

XXVIII Sunday (Cycle C) – Casa Divin Maestro, Ariccia, October 9th, 2022

Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit At the Opening of the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order

Readings: 2 Kings 5:14-17; 2 Timothy 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19

“And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.” (Lk 17:15-16)

Perhaps it is this phrase that could suggest to us with which spirit we are called to initiate our General Chapter, seven years since the last one, while meanwhile the world has suffered and is suffering a serious pandemic, a fratricidal war that puts the whole world in danger and great political and economic instability. Every one of us will have a different reason, every one of us has his or her own “incurable disease”, “leprosy”, “thorn in the flesh”, it doesn’t matter what. That which must unite us is that each one of us has his or her reasons to return ever again to Jesus, to adore him and to thank him. And it is this that makes us come together again.

To return, to adore, to thank. We learn from the healed leper these three grand dimensions of life and faith in Salvation. Jesus, at the end, says to him: “Stand up and go; your faith has saved you.” (Lk 17:19). It’s as if he is saying that the returning to Him, the adoration and the gratitude are the dimensions of a faith that saves us, that welcomes from Christ not only health, that which sooner or later is lost again, not only then the solution of our immediate problems, but the salvation of life, salvation forever.

Health did not suffice the healed leper: he understood that the miracle was a sign of something far greater and more precious: it was the sign of Christ the Savior, it was the sign that the Savior was present and loved him. That’s why he returned to Him. Health wasn’t enough for him: he desired Christ, he desired to encounter again and evermore the Lord and Savior of life.

The other nine healed lepers returned to their normal lives, certainly with joy. But is only this the meaning of life? Is it worth the trouble to be in good health only to outlive disease and death for a little more time? Christ offers us much more. Christ does not offer us only health, only the solution to our problems, our difficulties and sufferings. Christ offers us himself!

For this, faith saves us, because faith leads us to cling to Christ, to return always to Him, to His presence, to His love; to recognize Him our God in adoration; to recognize Him as the inexhaustible source of our joy, that makes us praise and thank God always and for everything.

To return to Christ, to set off from Christ, means also to recognize that His presence that heals and saves us is tied to a place, and that if we truly want to encounter Him we have to go where He is.

Even Naaman, the pagan commander that God healed from leprosy by means of the intervention of the prophet Elisha, understands that he must bring back with him the earth of Israel, upon which to place himself for prayer to the true God. This earth is the symbol for us of the Church, of the community of people and of communities in which to us is given always to encounter, to adore and praise the Lord. This holy land is the place of our vocation, it is our community, it is the Order. Our Cistercian founders understood from the beginning that the Cistercian charism, nourished by the charism of Saint Benedict, would always be tied to the sacred earth of the communion between the monasteries born from the new monastery of Citeaux. And that the main way to return to Christ on this earth was the meeting of the General Chapter.

For this we do not have to return to meet in the General Chapter as if we convened a parliament or organized a congress, but with the awareness to find ourselves together on the sacred earth of the encounter with the Lord Jesus who saves us, who gives us His Holy Spirit and renews us in the universal fraternity of the children of God the Father.

The General Chapter will go well and will renew the life of the Order if in these days the Holy Spirit will open our hearts to listen to Jesus who repeats to us: "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you." (Lk 17:19).

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