

LOVE OF POVERTY

As a community, we thought of proceeding with our reflections on Bertonian topics going along with the text of Fr. Marani, about the inspiration given us by the Holy Spouses: “**love of poverty**, dedication to prayer and meditation; readiness to be obedient ...; love of God...; love of one’s neighbour...”¹

TEXTS

- a) To follow Christ is the goal: the means is renouncing everything. “*Everyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple*” (Lk 14:33). “*Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has got enough for its completion?*” (Lk 14:28). The tower which now has to be built is the following of Christ. The cost and the needed materials are renunciation.²

- b) To begin an undertaking, one needs to have acquired great and heroic virtue. The capital needed is poverty, then all the other virtues. The smallest thing should not be neglected, nor should one hesitate to gather inspirations.³

- c) It is necessary to prepare for a great war against hell:
 1. Humility is needed to draw help from Heaven.
 2. Detachment from all things is also required, so that the devil will not have a means to get hold of us.⁴

- d) Cheerfulness in adversities. Practical experience of **real poverty**, with thanksgiving to the Lord. Self-offering for more experience of humiliations and suffering if He likes to grant it to me. This attitude is the best gift I received. I consider myself utterly unworthy of it. May God be praised always!⁵

¹ We give you again the full text: “*Whoever intends to become a member of this Institute of the Stigmatine Fathers and Brothers, must always bear in mind the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph and learn from them: love of poverty, dedication to prayer and meditation, readiness to be obedient on all circumstances even if they are difficult or contrary to human nature. Love of God and a committed striving for His glory. Love of one’s neighbour whose spiritual welfare he will care to achieve with fervent zeal even unto death.*”. MARANI GIOVANNI M., *Compendio delle Costituzioni*, CS II, p. 165. Cf. “*Teachings of St. Gaspar*” (Grammatica), n. 352.

² “*Teachings of St. Gaspar*” (Grammatica), n. 262. Cf. *Retreat Meditations*, MS 2528-9. The original complete text is: **2528** Omnis ex vobis qui non renuntiat omnibus quae possidet, non potest meus esse discipulus, *Luc. 14,33*. **2529** Seguir Cristo [è] il fine; [i] mezzi [sono la] rinunzia a tutto. Seguir Cristo è la torre da edificarsi: [la] spesa e [i] materiali [sono la] rinunzia.

³ “*Teachings of St. Gaspar*” (Grammatica), n. 262. *Spiritual Journal*, 23 July 1809.

⁴ “*Teachings of St. Gaspar*” (Grammatica), n. 262. *Spiritual Journal*, 24 July 1809.

⁵ *Spiritual Journal*, 22 October 1808. Fr. Stofella, in his commentary to the *Spiritual Journal*, hints, as a possible situation of “*real poverty*” some debts of his father, due to the town authorities from July 1808, but the father could not pay them. So Father Gaspar had to deep into his meagre funds to cover this debt.

The capital needed

Embraced poverty is not anything that gets in your way and you cannot make any choice about it.

Fr. Gaspar, together with the first community at the Stimmate, chose to live poverty: there was no lack of funds, so much that they could properly run the school; they could give away large alms; the income from the farming estates were quite big, of which the greatest part was reinvested for improvement of the same estates, to the benefit of the workers⁶. But for the community they had other standards: they were not deciding on food and lodging according to the funds available, but they had decisions of a spiritual type. Poor in spirit, but also in the style and in everyday reality.

Most probably his personal experience of “real poverty”⁷ refined him to understand the value of being without material things in order to arrive to and interior freedom, open to the Spirit.

Without renunciation, says St. Gaspar, one cannot “build the tower”. But how can I build, if I give away all the materials that I deemed helpful? Perhaps the Lord of the tower wants that you use “his” materials, not “yours”. He wants that you build the tower (“sequela”, i.e. he wants that you follow him) according to his plan, not according to yours. That’s why Fr. Gaspar says: “renounce to all”. St. Peter asked Jesus what happens to those who left everything; and Jesus said that “they will receive a hundredfold”⁸: but, before receiving, I have to give up, give up a lot, give up everything! Only in that moment when I am without means, even more: when I gave up also myself for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom, exactly then the Lord of the tower gives me his tools to dig the foundations, his materials for building walls and for the finishing: in his own way, according to his plan, with his means and systems. Here we discover the true “capital”: I have nothing, not even myself; but I am with the one who knows everything and can do everything, and he leads me to know him and to serve him according to his plans.

This way of serving the Lord does not come automatically: I have to choose it. I have to make daily small and big choices of renunciation. I have to discern what in my life “I have built with my own strength” and “what I have built with the Lord”, and make again the decision to trust Christ and trust less my strength (which, on its turn, is a gift of the Lord; and he will bring it to maturity at the due time...).

Being in love with poverty

“Love for poverty”: this could come from an intuition, a falling in love, but love is a fire that needs fuel. We cannot love poverty without making concrete choices, which, according to Fr. Gaspar, are renunciations, are sacrifices, are a going against the way of thinking of those who near us.

I take these decisions personally, but immediately my community becomes involved. I live my poverty together with my Congregation, with and within my community.

⁶ Cf. *Miscellanea Lenotti, Summa Additionale* p. 175. Quoted in the “*Teachings of St. Gaspar*” (*Grammatica*), n. 264.

⁷ This is a theme still in need of research: which “real poverty” did St. Gaspar experience?

⁸ Cf. Mk 10:28-30

In the Constitutions and the Directory we have:

*“Religious poverty implies total detachment from material goods, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, which contributes to our credibility”.*⁹

*“Our witness to poverty should manifest itself in our community life-style and in those goods that are for common use. Buildings, furnishings and everything else used in our apostolates should be functional and reinforce this witness”.*¹⁰

*“In order to respond better to the pressing demands of the Church, the Congregation and the Provinces, especially on the occasion of the General and Provincial Chapters, will examine the **real** witness to religious poverty that we are giving in our apostolates. When necessary, we should be disposed to reorganize every facet of our apostolate. In order to do this we must have an attitude that is progressive and prudent, strong and decisive”.*¹¹

Certainly, the basic contents on poverty are the same for all and everywhere. But the ways are quite different according to places and times, also according to the confreres who live in one community. Views and practical decisions can change when new members come to the community; young members bring to the Congregation new ways of understanding and new proposals for the realization of poverty.

This calls for an openness to review constantly on how poor we are.

Poverty is a decision not made once for ever, but continuously is reviewed and refreshed, because situations change and we have to give always new answers so to live a real poverty.

The community should then become the place that spurs me to live poverty, and at the same time the place where I can express it in concrete ways.

And, as Marani reminds us, under the inspiration of the Holy Spouses we have to learn to “love” poverty, keep it to heart, look for it, make it ours...

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⁹ Const. 18 (c). Cf. P. C. 13

¹⁰ General Directory, n.20.6

¹¹ General Directory, n.21.3; NB. Here also, as St. Gaspar already said, the need is felt for something “real”, concrete, not just words or feelings...