



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 ΛΕΙΒ (Εβρ 4,4)

ONE BODY – 10: FOLLOWING THE POOR JESUS CHRIST

“Missionary charity requires of the members that they live a life that is really poor, and adapted to the condition of the poor they are evangelizing. By doing so, they show solidarity with the poor and become a sign of hope for them.” (Const. 65)

“Without neglecting traditional forms of poverty, they will willingly seek to discover new ways of practicing it, which will be ever more in accord with the Gospel, and provide both personal and community witness of evangelical poverty.” (Const. 63)



What is the meaning of the vow of poverty today? We need to reflect, to listen and to dialogue in community about its meaning as well as its demands. We need to share our knowledge, our reflections, our experiences, our difficulties, our questions, our doubts, the challenges that confront us. We need to share about personal poverty, community poverty, solidarity and poverty, commitment and poverty and the witness value of poverty. You members of the

provinces are those who know best the challenges of your own province.

The “vow of poverty” is central to the Redemptorist Congregation. The vows (poverty, obedience and chastity) are complementary, however, I personally believe that the vow of poverty is the “first vow”. It gives expression to total consecration to God and to total openness to the following of Christ the Redeemer. It is connected to the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word. God became human and dwelt among us. The meaning and the challenges presented by poverty have always been the object of reflection in the General Chapters. The Congregation has always underlined the importance of this theme. Our Constitutions are a synthesis of Redemptorist spirituality. Ten statements are dedicated to the vow of poverty. They are found in Constitutions 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69 and 70.

Following Jesus Christ, committed to the poor.

The Evangelical Counsels are for all Christians. Our consecrated life, which has its root in Baptism, commits us to giving ourselves over totally to God, serving the Kingdom of God through charity. We follow Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, committed to the poor, as we preach the Gospel to the most abandoned, the poor. We have taken on this lifestyle. In community we strive to give

witness to fraternal love, as well as to our faith in the Most Holy Trinity, and to relate to each other in pastoral charity. Our life together strives to offer hope, announce “plentiful redemption” to the Church and the glory of the world to come. Our lives express a radical commitment and the hope that arises out of the grace of God. We intend to manifest communion with God, charity, brotherly love, solidarity, liberty and equality. Without faith our life together does not have much meaning. It should be a life sensitive to and focused on the will of God. We depend on the strength of the Holy Spirit, the inspiration of the Gospels, and the help of the confreres.

A Love Response

Redemptorist religious profession is “a full donation of ones being in order that they themselves will become, through Christ, a response to the Lord who loved them first.”(1 Jn. 4:10). (See Const. 56) The mission of Christ the Redeemer is the reason that we offer ourselves. Called to be poor, in harmony with the spirit of Jesus Christ who became poor and dwelt among us, we look for communion with Christ and strive to become witnesses of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word. It is only from the perspective of love that we can faithfully put into practice in our lives the spirit of the Evangelical Counsels, which are commitment and spiritual and material honesty as we live our religious profession as missionaries.

What does it mean to live the “vow of poverty” today?

It means living a “wholehearted offering of himself for the life of the world” (Const. 51). With the freedom “of total dedication to the mission of Christ”, announcing the “Kingdom of God”, we share the “self-renunciation of the... Lord” in order to serve with a spirit of mercy and poverty. How can we live this “wholehearted offering”? We have to discern in community about the manner in which to do it, the concrete practices to be undertaken and the lifestyle which will announce the message of Redemption. There is a big change in the times and the manner in which things are done. The present reality demands flexibility and constant discernment. However, the fundamental commitment is unchanged. A wide, open, generous, unified, and with the goal of renewal is necessary.

The vow of poverty cannot be reduced to a personal ascetical practice of self-denial. It goes beyond “do not possess anything” or “do not be dominated by a desire for material goods”. “To live poverty” is not only about the use of money. It does, of course, demand responsibility, transparency and the rendering account of one’s expenditures. It invites us to reflect seriously about our relationship with money and material goods. But it not simply an attitude of “do not spend”. It is not only a question of an attitude of “saving money”. This mentality has engendered a paternalistic, selfish attitude and promoted infantile conduct with a spirit of dependence upon the decision making power of some religious superior, giving rise to individual clandestine or “on-the-margin administration of goods. In some cases it has fostered a miserly attitude instead of favoring generosity.

