

## *Vespers, Saint Clare's – 27<sup>th</sup> May*

We are gathered together here in prayer, the Poor Sisters of St. Clare and the Friars Minor, with the profound desire that the lives of each of us may be focused on God, and to have, above everything else, “The Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation and to pray to Him always with a pure heart” (Rb 10, 8), in the “spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all other temporal things should serve” (Rb 5, 2).

The letter of St. Clare to Agnes is today directed to us “EMBRACE THE POOR CHRIST....; look at him, consider him, contemplate him, desiring to imitate him (2LAg 20), he is the Lord who for “us made himself poor in this world” which in the experience of Francis expresses “the sublimity of that highest poverty” which is our portion of the inheritance (cfr. Rb 6, 4-6). From that moment Clare, the Sisters and the Friars follow “the humility and the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ” (cfr. Rnb 9, 1).

With a heart open to the Spirit, we ask the capacity to have the gifts and virtues of wisdom and simplicity, poverty and humility (cfr. SalVir), which confound the wise and the perfect of this world (cfr. 1Cor). St. Francis and St. Clare, lovers of Christ, continue to be for us the icon of Holy Poverty, images of Christ poor and crucified, examples of the believing soul capable of going out of itself for love, entrusting itself to others and sharing that in humility.

In this holy place and in front of the crucifix of San Damiano, we are invited to recognize the need to embrace, to desire, to contemplate and follow every day our Lord, creator, redeemer, consoler and saviour with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind (cfr. Pater), to live each moment:

\* *The happiness of fraternity and minority.* From history we have learned that the poverty of Francis is not exclusively an ascetic and individual value, but is always linked to a spiritual and fraternal poverty; and this poverty is the condition, almost the door, to enter on the path of discipleship, to live a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

\* *The joy of being minors,* as a manifestation of the authentic humility of heart (cfr. Am 2, 3; 3; 4; 6, 4); as closeness to those who are in need; as capacity to open new constructive fraternal relationships. Francis in the Rule speaks of the “sublimity of the highest poverty” (Rb 6, 4) in the chapter on fraternal relations, sketching out therefore a fraternity in mission capable of living the value of solidarity.

\* *The novelty of mercy.* Francis tackles the problem of the poor, and his attitude, independently of the personal qualities of those whom he had in front of him was to not only to give alms, but to give the best: good bread as well as care, respect and good humour. Here there is the intelligence of love: Francis understands that men need to be treated as human beings, to be esteemed and respected. His mission is to win hearts through evangelical courtesy and with benevolence.

This discovery in the scheme of faith creates in the believer and in the consecrated another way of relating to God, with men and women, with all creatures. The old forms of domination, submission and exploitation fall; more fraternal, just and free relationships emerge in equality and respect. From this derives a *simple life style*, the rejection of riches reserved to a few, the grace to work with one's own hands. Holy Poverty creates new relationships, not only between consecrated and people, but also internally within the fraternity.

Let us ask God, good and faithful, for the grace to follow the example of His Son, for as Pope Francis says, “in God’s heart there is a special place for the poor, as He Himself became poor in his only begotten Son (cfr. 2 Cor 8, 9)” (EG 197).

The same Pope proposes a real transformation in the way of being disciples and being Church, which concerns consecrated life as well, with a dynamism of “going out” which God wishes to provoke in believers (EG 20). It is a matter of a call directed to us today, concerning our conversion, “to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel ” (EG 20).

We cannot forget that there are many “spiritual and material comfort zones” from which we are called to go out, in the awareness that no exodus will be entirely completed until it means EMBRACING THE POOR CHRIST from within.

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