 Reading time: 3 min.

*(continuation from previous article)*

**8. Prayer or service**

Dear young people,
charity and prayer always go together. I must tell you that of the person of Jesus, one of his statements has always touched me very much: “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29).
Well, the meek and humble-hearted Jesus has always strongly united his being the Son of the Father who loves him and with whom he is in perfect harmony, with the other dimension, that of charity and love of neighbour: “Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me…he will be forgiven because he loved much…I was hungry and you gave me something to eat..”
You ask me how you can become holy in your daily life: through prayer and apostolate. While prayer nourishes friendship with God, through silence, the Sacraments and the Word of God, charity leads to loving one’s brothers and sisters, to building community to the point of communion. The apostolate, the giving of oneself to one’s brothers and sisters, first and foremost one’s neighbours, is also the way in which you can begin to encounter God: if, in fact, you give yourself to your brothers and sisters with a meek and humble heart you will encounter the Jesus who says “*you did it to me*”. Christian holiness (which I used to call “devotion”) consists precisely in this: it is God’s love that acts in us and we indulge it in our giving to others, briskly, readily and wholeheartedly.
Love of God and love of neighbour are not only the two main commandments, but they are mirrors of each other; you would say they are one to the other. To help you understand this, I remember once giving advice to a woman who was making a strong commitment to prayer: A soul who lives a freedom that comes from God, if interrupted in her prayer, will come out with a straight face and a gracious heart towards the troublemaker who has inconvenienced her, because everything is equal, either to serve God by meditating, or to serve him by bearing one’s neighbour; one thing or the other is God’s will, but at that moment it is necessary to bear and help one’s neighbour.
You may be thinking that living this way in your world is very complicated. The culture and the historical/religious moment in which I lived were certainly full of conflict, but imbued with a religious sense and respect for the widespread Christian faith. Not so your time.

However, I can tell you that I too had to (and wanted to) live for a few years a decidedly challenging form of missionary work in a hostile land, ruled civilly and religiously by Calvinists.
Thinking back, I could tell you a few things about my experience and, perhaps, this could offer you some small suggestions on how to live in this complex time. In order to find out the motivations of our Huguenot “opponents”, I asked the Pope for permission to read several texts, which at the time were forbidden to a Catholic, in which Catholicism was bitterly contested. My aim was to find common ground and then go to the roots of their theories, especially if they were ambiguous or incorrect. Even when I was insulted, threatened, accused of magic, slandered, I responded gently with simple people, but firmly with those who were in bad faith. How much prayer, penance, fasting I offered to the Lord for those poor brothers of ours. You carry the Gospel with your whole self and much more effectively with concrete help, willingness to listen, humility of approach that very often dissolves arrogance.
To a lady and mother, whom I followed through correspondence for several years, I used to give some advice that may be useful to you:
“You must not only be devoted and love devotion, but you must make it lovable to everyone: you will make it lovable if you make it useful and pleasant. The sick will love your devotion if they find comfort in your charity; your family if they recognise that you are more attentive to their welfare, sweeter in matters, more amiable in your corrections… your husband if he sees that, the more your devotion grows, the more cordial you are to him and the sweeter in the affection you bear him; your relatives and friends if they see in you greater frankness, forbearance and compliance with their wishes that are not contrary to those of God. In short, you must make your devotion attractive.

*Office for Vocational Animation*

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