Everything belongs to the community

Community responsibility exists. “As poor men, let them regard themselves as bound by the law of labour, so that performing his duties, each will contribute to the best of his ability to his own support and that of others.”(Const. 64) I do not live alone. I live in community. In a community in which there are elderly and sick confreres, men who have given their whole lives in mission, giving

witness to “plentiful redemption. We share among all and we all help each other. Before whom am I responsible? To whom do I give account? Before anyone? How do I accompany and practice solidarity with my older and sickly confreres? What becomes of the community dimension of the vow when I do not feel that I have the responsibility to give an account of my expenditures and consider myself totally independent?

Constitution 62 helps us: “They will make every effort to live in the spirit that permeated the community of apostolic times. In this way they become the sign of that fraternal life of Christ’s disciples, of whom it is said: “the whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed for his own use anything that he had as everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32) Therefore all goods should be simple in style, in keeping with their state and held in common for common use. Whatever the members acquire by their industry or in view of the fact that they are religious, they must acquire for the institute, and for that reason it must be incorporated in the goods of the community.”

Is this a prophetic sign? No, it is only an eschatological sign, a sign of “the life to come”. Many Christians today do not understand well the meaning of a “sign of the life to come”. How can we be a sign which others can understand? How do we become a “community in solidarity with the poor”?

To have the same feelings as Christ:

“Evangelical poverty” consists in following the poor Jesus Christ: having the same feelings as Christ, the same attitudes and conduct as Christ, starting from the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, who announces the “Kingdom of God and God’s justice”, in a spirit of solidarity, compassion and mercy. The practice of “evangelical poverty” is connected to the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, the demands of the mission, closeness to the people, and the inculturation of the Gospel. Redemptorist Missionaries, full of confidence, embrace the poverty of Jesus, who “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). (Const. 61). It follows then that “renunciation” expresses an option for a profound sense of Incarnation and Redemption; inculturation and liberation.

For Redemptorists, “poverty” has to do with the spirituality of “distacco” (detachment) in order to seek communion with God, find freedom and be available for the mission. We are not “bound”; we are not “slaves” of anything. As a community we try to reach out in love to the mission that the Lord has given to the Congregation. It is an ideal, a goal, a horizon. We desire and force ourselves to live only “under the action and the power of the Holy Spirit”. It is a gift and it needs to be requested continuously. In Jesus Christ we are called to be “poor in spirit” and “signs of solidarity, fraternity and generosity.” Jesus Christ, being God, became poor in his kenosis and by means of his solidarity, compassion, mercy.

For the mission

For the Redemptorist the vows are always subject to the mission. They indicate the direction that we wish to follow as disciples of Christ the Redeemer. They express our consecration and are connected to “apostolic charity”, with a spirit of freedom and availability for the mission of the Congregation. “The members of the Congregation confirm their personal and community life by religious profession, so as to bind themselves totally to the work of the Gospel and to the perfect practice of apostolic charity, for this is the very purpose of the Congregation.” (Const. 46)

We leave to one side our personal certainties, our need for security, our need for affection, our economic needs, etc., in order to be close to the people we serve, to the poor with their needs. We seek to respond to the needs of the most abandoned, the poor, in communion with the Church. To be poor means to take the initiative to collaborate with others and not only wait for others to collaborate with our personal projects. Of course the Institute needs money and sufficient economic security in order to carry out our mission in the Church, to form future Redemptorists, to have ongoing formation for the professed, to take care of the sick and the elderly. The basis for this is solidarity. At the same time the Institute must be open and generous. So, the challenge is to find a balance and not to center our attention only on our needs and our security.

