

“THE WORD OF GOD IS THE MISSIONARY’S DAILY FOOD”

LECTIO

(what does the Word in itself say)

Mark 4:13-20

¹³Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any of the parables? ¹⁴What the sower is sowing is the Word. ¹⁵Those along the path where the seed fell, are people who hear the word, but as soon as they do, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶Other people receive the word like rocky ground. As soon as they hear the word, they accept it with joy, ¹⁷but they have no roots so it lasts only a little while. No sooner does trouble or persecution come because of the word, than they fall. ¹⁸Others receive the seed as among thorns. After they hear the word, ¹⁹they are caught up in the worries of this life, false hopes of riches and other desires. All these come in and choke the word so that finally it produces nothing. ²⁰And there are others who receive the word as good soil. They hear the word, take it to heart and produce: some thirty, some sixty and some one hundred times as much”.

“THE WORD OF GOD IS HIS DAILY FOOD” (CONF S III 142)

* The Word of God had been Joseph Allamano’s daily food, and he even wanted it to be so for his missionaries.

“Read Sacred Scripture attentively, fall in love with it. It’s our book. A solution to everything is found in it; everything which can be useful for us and for others is found in it. Whoever reads Sacred Scripture, fills himself with good spirit... Savour it, make it a vital nourishment for oneself. Ah, Scripture! The more it’s read, the more it’s studied and the more one loves it and takes delight in it! Saint Augustine affirms that the words of God have a marvelous depth. They’re like a deep well, which requires toil in order to pull the water up, but it’s a sweet and consoling toil. This is the first, the paramount study in the Institute, and there isn’t any excuse. I want you to become affectionate to Sacred Scripture!” (VS 626).

THE CENTRALITY OF THE WORD IN THE MISSIONARY’S LIFE

* We become what we listen to. The listening to the Word of God is at the origin of the call and of mission. But the listening to the Word isn’t taken for granted.

““Listen Israel...” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9): Moses asks for the listener’s silence; he doesn’t only ask that there be an absence of noise, he wants a decision, an active renunciation to every other voice, to intervene in order to concentrate the ear and the heart in one only direction, that of the mouth from which the Word of God comes out. What keeps one from listening is of course exterior noise, but it’s above all the inner refusal, often unconscious of opening itself up to the other. There’s no silence inside the heart when it’s “pre-occupied”, already inhabited by a thousand anxieties, by a legion of bosses who reign and promise, by the thousand voices of vanity itself. Moses’ imperative is equal to that of closing one’s own room and making the fear and the pride of one’s own heart

keep quiet, in order to listen to God” (P. Bovati). The obstacles to the listening of the Word: the incapacity to interiorize and allow it to go down into the depth (v. 15); the lack of perseverance (v. 17), the worldliness which dissuades from coherence (v. 19). Whoever welcomes it, bears fruit (v. 20).

* The missionary ministry is a “service”, “being servants” of the Word (cf. Acts 20:32). The missionary is a person who is entrusted to the Word, which has the power of edifying the person and the community. The Word is above all entrusted to him so that it “moulds” him (cf. PDV 47; 26).

The disciple is in need of an assiduous contact with Scripture in order not to be a “vain preacher outside if he doesn’t listen to it inside” (Saint Augustine) (cf. PDV 47); he’s the first believer of the Word (cf. PDV 26).

“The priest has to be a man who intimately knows Jesus, who has met him and has learnt to love him. Therefore he has to first of all be a man of prayer. Without a strong spiritual base he can’t last all that long in his ministry. He has to even learn from Christ that in his life the realization of himself or success has no importance, but he has to learn to spend his life for Christ and for his flock. And if such a way of living initially opposes itself to the person’s natural inclination, this loss itself of relevance of one’s own self and that which frees us reveals itself with time. When we seek success, priesthood becomes a toil which overcomes our strengths, the weights become too big for us. Whoever loves wants to know, therefore the authentic love of Christ expresses itself in the will of knowing him always better and of knowing everything which belongs to him. It’s the Word contained in scripture which above all gives us knowledge of Christ. What are holy men if not rivers that irrigate the arid earth of men. But they would soon dry up if they were never to return to the place from which they arise, if they weren’t to tighten themselves with ties of affection to their source” (Card. Ratzinger).

* Listening is the fundamental asceticism. There’s no spiritual life without the transforming dependence of the Word of God. “The ministry must support itself as a central element upon a daily reading of the Word of God contained in Scripture” (Card. Ratzinger). It’s in the *Lectio Divina* that the disciple finds the food of his faith and of his spiritual life.

Listening is a principle of conversion: the Word comes to live in whoever listens to it, who can affirm: “It’s no longer I who live...” For this reason the Gospel insists by saying: “Be careful to what you listen to” (Mark 4:24); “Be careful how you listen” (Luke 8:18).

* The Word of God confers the capacity of discernment like no other word (cf. Hebrews 4:12). The signs of God can’t be discerned without the light of the Word (cf. PDV 47). The will of God upon us isn’t a starting pre-thought life, but it exists in the moment in which it’s lived in the light of the Gospel. It’s a gift and it’s an answer, therefore a commitment to be carried out in love, and in freedom.

THE *LECTIO DIVINA* IS THE MISSIONARY’S FORMATION SCHOOL

* The encounter with the Word of God becomes determining for life: it’s the formation school. The encounter between the Word and daily life isn’t taken for granted: it’s the toil of life.

Love isn't a feeling but decision and commitment, therefore it comprises discipline and order. The *Lectio Divina* is the necessary attitude so that the Word of God enters into life, and provokes the encounter with Christ. The *Lectio Divina* becomes "the listening that changes life".

