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SPIRITUALITY - "One of the most beautiful streets to join in prayer passes through the Word of God. The lectio divina introduces to the direct conversation with the Lord and unlocks the treasures of wisdom. The intimate friendship with the One who loves us makes us able to see with the eyes of God, to speak with His Word in our hearts, to preserve the beauty of this experience and share it with those who are hungry for eternity."

This sentence of Pope Francis (to the General Chapter of the Carmelite) clearly highlights the intrinsic link that exists between the Word and prayer in a religious community. And specifically how to generate an authentic prayer is precisely the experience of an obedient listening and dialogue with the person who is the Living One who lives the Word. This is not a report or amount of similarity of themes, but something inherent in the very nature of prayer.

The Christian community, as it already was for the qahal Hebrew, is called by the Word, is properly "a call" (ekklesia) generated by obedience to the Word; and only in the Word heard, reciprocated and put into practice can find her own language to talk to God and with God . More, the community is the place where the Word can resonate with power and effectiveness, both in dialogue with God both in relation horizontal with others. It sounds like the Word of life and stir of life, and not as an ideographic theory or pure information about God or sacred events.

To understand this we must go to the specific nature of the Word, which is both a source of deep joy as the Psalms sing, but also with toil and torment, as is well evidenced by the prophets, and mysterious juice of a wise life as the sages interpret. We must ask ourselves before the mystery, as CM Martini sensed: "We have the feeling of not being able to express the extraordinary power, wealth, vitality of the Word. We always feel overcome by the mystery of Christ present in every page of Scripture, the love of God that surrounds us, and that we are incapable of communicating properly"¹.

Praying "with" the Word

I have always been impressed to note that many consecrated persons do not realize that when they pray the breviary or participate in the Eucharist are in close company with the Word. What else are the texts of the Breviary, in almost all of the pages show how much, if not biblical texts? These psalms, hymns and antiphons, readings and responses, of prayers and verses, which are almost entirely of biblical origin, or at least paraphrase of the Biblical words.

Having inherited a habit of "saying prayers" - in large quantities, especially in the past - automatically switches the pattern that the breviary is a "collection" of prayers to be recited, to be put right in a row. And if ever after, in the silence and in the allotted time of "meditation", he muses above, reflect on what we have prayed, read and heard. Misconception extremely dangerous: because it implies that something is "to say" recto tono and other the response of the thoughtful heart .

But St. Benedict had already warned that you have to tune the heart and mouth: "Mens nostra concordet voci nostrae" (Rule, c. 19). And before him, Augustine too had the same concern: "Versetur in corde quod profertur in or: that is, the movement of the mouth is accompanied by a watchful and sincere heart, why not become a pure aesthetic exercise and sound empty of "sacred "formulas.

Moreover Isaiah had already noticed the religious hypocrisy and "imparaticcio" hardly ever learning style of the praying: "This people honors me ... with his lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13). Even Jesus has taken this ancient expression, against the formalistic practices that were like an empty shell (cf. Mk 7:6)

Therefore, the prayer with the Word, it must be preceded and followed by fearful and confident listening to before the Lord, from the belief that we return to God what He has inspired, and made their own and fermented in the lives and hearts of our fathers.

And they have expressed with human formulas, impregnated of languages and symbols in the context in their vicissitudes and suffering, but also rich in intimate impulse of the heart, feelings and rebellions, gratitude and supplication. And everything is now in our hands, our mouth, so that it becomes the dialogue of the heart, pleading and sincere conversion to God.

For this reason, every religious community should be concerned to offer special deals to herself for a better understanding, even exegetical, of the texts that holds in her hands with her breviary and other celebrations (Mass included), so as to be able to understand, enjoy the lyrics - and recognize ourselves in the texts - that "reads" in unison, so that the formulas will not only move her lips, but also grab her heart.

Praying "the" Word

There is still a step forward to do. If the community is created and called by the Word heard, is *ecclesia Verbi*, *sacramentum Verbi*, or as Paul would say "a letter from Christ ... written not with ink, with the Spirit of the living God" (2Cor 3:3), we must go beyond "praying with the Word" . We must get to live in the Word, to live the Word, to breathe the Word, as a true "pure and everlasting source of spiritual life" (DV 21).

