf., Mt 25, 31-46). Again, we understand very well – these activities, thoughts, desires, etc., can result in great harm to others. However, the basic principle of love for others, especially the least, is clear.

It is hard not to think here about the fig tree, in blossom, but without fruit, which Jesus cursed, resulting in its immediate death. Looking at our lives, sometimes one could ask the question: “Yes, you are so beautiful with your virtues, in full blossom in your performance of your religious duties, but where is the fruit?” Why is it that when someone approaches you, a member of your community, a lay person looking for understanding, mercy, consolation, but instead of joy and peace of heart they find bitterness, criticism, judgmental thoughts, even gossip? Of course, these are rare cases, but who of us has not met in his religious life “a mummy”, adorned with virtues and piety, from whom he ran away, after or before being hurt?

The vow of chastity will never be a full expression of our love for God if it is not lived in a day by day love for those around us, those with whom we live, those for whom we live, as missionaries. Pope Francis offers some thoughts on this from the last Synod, reminding us constantly: our chastity, our celibacy as priests, are means to an end - to make us living Sacraments of God’s love for all the people, especially those who are broken, lost, and marginalized, poor economically, and moaning in the slavery of their sinfulness, even if they themselves do not recognize it.

Look at the Cross. It has always two dimensions, the vertical and horizontal one. Without any one of them there would be no Cross. Our Redemptorist, Cross-like life, our love and faithfulness should be like this. Love and faithfulness to God, who called us in His mercy and love, and love and faithfulness to the people, for whom God has called and sent us.

### *Before the Icon*

Looking at the Icon of Mother of Perpetual Help we realize that She looks at us. She is watching us as if She wanted to catch our attention; as if she wanted to say something important to each and every one of us. At the same time She points with Her right hand to Jesus. Every person, who meditates in front of the Icon must get the impression that She wants to say: He is important; follow Him as I did.

Mary's "yes" to God was not that picturesque and sweet one portrayed in many works of art (and, unfortunately, many copies of the Icon are somehow "weakened" by this weakness of style). But Her "yes" to God, despite questions and fear, was firm, unconditional and undivided. Her response to God's proposal was pure, transparent and chaste. In saying Her "yes" She had to struggle with doubts and questions, but, assured by the Angel's promise, She abandoned Herself totally to God's will. The very foundation of such a generous gift of consent was love, was the love of God that She experienced and the love that She offered back. It is a humble love that makes Her call Herself: a Handmaid of the Lord. It is a humility that radiates from the Icon of Mother of Perpetual Help, humility that brings out the message: He is important; follow Him as I did, do whatever He tells you. It is a humility that results in love (the foundation of religious vows): poor, chaste, obedient and perseverant.



As we pray before the Icon we look into Her eyes and at Her hands. We realize that we are also invited to give our response to God. It may not be an easy one because of the doubts and fears that we carry within ourselves but we can always count on Her help. For 150 years the Redemptorists have been entrusting to Her their lives and their mission. She has been very generous with Her response and protection. This gives us courage and a willingness to imitate Her and to give to God our total undivided, transparent and pure love. Her humility teaches us to call ourselves: missionaries of plentiful Redemption. As She indicates to us Her Son so we want to reveal to people Jesus the Redeemer.



Again, looking at Her Icon, we should always keep in mind the context, the context in which She told the servants, “do whatever He tells you to do”. It was her simple reaction to a situation of need, to the embarrassment of the couple celebrating their marriage at Cana of Galilee. Our chastity, as our response to God’s love, should open our eyes to all those around us who might be in need. Even in our communities – there are people who fall into the abyss of loneliness, who may feel embarrassed because of their situation, the experience of their weaknesses and inadequacy. Can we see them with Mary’s eyes? Are we able to respond? Or, do we take the position of the older, always “faithful” son from the parable of the prodigal Son?

### *Drinking from our own well*

Chastity invites us to a transparent life not only in our actions but above all in our intentions. The vow of chastity it is a way of life committed to God by following the example of Jesus the Redeemer. That undivided love leads to make many choices and to take many decisions in order to remain pure and transparent. The history of the Church gives us many examples of those who paid the highest price to make their life transparent. We may not be asked to make such extreme choices but in our daily religious life we are so often being challenged to remain pure and transparent in the face of so many temptations to live in the “shadow of egoism and vainglory”. What matters is that whatever we do or think, we should do it with the right intention. The choice to live a life of chastity has to be undertaken with a right intention.



St. Alphonsus writes on the importance of the Right Intention. He says: *Purity of Intention consists in doing everything we turn our hands to with the sole intention of pleasing God. The good or bad intention with which we do something makes it good or bad before God. St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi said: "God rewards our actions in proportion to the purity of intention."*

*In the first place, we ought to seek God and not ourselves in everything we do. If we seek our own satisfaction we cannot expect any reward from God. This applies also to spiritual works. There are those who work hard and wear themselves out in preaching, hearing confessions, helping out, and doing other charitable works but they can lose everything because they seek themselves, not God, in doing all these things. The sign that we have worked for God in something is when we do not seek approval or thanks from others. We are not distressed when the work we undertake is not successful. We take as much pleasure in some good work that has been done by others as if it had been done by ourselves. Besides that,*

*when we have done something good to give pleasure to God we do not have to struggle against vainglory if we are not praised. It is enough to say, "to God be the honor and glory." And we never neglect to do good works for the edification of our neighbor out of fear of vainglory. The Lord wishes that we do good in the presence of others so that they may benefit from it: "Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:16). So when you do what is good, first of all, have the intention of pleasing God, and then that of giving good example to your neighbor.*

*In the second place, we also give glory to God when we perform physical actions like working, eating, sleeping, taking justified recreation. Let us do all this to give pleasure to God. Purity of*

*intention can be called a heavenly alchemy by means of which iron becomes gold: That is to say, the slightest and most ordinary of actions become acts of divine love when done to give pleasure to God* (See: “Regolamento di Vita di un Cristiano”, 1754. Cf. Opere Ascetiche, Roma, 1968, vol 10, pp. 315-316).

Let us complete our reflection with some questions and allow them penetrate our minds and hearts:

Do I live my vows of poverty, chastity and obedience together with the oath and vow of perseverance as a response to God who first loved me?

Is my love for Him, despite problems, doubts or fears, transparent, pure, total and undivided?

Is my missionary activity motivated by right intention?

Is my life, internal and external, chaste and transparent, without any “negotiating” with shadows and mediocrity?

Does my response to God’s love follow the designated way, shown by Christ – the way of love for my Confreres, for the people, those who work with us and for us in our communities, and for those to whom we are sent, who are the reason for which we, the Redemptorists, exist in the Church?

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ONE BODY is a monthly text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality. For more information: Fr. Piotr Chyla CSsR (Director of the Center for Spirituality [fr.chyla@gmail.com](mailto:fr.chyla@gmail.com) ).

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