

The Holy Apostles, Continuers of the Savior's Activity, Role Models of Spiritual Shepherds and Pastoral Means Used by Them

Vasile Miron

*Arhim.Prof. Ph.D., Ovidius University from Constanta, Romania
vasile1960miron@yahoo.com*

ABSTRACT: The Holy Apostles have assimilated the evangelical teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ thoroughly and lived by it, transposing the ideal example of life of their divine Teacher into reality. By the weapon of word, by the power of prayer and the unparalleled example of their clean and holy life, these organs of the Holy Ghost and messengers of the godly teaching have renewed it, bringing it into the light of knowing the true God.

KEYWORDS: apostles, word, worship, prayer, role models, feeling, love

Introduction

During His earthly activity, the Savior Jesus Christ has reached hearts and conquered people's souls not only through the beauty and sublimity of His godly words, but also through the example of His holy life, because the example of deeds is more convincing and building than the spoken words. Fascinated by the teaching and wisdom of their divine Teacher as well as by His exemplary and impeccable moral life, the Holy Apostles have striven not only to convey His evangelical teaching to the people, but also to transpose the example of His life into reality, as Saint Apostle Paul said: *"I don't look back, I lengthen my stride, I run straight toward the goal to win the prize that God's heavenly call offers in Jesus Christ."* (Philippians 3:14).

Content

In the Christian pastoral care, the example of deeds plays an essential and decisive role, overcoming all obstacles and hostility and conquering the sole, because good deeds are the expression of inner feeling and the seal of faith and Christian love.

Following the example of the Savior, the Holy Apostles proved the most honorable workers of good deeds. They had clear conscience that *"in all things God works for the good of those who love him"* (Romans 8:28). They were charismatic and virtuous people, noble and strong characters who overcame the hostilities of their times, making the Savior's teaching throughout the Roman Empire and beyond its borders. The most important means they used in the pastoral care was the word, this great gift which God has bestowed man to communicate and promote moral goodness. *"How horrible it will be for me if I don't spread the Good News"* (1 Corinthians 9:16), exclaimed enthusiastically Saint Apostle Paul and Saint Apostle Peter, aware of the effect of the seed of word planted in the field of soul, he urges his followers to be skillful in the art of handling the word: *"Always be ready - said he - to defend your confidence when anyone asks you to explain it"* (1 Peter 3:15). This text can serve as basis for the priest's duty to be constantly trained, instructed and initiate his believers in the knowledge of creeds. Saint Apostle Paul also insists on this aspect, when he urges his spiritual sons thus: *"Everything you say should be kind and well thought out so that you know how to answer everyone"* (Colossians 4:6).

The truth was discovered through word, was engrafted with faith, hope was strengthened, suffering was healed, souls were invigorated and warmed and wills were hardened. This did not escape the Apostles, who have dedicated all their passion and sacrifice

in the service of spreading God's word. *"So be alert! Remember - said Saint Apostle Paul to the priests of Ephesus - that I instructed each of you for three years, day and night, with tears in my eyes"* (Acts 20:31). They have used the weapon and power of the word, but this depends largely on the man who uses it, of the certainty and authority he relies on, of the faith which drives him and ardour which guides and warms him. Being enlightened by the Holy Ghost and leading a wholesome life and having a healthy mind, free of passionate thoughts and wronged teachings, they have understood the essence of creeds, they were deeply convinced by these truths and lived by them, so that Saint Apostle Paul, in order to avoid any suspicion and contradiction, was often referring to himself, saying: *"You and God are witnesses of how pure, honest, and blameless we were in our dealings with you believers"* (1 Thessalonians 2:10). That is why the message of their sermon also resonated and echoed in the souls of their listeners because it came from the seething of their heart, from all their conviction and inner feeling and their eloquence was unparalleled, even though they were speaking in plain, grandiose, attractive and commonly understood language. *"Strengthening the faith and forging the will of the believers according to the principles of faith was a constant care and preoccupation of the Apostles"* (Belu 1955, 256).

The Apostles began to exercise their teaching function after the Resurrection, when the Savior lays down their specific commandment: *"So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have commanded you..."* (Mathew 28:19-20). They have considered this teaching ministry as fundamental duty and fulfilled it diligently, as true servants of the embodied Word and achievers of His mission, according to the urging of Saint Apostle Paul to his follower Timothy: *"Be ready to spread the word whether or not the time is right. Point out errors, warn people, and encourage them. Be very patient when you teach."* (2 Timothy 4:2).