"*Spiritus tangit animum legentis*" wrote Gregory the Great: it is not only encounter with the Scripture, it is an encounter with the living God who challenges me, he wants by me a reaction to life and not just a mental assent. In the words of a preparatory text of the Synod on the Word (2008): "It is the man who can penetrate the Word of God, but this can only conquer and convert him, making him discover its riches and secrets, widening his horizons and proposals of freedom and full human development (cf. Eph 4:13) ... It's surrender to silent praise silent of heart in an atmosphere of simplicity and prayer of adoration" (Lineamenta, 59).

To this aim, it must bring the experience of *lectio divina* which for some ten years now spreading in many Christian communities, and also in religious communities is now becoming the typical familiar approach to the Word of God. Certainly in this shoot of the experience of *lectio divina* is to recognize a fruitful resourcing of monastic practice that has graced the theology and spirituality for centuries. But there is also new. Not only it is the monastic practice revitalized, and well cataloged by the famous operetta by the Carthusian Guigo II (+1188). The scale/staircase of the monks². That wise description is certainly still valuable today, because of its clarity. And many refer to it as the supreme norm: I have some doubts

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. But the Spirit, who inspired and guided the drafting of the glowing memory into pages and texts we call the Bible, continues to accompany the spread and the meeting of the Word with the believers, making significant changes and not only confirmations. It is the Spirit who inspired and aroused all the time, in addition to the classical scheme of *lectio divina*, the new dynamics of the thoughtful and prayerful listening to the Word, especially on community and in the midst of all sorts of kind Church. To this today has now spread so thoughtful and prayerful listening to the Word in the community, grassroots groups and especially in marginal and poor environments.

As already said twenty years ago the Pontifical Biblical Commission: "It is a joy in seeing the Bible in the hands of humble and lowly people, who can bring to its interpretation and its actualization a more penetrating light from the spiritual and existential point of view, of what is a science self-confident"⁴. Hence the challenge to read the letter in the Spirit, along with the

easier people, agreeing to go over the great and glorious traditions and the refinements of exegesis, for a journey of the people, for a "doxology" of life and not just for verbal formulations. The people are capable of this today, under the guidance of the Spirit, and when it is driven really becomes enamored of the Word, has a new "hunger and thirst" that must be met (cf. Am 8:11).

Prayer and *lectio mundi*

There is still one aspect that I would like to touch and it is often not warned. The first Word of God that we are called to accept and which to obey - in the etymological sense of ob - audire, in greek hypakoè - is creation. It is the primordial divine Word, to which you have to have obedience and give consent devoted guarding creation The Fathers were very aware of this fact, we have done instead of created reality often a heap of ruins, due to the manipulation and exploitation.

The created world tells of the glory of God, the Psalmist sings (Ps 19:1), and therefore everything is his voice, bears the seal of his wisdom (Sir 46:17, Ps 68,34). And the Pauline hymn sings: "All things were created through him (Christ), and for him ... and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17). This implies a contemplative ecological capacity for the believer, and a "theological and doxological" reading that must feed a consequent practice.

The monastic tradition has always shown a particular ability in relation to the environment, in the "aesthetics" transformation of the places , in the promotion of nature to a habitat not only better, but also inspiring of contemplation and enjoyment in consonance with the search for God The same St. Teresa of Jesus wanted her monasteries in beautiful environments with beautiful landscapes, because the nature was the companion of passionate pursuit and in love with God.

Our communities are able today to keep this Sapiientia Vitae, this beautiful relationship with nature, this subtlety of mind, and also of faith, to spread and defend the light of God that inhabits his creation? The squalor and the sloppiness of some of our environments, lack of taste and style in everything that we are and live, could show that we have lost this ability to see God who walks with us, dwelling among us. He is a God of pure interiority, or who lives far away in outer space?

Should be recast our witness and our dialogue with God, even starting right from the eloquent word of the "creation" that surround us. Often, unfortunately, it does not announce its greatness and its beauty, her tenderness and her life "full", but only our sloppiness and spiritual poverty. Here is a challenge and also a great need for conversion to the "prayer" of the community.

[1] C.M. MARTINI, Carissimo padre..., in AA.VV., La Parola edifica la comunità, Qiqajon, Bose 1996, 13.

[2] Now you can see in internet: <http://www.monasterovirtuale.it/lapatristica/guigo-il-certosino-sc-ala-claustrialium.html>

[3] You can see another in my book: Lettura orante della Parola, Messaggero, Padova 2003, 13-47; and also in the pamphlet with: Poster. La lectio divina, LDC, Leumann 2008

[4] Pontificia Commissione Biblica, L'interpretazione della bibbia nella Chiesa (15-4-1993), IV,C 3: Enchiridion Vaticanum 13, EDB, Bologna 1995, 1724

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