

### **Day 3: Clement Maria Hofbauer**

#### **Providence, Prayer and the Virtues**

Confidence in God and in Jesus Christ: Obedience to the will of God was always accompanied by confidence in God and in Jesus Christ. If we are faithful in carrying out the will of God, this will help us in our difficulties: "God never fails to assist those who cooperate faithfully with grace." This phrase echoes Alphonsus' own teaching on cooperation with God. Clement also writes, "We cannot succumb except through lack of confidence and of faith." The famous scene comes to mind, where at St. Benno's, in extreme poverty, Clement knocked on the tabernacle door and said, "Lord, help us. It is now time."

Prayer: Unlike St. Alphonsus, Clement did not write a treatise on prayer. However, prayer has an important place in his life and spirituality. We must, first of all, note the place that liturgical prayer had at St. Benno's and with the Ursulines of Vienna, celebrated in a manner peculiar to the northern countries, with special emphasis on Masses with music; we are in the age of Mozart and Beethoven. Hofbauer looked for the best musicians for Mass in Vienna. What attracted him in a special way was devotion to the Eucharist, whether in processions linked to benediction or in a silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. The Eucharist was truly the centre of the service of praise which is due to God. One of the sayings of Clement showed the meaning he attached to divine worship, "God does not need our adoration nor our service, it's true, but we need it."

Don Pajalich, a close confidant of Clement states that, "Clement led a very active life in Vienna...He had only one room which was open to all... There he created in his heart a desert, a solitary cell, a little oratory. Into this loneliness of the heart he would withdraw whenever he wanted to, at any time, wherever he found himself, even when he wandered through the most crowded streets, he immersed himself in himself. He willingly sought out this solitude, at any moment, no matter where, in spite of difficulties and anguish and in no matter what kind of occupation or society. Withdrawing into himself in this way, he devoted himself to his reflections and meditations in this interior solitude. "Even when he passed through crowded streets he made aspirations of faith, hope, love of God and neighbour, acts of adoration, thanksgiving, humility, contrition and total offering of himself."

Father Srna knew Clement well, because for years he lived with him in very close quarters. He claimed that Hofbauer was a great man of prayer "because prayer was the nourishment and refreshment of his heart." Clement also taught his penitents to follow the same life of recollection and prayer. Dorothea Schlegel describes it at length in a letter to her sons.

Among his favourite prayers was the recitation of the Rosary. "In his comings and goings in the streets, as well as in his free moments at home, he almost always had the rosary in his hands. One of the tasks he proposed to his congregation of Oblates was to defend and re-establish this exercise "ridiculed by modern errors." At St. Ursula's Clement blessed rosary beads and distributed them to his friends, students, etc.

Devotion to Mary: This is one of the characteristics of his spirituality. In his preaching he spoke always of Mary with veneration and tenderness; from an early age he had this devotion. He joyfully visited the sanctuaries of Mary, for example Altötting. While staying in Vienna he only left the town in order to visit the sanctuaries of the Virgin. He went on foot twice to Maria-Schossberg in Hungary, and once to Maria Taferl. His favourite pilgrimage was to Maria-Zell, where he went once a year.

His prayer, especially the rosary, was at the service of his apostolate. He gave this answer to someone who was worried about Clement's health because he had to go to a distant suburb: "Yes, it is good when the one who is sick lives far away in a suburb; then I have time to say the Rosary 'en route', and I don't know a case of any sinner who failed to be converted when I had the time to say the rosary." Clement was definitely a great devotee of Mary and he wrote once in a letter that he preferred it whenever one added the name Mary to his name of Clement.

The Virtues: Clement exhibited a tremendous *PATIENCE* with people. All his life Clement had seen failure dog his projects and he did live in difficult circumstances in the foundations he made, he thus had to exhibit patience. "It was amid persecutions that the Lord founded his Church. We know how to speak of patience, but when it is a question of ourselves we no longer know what to do." Clement also exercised this patience in relation to others: "I prefer to put up with wrongs, because I tell myself that I am a man and I have my faults."

Clement united the most perfect *HUMILITY* to this patience. One can recall the circumstances in which Clement, begging for charity, received spittle in his face, and addressing the insulter, said to him: "That was for me; now give me something for the Child Jesus Orphanage"

*Patience, Poverty and Mortification*, these were the virtues that Clement demanded from his brothers. In those troubled years of many journeys, new foundations, at St. Benno's, as well as during his sojourn at Vienna, he always practiced an extreme and real form of poverty. But his poverty was regulated by his sharing with others. Speaking of St. Benno's, he said: "I was very poor, but never to the point of having nothing to give." He always said to Fr. Jestersheim, the treasurer at St. Benno's, "Give, and others will give to you. These two go together."

Clement also knew how to mortify himself. He could sleep on the ground in a corner. When he cooked a meal, he would often give himself what was least good.

Humour and Kindness: Clement was not a sad person. He was jovial, a good story-teller with a sense of *Humour*. Clement was not a melancholic person despite his many failures and the constant persecutions directed against him. He was a joyful man. One never saw him moody or embittered; he called sadness "vapours from hell". Clement with the charisma of humanity frowned upon everything that was extravagant. He was strict with himself but not unmerciful. In his old age, in contrast with his younger years, he permitted himself a good glass of wine or a cup of coffee. Then he praised wine as a valuable gift of God, especially for fortifying one's strength in old age.

Clement teaches each of us that once we place our trust in the Lord, the Lord takes care of us. This trust is nurtured through prayer which is our daily conversation with the Lord which nourishes our relationship with him. Mary the Mother of Mercy intercedes for us her children so that we can grow in the virtues that make us more and more like her Son Jesus, in patience, humility, humour and kindness. This is a holy life and it is for all of us to grow into.