When the Christians began to grow in numbers, the Holy Apostles have chosen the seven deacons to handle the housekeeping work, so they can persist in prayer and in service of the word (Acts 6: 4). Saint Apostle Paul gave so much importance to preaching the word of God, that he dared say to the community of Corinth that Christ has sent him not to baptize, but to bare the good news (1 Corinthians 1:17), although as we know, the sacramental service outweighs that of teaching. He was aware that the flame of faith is kindled upon hearing the word of God and the effectiveness of the work of grace depends of the power of faith which is stimulated by listening and assimilating the word. Therefore, he was entitled to say: *"But how can people call on Him if they have not believed in Him? How can they believe in Him if they have not heard His message? How can they hear if no one tells the Good News? How can people tell the Good News if no one sends them?"* (Romans 10:14-15). The basis of the Apostles' preaching as well as the fact that they had the awareness of being sent lie in these words.

Their preaching resonated and had the power of persuasion, because it was not only based on rational arguments, but it came from a clean, sincere and loving heart, where there was no trace of repulsion and resentment. Therefore, they were not answering evil with evil, were not vindictive and never hated those who spoke ill of them and persecuted them, but as they were cursed, they blessed, as they were persecuted, they endured, as they were blasphemed, they prayed, becoming the garbage of the world (1 Corinthians 4:12-13). Their generosity, patience and forgiveness, proved abundantly that they were transposing the commandment of love (John 13:34), left as testament by the Savior and therefore there was no contradiction by them between word and deed. They lived deeply what they preached and therefore, their preaching had spirit, moving the most hardened of hearts. Because it came from clean heart, warm and full of conviction, their word reached the heart and produced religious convictions, germinating clean thoughts and good intentions. They carried out this work of spiritual building of the believers *"with the soul overwhelmed by deep joy, no matter how hard the obstacles and adversities they had to face (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). The Apostle feels so totally integrated and absorbed in the work of bringing the listeners to the Gospel,*

that his life has no other meaning other than this activity. Therefore, the interest for his physical life drops up to annihilation, as he is concentrated fully on the activity of evangelizer.” (Belu 1955, 257)

Another pastoral tool used by the Holy Apostles, especially by Saint Apostle Paul was the divine worship which they were attending regularly, both at services in the Jewish temple and in synagogues. Ever since the apostolic century, the divine worship was *“the means of manifestation of religiosity and maintaining and deepening the spiritual bond with God. It originated and was implemented from the teaching of Jesus Christ, especially in the laying down of the Holy Eucharist, a Sacrament at the core of Holy Liturgy.”* (Călugăr 2005, 260). Saint Evangelist Luke tells us that after the Savior’s Ascension to heaven, the Apostles were lingering *“They were always in the temple, where they praised God”* (Luke 24:53). It was here where they were praying (Acts 3:1) and also here they were preaching the word of God (Acts 5:24,42) and were performing the ritual of the breaking of bread (Acts II, 46) that is they were performing the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Holy Liturgy. Saint Apostle Paul began his missionary activity in the synagogue (Acts 18:4), where he spoke to the people every Saturday, bringing many Jews and Pagans to the new Christian faith. In Corinth he *“lived in Corinth for a year and a half and taught God’s word to them”* (Acts 18:11), and in Ephesus he spoke boldly in the synagogue for three months (Acts 19: 8).

Another pastoral tool used by the Holy Apostles during their missionary activity was prayer, because *“the typical atmosphere of catechism, of prayer and Christian humility, through it warming the soul of the believers and creating the state of inner feeling of the religious life, but also of externalization in Christian actions useful to the Church and all her sons.”* (Călugăr 2005, 238). In the midst of the community of Jerusalem *“All these were persevering with one accord in prayer with the women, and with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers”* (Acts 1:14).