Pastoral charity

Pastoral charity shapes the life of the Redemptorists and provides a basis of unity. Pastoral charity is the unifying principle of the whole existence of the Congregation. It is through this pastoral charity that the confreres participate in the mission of Christ the Redeemer. Our community life is always at the service of our apostolate. Continual conversion increases the spirit of availability for serving others. (Const. 52 and 54). Missionary dynamism, apostolic charity and the spirit of availability for mission arise from a commitment to the vow of poverty. Constitution 48 instructs us: "In order to fulfil his mission, which is essentially the exercise of pastoral charity, Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7) and submitted himself to the will of the Father in the work of redemption to which he dedicated his entire life." The vow of poverty must be understood in context. It represents a manner of following the very path of Christ, by participating in a specific peculiar way in the mystery of the Church and by identifying one's self with more profoundly with the paschal mystery (Const. 50).

"Imposed poverty" is not evangelical

Many times poverty and injustice do not cause us sufficient indignation. There is something which we should not forget. There are still many, many hungry people in the world. More than 50% of the world's population continue to live in poverty, some in misery, and the number of the poor increases continually. There is an enormous lack of justice and great socio-economic inequality in the world. Millions of people do not even have the bare minimum of food nor sufficient material goods to live according to their dignity. The "globalization of indifference" points to an alarming degree of dehumanization. Many times we do not know what to do nor how to respond to that reality. Confronted by the overwhelming amount of poverty and its consequences we prefer to barricade ourselves in our own worlds. It is not easy to deal with persons and families who are really poor. It is easy to look down on them and fail to respect their human dignity. The poor have many needs, many are abandoned, excluded from society, "discarded". We walk with them and help them precisely because they are needy (and not because they are good, nor belong to our religion, nor are part of our cultural reality, nor our country). The questions seek answers: Why are they poor? What does "the Kingdom of God" mean for them?

Poverty which is the consequence of laziness, or indolence, or a lack of effort, or a lack of trying and taking an interest in bettering one's self, is not evangelical. There also exists a form of poverty which results from a lack of sharing knowledge, information, educational methods, a lack of sharing resources others and technology. But there are other forms of poverty, many other, which are imposed by others from outside. When poverty is the fruit of injustice, of corruption, of the exploitation of some persons by others, of stealing and plunder, this reflects a total lack of respect for the dignity of the human person. There are forms of poverty which result from political,

economic and social decisions which are contrary to the meaning of equality of opportunity and of human dignity. These decisions have a very negative effect on the poor.

“Unjust and imposed poverty” is not evangelical. There is a poverty which is the result of a system which enriches some and excludes a great majority from the possibility of acquiring material, cultural and social goods. Poverty which is the result of stealing and the corruption by certain groups of persons with the power of decision is totally unacceptable. Based on the evangelical meaning of poverty we fight directly against “imposed poverty”. The Redemptorists, announcing the “Kingdom of God”, are against these forms of poverty and we fight against them.

Solidarity with the poor

The fact that economic and social poverty exist demands our solidarity. As we look around ourselves we know who the most abandoned and the poorest are. It is useless to say that we do not see them. In every local community, in every parish, in every missionary center the question is always: Who are the most abandoned and the poorest in this setting? How are we signs of hope for them? How do we build solidarity with them?

To follow the poor Jesus Christ does not mean to “use the poor to our advantage” in order to increase our personal or communal prestige, nor our personal or communal finances. Quite the opposite, it means being close to the poor and to see the world through their eyes, fighting at their side. This requires strong motivation, clear vision, and a firm decision made from one’s faith in Jesus Christ the Redeemer. To follow the poor Jesus Christ means being willing to accept the consequences of the Incarnation of the Word and to practice solidarity with the poor, with those who suffer, with the most abandoned, with the oppressed and the exploited. In practice we have to approach the poor, practice solidarity with them, experience and reflect on life from their realities and their perspective. We have to interpret all political, social, economic, educational, cultural, etc. decisions made by the leaders of our world through their eyes. What are the consequences of these decisions for the poorest? Do these decisions favor them or no?

