

ONE BODY (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Ef 4,4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

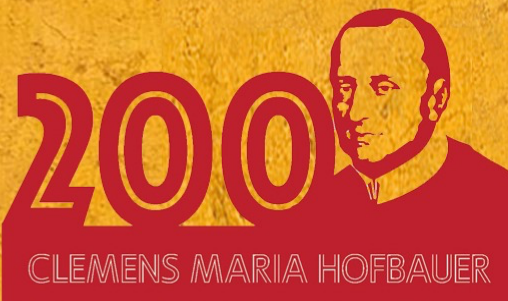
UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)



C.Ss.R.

PIRITUALITY



ONE BODY

Clement's failures

One of the features of the bicentenary of the death of our confrere Clement Hofbauer has been the variety of inspiring and useful texts in this series of C.Ss.R. Spirituality. From the sheer holiness of the man, to his missionary vision and accomplishments, to his interior life, we have been treated to insights into the man we right call our “second founder”.

In this reflection I want to look at the failures in Clement's life or rather at how he coped with failure. Sometimes in reading the lives of the saints we are inclined to conclude “marvellous, to be admired, but hardly to be imitated”. But we all have in common some brush with failure; indeed we may feel trapped in failure or afraid of failure.

Failures due to external forces – failures from within the Congregation

Perhaps the most public and dramatic failure for Clement was the suppression of St Benno's on June 17th 1808. The arrest, imprisonment and eventual deportation of the Warsaw community was the end of the transalpine Congregation for the time being. To see such a fruitful ministry terminated and the community dispersed must have tested Clement's trust to the full. Less dramatic but no less disheartening was the failure of many, if not all, of the foundations Clement made across Europe. From France to Romania Clement saw his efforts fail.

Such failures were due to external forces, political, social and sometimes religious. A quite different level of failure came from within the Congregation itself. The Consultor General, Fr Leggio, accused Clement of “changing morning meditation for two sung Masses, no observance of silence, no afternoon acts” and for good measure he accused Clement of refusing to return to Italy because “you do not want to have any superior over you”.

Even within his own Warsaw community Clement heard voices raised to highlight his failures. Fr Vannelet's correspondence showed that some members of St Benno's community were uneasy with the pace and style of Clement's version of Redemptorist life.

Clement was not unaware of the limitations under which he laboured. So much of his earlier life had been patchy: some study, some experience of the hermit life, some theology at the University, very short Novitiate, skimpy familiarity with the traditions of the Congregation, little contact and less literature on the charism of the Congregation....all added up to feelings of inadequacy and a recipe for failure. On top of all this, Clement had to cope with his own temperament: “I thank God I have this shortcoming (short temper) because if I didn't have it, I would be tempted to kiss my own hand out of respect for myself” he ruefully admitted.

A missionary disciple of Jesus

As a missionary disciple of Jesus, Clement was able to look at the life and death of Jesus in terms of what counts as failure and success. Jesus was not accepted by his own people, he was considered out of his mind by some family members, he knew desertion, betrayal, torture and brutal execution. Even in his inner journey he knew moments of fear, temptations and distress even to the point of a sense of abandonment. He had warned his handful of disciples that they could expect no less themselves.

We see this template in the lives of Peter and Paul. For Peter the moment of real truth came when, having disowned his master, Jesus “looked straight at Peter” piercing his heart and releasing his tears of repentance. With inspired words, Paul confessed “I shall be very happy to make my weaknesses my special boast...for it is when I am weak that I am strong” (2 Cor 11: 30; 12:9-10).

How to deal with failures?

It is not difficult to identify some of the ways in which Clement dealt with the various failures in his life and which we too can deal with our own limitations and failure.

Among the spiritual maxims of Clement, lovingly, gathered by one of his circle, Joseph (later Cardinal) Rauscher, we read:

“When we are conscious of having failed and done wrong, we must humble ourselves before God, implore his pardon and then go quietly on our way; our defects should make us humble, but never fainthearted.” (Maxim 8)

This spiritual maxim brings to my mind the advice of St Alphonsus himself in *The True Spouse*: “Getting angry with ourselves [when we fail] is not humility; it is rather a subtle form of pride which makes us forget the weak people we really are. Getting angry with ourselves after a fault is a far greater defect than the fault itself, for it can lead to a whole chain of other faults”. Clement’s advice “to go quietly on our way”, coming as it does from a man of unusual energy and determination, is a profound insight into how to deal with our own failures and sins.

Another feature of Clement’s struggle with failures and setbacks comes from the contemplative dimension of his life. Those early years as a hermit surely influenced him for the rest of his life. In exploring his possible vocation, Clement wisely opened himself to the call of the solitary life, to the riches of contemplative prayer and to the longing for God alone. He may have left the physical hermitages where he learned to pray, but he kept a spiritual hermitage in his heart right to the end of his life. When trials and failures pursued him he was able to retire to that hermitage of the heart and find again the God of all consolation -and the consolation of God.

Without a contemplative dimension to our lives, how could we face our own weaknesses or how could we face the difficulties and failures of life?

Questions for reflection

1. How do we manage the weakness and mistakes of the Congregation or of our own Community?
2. How do we cope with our own personal failings?
3. Are we able to take our own advice?
4. St Teresa of Kolkuta reminded us that we are not called to success but to fidelity. Are we hostage to the tyranny of success?

PRAYER

Father of mercy, in the life of St. Clement you have revealed to us
the original freshness of the Gospel.

Pour out your Spirit so that we can serve with creative fidelity
the mission of the Church and the Congregation.

When doubting, make us strong in faith;
if we feel threatened, keep us rejoicing in hope;
when faced by the uncertainty of the unknown, inflame us with the fire of your love,
and rekindle in us the missionary dynamism
so that your Church may rejoice with the joyful announcement of
the fulness of the Redemption of your Son Jesus Christ.

May we live a life rooted in prayer undertaking what is demanding,
as did St. Clement, until we can attain the glory of the promised crown.

We ask this through Jesus Christ your Son ...

Amen



ONE BODY is a monthly prayer text proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality.

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