* The *Lectio Divina* consists of an itinerary of a reading (Lectio) of a page of Scripture (Divina), which comprises some passages to be done with order, so that a transforming encounter with the Word of God is carried out. The *Lectio Divina* is the journey of the Word in us, and it's our journey "inside" the Word: we listen to the Word (= Lectio): "Give your servant a heart capable of listening" (1 Kings 3:9).

Let us eliminate every resistance and order our lives according to the Word with a decisive, generous, joyous "here I am" (= Meditatio). The Word takes us to journeying along the whole way of holiness. Let us ask for forgiveness for the Word that wasn't lived out; let us thank with unconfined joy for having been called, accompanied and enlightened in the present, guided by the Holy Spirit (= Oratio): "A light on my steps is your Word, a light on my way" (Psalm 118:105).

Let us enjoy discovering our lives as a sacred history inhabited by God (= Contemplatio) and a fulfillment of the Word of the Lord: "In Scripture you possess the Word of God: don't look for any other master. Nobody will instruct you like it" (Saint John Chrysostom).

Let us live in responsibility towards others and in joint responsibility (= Communicatio).

* Truly "Scripture is enough for our formation" (Saint Anthony).

* The Word of God thus becomes the Word of Life.

The *Lectio Divina* deeply modifies the human person and reorders everything: convictions, attitudes, behaviour. It answers man's need to find himself. "Every time that the Word of God arrives to the world, it comes to change the world" (Luther). Listening to and welcoming the Word is a journey of listening, conversion and new life: one becomes the Word, like in Mary. Whoever places himself in listening to the Word is always on a journey.

MEDITATIO

(what does the Word say to me)

The X General Chapter invites every missionary to "make of Sacred Scripture "his book" upon which to bow himself every day in order to meditate: an announcer of the Word, he's its first addressee" (38). And the Constitutions affirm: "The Word of the Lord is at the center of our lives, because the gift has been given to us to become servants and ministers. We place ourselves in personal and communitarian listening of the Word, in order to assume the same feelings of the Son of God and make it the foundation of our prayer. Sacred Scripture is "our book", to which study we must dedicate ourselves everyday" (62). Is it so?

What is the Word of God for me in my daily life? Do I dedicate myself to the *Lectio Divina*? Has it reordered my life?

* The *Lectio Divina* is the root of every renewal. A flower doesn't become green again by blowing on the petals or by shoring up corolla so that it stays up: one has to intervene at the roots. It's my continuous evangelization.

"Faith grows by listening to the Word" (DV 8). "Only if we nourish our faith in a contact with the word, will we be able to cross through the spiritual desert of modern Europe unharmed" (Card. Martini).

* "By living it out gradually, it itself marks the steps of the journey to be carried out. The entire spiritual itinerary is guided by the Word, which enlightens, moves, guides, offers the program to be carried out, right to the point of becoming the protagonist of our very lives. One's freed of the preoccupation "to become saints". The only occupation is that of living out the Word, sure that it will be the Word that will make us cover the itinerary of perfection right 'till the end" (F. Ciardi).

* The *Lectio Divina*, rightly, becomes my personal project of life.

ORATIO

(what the Word makes me say)

Reparation:

"Those who think that it's enough to have Sacred Scripture in their hands, in order to understand everything, are wrong. God reveals himself only to the simple, while he hides himself from the proud. In order to understand Sacred Scripture well one has to pray and maintain great purity of life. The Imitation says: "Whoever wants to understand well and savor the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ, has to make the effort to conform one's life to His life"" (VS 626). How many times I've read the Word with superficiality!

Lord, have mercy!

Thanksgiving:

"By giving us his Son who is the only and definitive Word, the Father has given us everything, has said everything to us, and has nothing else to reveal" (Saint John of the Cross).

Thank you!

Spirit's request:

Nobody knows God's secrets if not the Spirit of God and therefore only He can reveal them to us (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:10-11). Come, Holy Spirit!

CONTEMPLATIO

("The Lord speaks and everything is done, commands and everything exists" [Psalm 32:9])

* The Word makes us "word that God pronounces for the salvation of humanity". Saint Ephrem "would paint in his person, in his acts, in his behaviour, that page which he had read: he would do what he would read" (cf. Conf II 534).

* “Only he who lives out the Gospel understands it” (Saint Jerome).

* I become “living word”, “word in the Word”, like Mary: “let your Word be done in me”.

* “I was hungry for your words, and when I would find them I would feel my heart filled with joy and I was perfectly happy, because I belong to you, Lord, God of the universe” (Jeremiah 15:16).

* “Sometimes”, writes Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, “when I read some spiritual treatises in which perfection is presented through many intricate difficulties, surrounded by a crowd of illusions, my poor little spirit doesn’t delay in tiring itself. I dose the book of the wise which sends my heads to pieces and parches my heart, and I take Sacred Scripture into my hands. Then everything becomes bright to me, one only word uncloses infinite horizons to my soul and perfection seems easy”.

COMMUNICATIO

(first and only addressee of the Word is the people of God)

* “Its then very beautiful communicating to one another in community what has been read: giving our impressions, what greatly struck us; and that, without having the pretense of making a homily, turns out to be profitable to everybody” (VS 623).

* “We need to read it for our good and for the good of others. St. Jerome would write to the virgin St. Eustochius: “May sleep encounter you with the code of Sacred Scripture in your hands”. Sacred Scripture made of this virgin a virile soul” (VS 625).

* Saint John Chrysostom would encourage the people of God like this: “Some of you say: “I’m not a monk”... But it’s here that you’re wrong, because you believe that Scripture only regards monks, while it’s still more necessary to you faithful who are in the midst of the world”.