Learn to hope

The poor teach us to live from hope. It is always important to be motivated by and active and creative sense of hope. Hope always demands action, “do something”. When we have everything we need and can solve all the problems to come to us in life, there does not seem to be a need for hope. But when we lack everything, when nothing turns out well and everything is going badly: that is when we need a lot of faith, hope and trust. On the one hand, hope is the daughter of the indignation that is suffered in the face of injustices and this leads to action. Hope is also the daughter of a creative imagination. Indignation leads to criticism and, in turn, leads to protest. It is also capable of proposing and accomplishing “something new, something different, an alternative.” Hope requires important attitudes like patience, a spirit of dialogue, perseverance, resiliency, and flexibility. Our hope is firmly based in the love of God, in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the mystery of Redemption. Hope is lived in the Incarnation and comes to fruition in a fighting spirit. It is not a question of self-pity nor of destructive criticism. It requires positive, pro-active action. To live hope from the place of the poor means openness, availability, solidarity, collaboration, association with others and concrete action.

The “mercy” principle



From the poor we let ourselves be led by the principle of “mercy”. We take upon ourselves this undeniable reality: many human persons and groups continue suffering needs and violence (affective, gender-related, sexual, economic, cultural, social, political, etc.) Many are discriminated against and are oppressed, victims of diverse types of abuse of power. There are many people who are poor, unemployed, left to their destiny, excluded from society and from the Church. Mercy

is the correct posture in the face of a suffering world. We Redemptorists are sent to bring hope and to announce the plentiful Redemption of Jesus Christ. We call to mind the parable of the “Good Samaritan” (Lk 10:30-37). Mercy is God’s rule of action, God’s principle. Mercy moves God to react and respond to human suffering. It is the movement of God in the Incarnation and in Redemption. It also moves us to react to suffering in others. The response of “mercy” is always personal, communal, pastoral and social. It is not about sentimental, paternalistic nor individualistic compassion. It is always accompanied by concrete actions.

Freedom, availability, gratitude

One concrete way to “be poor” according to the spirit of Jesus Christ is to follow the principles presented in the “Beatitudes” (Mt 5:3-12/Lk 6:20-23). The practice of the Evangelical Counsels is free and generates freedom. The vow of poverty favors freedom and availability for the mission. We are not attached to anything, we are not bound by anything, only to that which is essential, Christ. This poverty provides us with freedom. To be poor, to be open and tolerant, is to know, to hear, to embrace, and be attentive to the needs of others.

A grateful heart is serene, simple, happy, generous and full of hope, it acts from gratefulness. It is not anxious, nor arrogant, nor showy, nor pessimistic. It knows that all comes from God. To be poor, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, means being humble, available, open and in solidarity. Gratitude and generosity are clear expressions of lived poverty. To be poor is always to be “an apprentice”, to know how to listen to God and to the poor. A poor community is welcoming, open to others and attentive to the signs of the times.

The opposite of “being poor” is not so much to be economically rich, but rather to be miserly, covetous, ambitious to the point of lying, stealing, and being destructive of others’ lives. It means being self-centered, not to share anything with anybody, to want everything for one’s self, to be closed in on one’s self, to be arrogant, to believe that one has all truth, to be hypocritical, to look down on others. Not to be available for the needs of the mission. Whoever claims not to need anyone or anything, does not have an attitude of poverty. One who is disproportionately attached to material things or other persons, whoever feels autonomous and self-sufficient, and whoever treats the poor with disdain, does not live evangelical poverty. These behaviours are contrary to the spirit of “evangelical poverty” in the Redemptorist life. There is a way of accepting, taking on and

embracing poverty which is the fruit of a personal decision, lived in community. The main principle for this is sharing.

THE SPIRIT OF ST ALPHONSUS

In his “Novena for Christmas” (1758), St. Alphonsus offers these themes for meditation. They help us contemplate on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word and to understand the meaning of the vow of poverty. It is impossible to fulfill the mission of the Redemptorists without being in communion with Christ the Redeemer and with the mystery of the Incarnation. We should share and we should communicate to others how to live this commitment in our lives.

The themes are:

1. The eternal Word, being God, became human.
2. The eternal Word, being great, became small.
3. The eternal Word, being Lord, became a servant.
4. The eternal Word, being innocent, became a culprit and guilty.
5. The eternal Word, being powerful, became fragile and weak.
6. The eternal Word, being totally His own self and autonomous, became ours.
7. The eternal Word, being totally happy, took on tribulation and suffering.
8. The eternal Word, being rich, became poor.
9. The eternal Word, being sublime, became humbled.

