

STATIO August 2007

PRAYER

Constitutions III:1-5; RB 19 and 20.

In the Power of the Holy Spirit we stand with Christ before the Father on behalf of the whole world. Constitutions III: 2.

Thousands of books were written on prayer. How do I dare to write two pages on this topic? I feel very incompetent to do so, but rather wish to bring us ever new to our sources: the gospel, RB and our Constitutions.

Let us ask Jesus Christ: “Lord, teach us to pray”. Jesus teaches us a short prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, Luke 11:1-5. Time and again meditate on this prayer which we recite many times each day. Or did it become for you merely a formula?

If you read slowly and prayerfully the five paragraphs on **Prayer** in our Constitutions you will see that they are so rich, you will not finish until the end of your life to put them into practice. Take only this sentence:

In the power of the Holy Spirit we stand with Christ before the Father on behalf of the whole world.

Try to hear and listen as though you never heard this before. Wow! What dignity, what power is given to us. First we have to implore the Lord for faith. The power of the very Spirit of God is given to us, the Holy Spirit poured out into our hearts; we are temple of the Holy Spirit (see Rom 8:9; 1Kor 6:19). This sentence describes our life, our giftedness by God and as well our responsibility. We are in unity with the most holy Trinity, because of the inexpressible love of God. Together *with Christ*, 24 hours a day, *we stand* (a position of power, of dignity in Christ before God), not kneeling or prostrating. Here is the source of our assertiveness. If we stand before God with Christ, why should we be afraid to stand up to any power in this world?

On behalf of the whole world – not for ourselves, not in a remote corner, closing our eyes in a self-centred spirituality, no, we are entrusted before God with the care for the whole world, in adoration, thanksgiving and supplication for the wounded world. Do I live this sentence; does it express my life as Missionary Benedictine Sister?

All five paragraphs speak of “we”, not a single time in singular “I”. The first paragraph describes our whole life as prayer, not only that part we spend in chapel. The second paragraph speaks of the Liturgy: Eucharist, Liturgy of the Hour – Opus Dei; the third paragraph of Lectio divina; the fourth of personal dialog, contemplation and action. The fifth paragraph sums up our life as Church. “We draw down the loving kindness of the Lord on his people and bring to the Father the whole of creation”.

I am sure each one of us sees that we have a wonderful chapter here in our constitutions, but to put it into daily practice needs a lot of conversion. How much are we living often on the surface of life! How much routine and blindness, not seeing the depth and richness of our graced life! I mention often and pray daily for the conversion of myself and for all sisters. Imagine, how our Priory of Ndanda would look like, if all of us understand these few lines better and live it?

“The Benedictine way of life helps us to come to a keen awareness of God’s presence and to an attitude of unceasing prayer” V, 1. That is the goal of the community, the goal we set for

ourselves on our day of profession. What hinders us not to live in this *keen awareness of God's presence and in unceasing prayer*?

The main chapters on prayer in the **Rule of Benedict** are equally short and deeply condensed spirituality, RB 19 and 20. Please, read them yourself this Statio and meditate on them during this month. Add to this RB 7, the first degree of humility, living in the presence of God.

RB 19 *De Disciplina psallendi, the proper manner of singing the psalms.*

The short chapter starts with credimus – we believe. This is not the word *believe* we use very often in English language, but the word we use in the Creed, I believe in one God. We believe that God is present everywhere. But *maxime credimus* but we believe this very most when we are present at the Divine Office, verse 2. How enlightened is our, my faith? Do I act accordingly with my body and with my mind and soul? If there is such an awesome presence for the Divine Office, can I come running last minute, not prepared in my soul to stand in the presence of the most holy God? Do I probably need to get up a bit earlier in the morning; make more efforts to be not only physically present but as well with my mind and soul? “Let us stand to sing in such a way that our minds are in harmony with our voices” v 7. Benedict urges us: “Sing wisely” v 4. Meditate and study the psalms and other biblical texts. Can I trace my pattern what makes my mind wander from the prayer? What can I do that more harmony comes into my prayer and so as well into my life?

RB 20 *De Reverentia orationis The Reverence in Prayer*

Benedict teaches us here and in many chapters humility, reverence before God, the creator of the universe. Reverential awe before God is a central spiritual value of RB. In our society of secularism this awe before God is more and more missing. The secular world says that we humans are autonomous and need not defer to any supernatural power. We should not make the mistake to believe that this thinking does not affect us. The wall of the clausura is no barrier to individualism, secularism, hedonism – seeking mainly one's own pleasure, lack of a spirit of service without payment. If we really believe and live this reverence before the Lord God of the whole universe, standing before Him in the power of the Holy Spirit, then we are prophetic witnesses in our world. Prophets are alone, often not understood, laughed at, and not believed.

“Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind”, Paul urges us in Rom 12:2. We have to be wise. Of course I do not say, every thing is bad in our modern world and we should shy away from it. But we need the right discernment in the power of the spirit and to build our consciences, keep updated with the current teachings of the Church, a responsibility of each Sister. The reverence for holy places, holy persons is a high value in Bantu culture. Treasure it and help that it will not get lost!

Our prayer should be in “purity of heart”, RB 20: 3. Benedict mentions “purity” three times in these five verses. In regard to prayer it means unreserved commitment. If we cannot look God straight in the eye, when we pray, the whole enterprise of prayer is compromised.

Our Constitutions tell us that the liturgy is the highest form of prayer and the fountain from which our strength flows. Further the Eucharist is the centre of our liturgical life. Each Sister has to ask herself honestly whether this is true for her spiritual life. If not so, why? What changes do I have to make? Private prayer as we say, is very important, but not the centre. Better we would say: without aiming at unceasing prayer in our whole life, we shall not be able to pray with the purity of heart during the liturgy. Both belong together. *Lectio divina*

and interior prayer leads us to this purity of heart and intention to respond through a life of praise, thanksgiving and service.

How faithful am I to the daily *lectio divina*? How much do I make my spiritual home in the Word of God? I ask this question over and over for our conversion, the way to holiness.

In prayer we are united as Church with all people, giving voice to their praise and thanksgiving, to their supplication and repentance. *We draw down the loving kindness of the Lord on his people and bring to the Father the whole of creation.*

My dear Sisters, let us do this in great humility, imploring God for the grace of conversion of heart for all our Sisters, starting with myself, and in thanksgiving that he graces us with such a vocation, beyond all imagination. Pray and let your whole life become unceasing prayer. May the dear Lord in his mercy grant us all this.

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