

Holiness and Service

By Fr. Munachi E. Ezeogu, CSSP

The Salvation Army, compared to other churches, emphasizes the selfless nature of true religion without forgetting the importance of personal holiness. Its founder, General Booth, once said, "Without any boast, without any vanity, I can assure you that when I gave myself to God I did so more to save others than to save myself." That may sound strange to many of us who take it for granted that the primary, if not the only, purpose of being a Christian is to save one's soul. If that is so, then what we read in today's gospel will also sound strange to us. Jesus declares: "**For their sake I sanctify myself**" (John 17:19). We shall take a closer look at this profound statement.

"For their sake:" The man Jesus was totally committed to the welfare of others. When he states the purpose of his life he said, "**I came that they [i.e. others] may have life, and have it more abundantly**" (John 10:10). Jesus had miraculous powers but he used these powers more to help others than to help himself. When people were hungry in a deserted place he multiplied bread to feed them, but when he was hungry in the desert he would not turn stones into bread to feed himself. Once he was tired and needed some rest. He took off in a boat to a place of retreat but on arriving there he found that the people had arrived before him looking for him. Seeing how these people looked like sheep without a shepherd, he immediately shelved his planned rest and began to minister to them. Concern for others was the hallmark of his life and ministry.

The understanding that the gospel demands that Christians be actively concerned for the material and spiritual well-being of the less fortunate of the world has given rise to what is called the social gospel.

People who are involved in efforts to eradicate poverty and disease in their cities and in other parts of the world reflect the spirit of compassion and selfless interest in others that we see in Jesus. The first half of the statements: "**For their sake I sanctify myself,**" underlines the fact that concern for others is at the very heart of the Christian gospel.

"I sanctify myself" The second part of the statement, on the other hand, underlines the fact that personal sanctification is an essential element in the whole business of being a Christian. It counterbalances the first. Jesus was always there for other people, yet he did not forget to sanctify himself. People who are so involved in helping others that they forget their own inner life with God see only one side of the coin. How can one be doing the work of the Lord and forget the Lord of the work? People who are actively involved in efforts to help other people must also cultivate an interior relationship with the Lord for their personal sanctification lest they get lost in activism. The social gospel, rightly understood, therefore, presumes the personal gospel of intimacy with the Lord.

Now, when we look around us what do we see? We see so many Christians who are so involved with their own personal salvation and holiness that they forget to show practical concern for the less privileged. Such Christians subscribe to the personal gospel while neglecting the social gospel. They are looking only at one side of the coin. We also know people who are involved in efforts for social justice and peace, who consider it a waste of time to pray or go to church. These subscribe to the social gospel and ignored the personal gospel.

Which of the two is better, social gospel or personal gospel? Taken in isolation none of them is better. It is not a question of either-or but of both one and other. For us, regular church going Christians the danger lies more in focusing too much on our own personal salvation and holiness to the neglect of active concerns for others. To us, therefore, these words of Henry van Dyke are addressed:

*Who seeks for heaven alone to save his soul,
May keep the path, he will not reach his goal;
While he who walks in love may wander far,
But God will bring him where the blessed are.*

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Acts 1:15-26

1 John 4:11-16

John 17:11-19

May 20, 2012

靈 修 生 活

天 人 合 一

我不但為他們(宗徒)祈求，而且也為那些因他們的話而信從我的人祈求。願眾人都合而為一！父啊！願他們在我們內合而為一，就如祢在我內，我在祢內，為叫世界相信是祢派遣了我。我將祢賜給我的光榮賜給了他們，為叫他們合而為一，就如我們原為一體一樣。我在他們內，祢在我內，使他們完全合而為一。(若十七 20 ~ 23)

基督信徒靈修的最高峰是「合一」，人與人的合一，進而與天主的合一，如耶穌所說的「願他們在我們內合而為一，就如祢在我內，我在祢內」。

聖女大德蘭聖師在《七寶樓台》中，把天主與人的關係講得非常透徹，雖然她用了一個現代人不太容易接納的名詞——「神婚」，但這是受時代背景的影響而採用的。今日基督信徒比較喜歡用「天人合一」一詞來表達。其實，基本上兩者的內涵都是同樣的「愛」。愛到盡頭只有「一」，沒有「二」。

在解釋這靈修的高峰時，大德蘭也用極平常的事物作比喻，使教友們都容易知道和領悟她所要講的是什麼。她說：神婚彷彿水，自天上落下，很完美的攙入河水或泉水中，人們再也不能分開它們，也不能分別哪是河水，哪是自天而降的水。此外，還彷彿像一個小小水流，流入大海中，便再也不可能將兩者分開。或是由兩個窗子進入屋中的亮光，雖然在進入時是分開的，但結合在一起時，卻只是一道光芒。當保祿說：那與主結合的，便是與祂成為一神(格前六 17)，大概有意暗示這個不可比擬的合一；也就是說：天主已經由於結合而與靈魂聯合在一起。

這是一個絕妙又高明的比喻，既平易又容易了解。我國「水乳交融」這句成語，水乳攙合之後，誰也不能分別哪一滴是水，哪一滴是奶，兩種物質變成一種物質。同樣，在相愛的過程中，兩個人，或人與人，或人與天主逐漸的結合，終於成為不可分的一體。

假若有人要問：「這樣的合一可能嗎？」請他仔細聽聽保祿的話，要慢慢一句句念，念一句就停頓下來用心思考，誠實的反省自己的生活。沒有人比保祿更清晰解剖了「合一」的內涵。而合一的真諦也就在於這樣的愛，它由愛開始，最後完成在愛之內。

「愛是含忍的，愛是慈祥的，愛不嫉妒，不誇張，不自大，不作無禮的事，不求己益，不動怒，不圖謀惡事，不以不義為樂，卻與真理同樂；凡事包容，凡事相信，凡事盼望，凡事忍耐。」別把合一想得太玄或太俗，照保祿的指示腳踏實地一步一步走去，這是最好的方法；同時也勿把「合一」看成容易的事，以為可以一蹴而成，它需要長時期的鍛鍊。

若賴天主的助佑修到合一，或在修行的途中，切勿祇是你為我，我為你，還該追求共同的目標，哪裡有需要，就向哪裡跑，兩者一起跑，使第三者也來加入合一。記得有位智者曾說：「愛不是我注視你，你注視我，而是兩雙眼睛注視同一個目標，爭取同一個目標。」耶穌也曾說：「我不但為他們祈求，而且為那些因為他們的話而信從我的人祈求，願眾人都合而為一」。基督信徒在尋求「天人合一」時，往往祇想天主與我，遺漏了「我們」，或是說，把「我」字看作單數，而不想這「我」字應是複數。真正的合一之中，有著「我」、「你」、「他」。

我忽然想到一件頑物——磁鐵，可做為我們的好表率。普通的鐵塊若與磁鐵合在一起，假以時日，它也就成了磁鐵，能吸引其他的鐵塊。它把「我、你、他」合成為一體，基督信徒「天人合一」的靈修，不也該有這樣的精神嗎？

摘自「見證月刊」

本 週 讀 經

二零一二年五月廿日

宗 1:15-26； 若一 4:11-16； 若 17:11-19