The Word of God is a Light for my Path

Some of these texts may be helpful for the reflection and sharing of the community. Choose one.

- Philippians 2:5-11
- Matthew 10: 7-15 (Also Mk 6:7-13 and Lk 9:1-6)
- Luke 18: 18-29 (Also Mt 19: 16-30 and Mk 10: 17-31)
- Matthew 25: 31-46
- Luke 1: 39-56

BEFORE THE ICON OF MARY OF PERPETUAL HELP

(For prayer. As we gaze upon the icon of Mary of Perpetual Help we pray in two choirs. If you would like you may end this prayer singing the “Magnificat”)

- The icon of Perpetual Help is a celebration of the Child Jesus in the arms of His mother, Mary. Being God, he becomes a child and takes on our human reality. He gives himself to us out of love. The Child shows serene trust as he is in the arms of his mother. In his humility and poverty he feels safe and disposed to take on the challenge of the cross, of violence, of injustices, of pain, of abandonment and of death.
- Some call this icon: “the crib of Redemption”. Lord, we embrace your unconditional love. We thank you for the great mystery of Redemption. We are grateful for having given us Mary, mother of the Redeemer, to be our mother, our consoler, our refuge and help, a model of discipleship. Help us to respond with generous and faithful love.
- At the center of the icon, we contemplate how the fingers of the Child Jesus the Redeemer are intertwined with the fingers of his mother, Mary. This is a sign of a direct connection, of an

intimate relationship and of the full trust of the Child in His mother and the trust of Mary in the Redeemer.

- That is the heart of the icon: it is impossible to understand the Redemption offered by Jesus Christ without the mystery of the Incarnation, in the same way it is impossible to understand Mary as refuge, hope or powerful intercessor without a direct relationship with her Son, the Redeemer.

- The sandals worn by the Child Redeemer seated on His mother's lap are so that he can walk the road and let his feet become covered in dust. One of the sandals is falling off, it hangs about to fall. These express Jesus' commitment with humanity, with the poor. God walks on the earth and is in direct contact with human realities. Even to the ultimate consequences.

- It reminds us of the profound meaning of the Incarnation and of the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer. Help us, Lord, to fully commit ourselves from our poverty, from our limitations. Help us, Lord, be generous in love and to be close to the poor. Help us become signs of the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, announcing the Gospel to the most abandoned.

- We also contemplate and reflect on the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth; we think of Mary at the marriage feast of Cana of Galilee; we consider Mary at the foot of the cross. She is consolation, she is help. Merciful Mary, intercede for us. Help us to show mercy to others.



- Mary visits us with the Child Jesus in her arms and she strengthens us. She offers us the message of Redemption and she walks with us in our daily struggles. She invites us to communion with Jesus, she invites us to live our struggles and sufferings united to the passion of Christ for the good of humanity and with a spirit of loving gratitude.

- Mary evangelizes. As mother she shows us her Son Jesus Christ. She presents him to the world. Mary is both evangelizer and educator. The right arm of Mary shows us the Way. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life.

- Mary, woman and mother. You were strong and generous. An authentic woman of her time. An authentic woman, surprised by God's initiative, confused as she contemplates God's plans, just as so many of us are surprised and confused, but she has a profound sense of faith and total openness to God's will. Very young, Mary was called to be a mother. She experienced love, she suffered misunderstanding.

- She accompanied and protected her Son. She also experienced profound suffering. She is the mother of the child lost in Jerusalem, the mother of the defamed and calumniated Son, the despised Son, the unjustly condemned Son, the tortured Son, the victim of violence and death on the cross as a common criminal. Yet she knew how to hear and share.

- Help us, Mary, to love Jesus and to follow Him faithfully. The suffering and the strength of such a great mother is only understood from the viewpoint of love. The Child Jesus also sees the reality which He will have to face. Thankfulness for the love, the mercy and the hope is understood in the context of the experience of human suffering. Mary, our consolation and our hope, accompany us and help the most poor and abandoned. Amen.



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).

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