

Week 29: sincero corde

This week's Collect asks that we might serve the Lord with a pure heart/*sincero corde*. It may seem on the surface a fairly simple request and in the externals of monastic life we are, or we try to be, faithful to the common life. But is that what is meant by *sincero corde* ?

In Chapter 4 of the Rule Benedict introduces us to *The Tools for Good Works*. We first met these good works in the ⁷Prologue when Benedict described them as part of the basic equipment required as we set out on the Lord's way.

The first nine tools seem to echo Old Testament teaching in a New Testament context. Benedict seems to be placing Christian practice firmly in its Jewish heritage: ⁸*Look to the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were dug*, whilst reminding us that ⁹ *the Rock was Christ*. The next twelve tools seem to offer us a more detailed Christian way of living, enlarging upon the earlier foundations of the Law, a way of life rooted in the New Testament Gospels and Epistles and in the tradition of the early Church. It is almost as though Benedict is asking a rhetorical question: *How does a Christian live?* And he himself gives the answer: the first and last tool

⁷ Verses 21-22

⁸ Isaiah 51.1

⁹ 1 Corinthians 10.4

forming the parameters of Christian living. ¹⁰*To deny oneself in order to follow Christ ... to prefer nothing to the love of Christ.*

Then Benedict's focus seems to change. He moves from an outward and visible expression of Christian commitment to the inner dispositions, the inner motivations, the nitty gritty of monastic conversatio. Indeed one may perform charitable acts for many reasons, but at the core of Christian living is the call to purity of heart, to a life lived in *sincero corde* without which ¹¹no-one will see God.

The implications of this inner transformation in Christ is revealed in how we deal with hardship and injustice because ¹²*you will know them by their fruits.* In the monastery the fruit of a life of deep prayer and intimacy with the Lord reveals itself in the quality of an individual sister's life in community: the quality of her self gift, and her self forgetfulness. It is reflected in her living out of that delicate balance between personal need for solitude and love for the sisters as expressed in the common life.

This inner transformation brings with it true self knowledge for it is the perception of reality that recognises God and the goodness of God and also enables us to recognise ourselves as we are, wounded and fragile,

¹⁰ Matthew 16.24; Mark 8.34; Luke 9.23

¹¹ Matthew 5.8

¹² Matthew 7.17-20

and yet loved by God. True self knowledge enables us to recognise our own self minus its clatter and clutter, and to love that fragile self which is me, those fragile selves which are us.

Sincero corde ? Benedict uses the phrase once only in his Rule, in chapter 72: ¹³ *Let them give to their abbess simple and sincere love. A love which extends to each and all: to the sisters, to our families and friends, to neighbours and to all who come to this house of prayer.*

For isn't that true christian living ? Life in Christ measured by its quality, not its quantity, a service rooted in a life so focused on Christ that nothing else matters but to mirror His self-gift in everything we say, in every thing we do.

May we respond sincero corde to all that the Lord asks of us, to the demands of our daily life together justly, gently and kindly that in recognising the Lord, we may also recognise ourselves.

¹³ RB 72.10