Prayer was the oxygen of their spiritual life. Saint Apostle Paul was constantly praying for the growth of the spiritual life of the new converts to Christianity: *“For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit by the Gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I have kept a remembrance of you always in my prayers”* (Romans 1:9-10), he told the believers in Rome and those in Corinth he assured thus: *“This is also what we pray for: your perfection”* (II Corinthians 13:9). The Holy Apostles were masters of prayer. They made the prayer their utmost preoccupation, urging the believers to pray each day, to be worthy of God’s gift and help, Descendant from *“Father of the Lights”* (James 1:17) only through prayer. *“Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in everything. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for all of you”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17), said Saint Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians and Saint Apostle Peter recommends the practice of prayer as a weapon and shield against devilish temptations and machinations: *“Be sober and vigilant. For your adversary, the devil, is like a roaring lion, traveling around and seeking those whom he might devour”* (1 Peter 5:8).

Aware that the prayer strengthens the spirit of brotherly community, deepens the faith and builds the spiritual foundation of the new life, the Apostle of nations urges the Christian communities to pray for each other and the progress of his apostolate (Ephesians 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:25). He often underscores the value of the communal prayer, yet he also does not ignore the importance of private prayer (Acts XX, 7-11; Ephesians 5:19-20). With both types of prayer, the Apostles have molded the new man (Galatians 6:15), managing to create a community of saints in the midst of a corrupt world. With the help of prayer, they have polished and chiseled the stones on which they built the Church of Christ day by day, in its meaning of spiritual body and divine-human establishment. For this reason, they were always leaning with care and compassion to the newborn believers for the new life in Christ. *“My little sons, I am giving birth to you again, until Christ is formed in you”* (Galatians 4:19).

This exclamation shows the tireless ardour of the apostle yearning to turn the wanderers for whom he was praying day and night back to the path of salvation. *“For night and day, ever more abundantly, we are praying that we may see your face, and that we may complete*

those things that are lacking in your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:10), said the great apostle of nations to his spiritual sons, converted to the new Christian faith and when they were growing in knowing and experiencing the evangelical deeds and virtues he felt a deep satisfaction and spiritual joy (1 Thessalonians 2:18-20; Philippians 4:1), like a mother constantly caring for her sons. Including in his thought and mind of those near and far, he strove to be ever more present in the midst of the communities of believers to guide them and improve them spiritually and this gave him utmost satisfaction. The other Apostles have also worked in this sense, but Saint Apostle Paul excelled the most, fulfilling his vocation of spiritual guide in exemplary fashion which was planted in him *“from his mother’s womb”* (Galatians 1:15).

The Holy Apostles’ prayer was based on the Holy Scripture they knew from the regular quotations and interpretations from the temple and synagogue. They had to find the most adequate arguments to justify the faith they were preaching, but first of all, they lived what they had to teach others. Living in the light of revealed truth and evangelical precepts was compelling by their very nature of shepherds and their high calling of communal workers with God to the work of restoration and existential renewal of the human being (1 Corinthians 3:9). Strengthening the faith and channeling the will of the believers in full agreement with the principles of Christian teaching was the Holy Apostles’ utmost and constant care and preoccupation (Acts 14:22; 15:41; 18:23, 27). Through the spiritual preaching and guidance of the Apostles, *“the Church did not demand provisional adherence to its teachings, but absolute and final faith. It is true. Yet these teachings have also been founded initially on experience and constantly verified”* (Oltramare 1925, 34). Saint Apostle Paul *„has fought idleness in word and deed”* (Mercier 1933, 185).

He gives himself an example of diligence and zeal, saying: *„For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you”* (2 Thessalonians 3:7-8). Therefore, their catechist teaching was preeminently pragmatic and had an instructive-educational purpose, to forge Christian characters and build religious personalities. *„Therefore, their catechist work did not stop in a conference room or at religious sermons, but was continued in Church at the actual mass for catechumens and the religious life with experiments of social Christianity”* (Bulacu 2009, 25).

In their pastoral and catechetical activity, they took into account the apperceptive organ that is the particularity of their listeners, adjusting the teaching and work methods to the specifics of various categories of people they were addressing, their age, temperament and level of education, because the gifts are different and not all listeners are equally gifted. There was one way to address the Pagans and another to address the Jews or those more or less enlightened. Also, they were scholarly and systematically outlining their creed, starting from simple to complex, from concrete to abstract, carefully following the process of assimilation and living of the creeds and rules of moral life. *“I gave you milk to drink, not solid food. For you were not yet able”* (1 Corinthians 3:2), said Saint Apostle Paul to the newly converted to Christianity. Unlike the other Apostles, Saint Apostle Paul has also explored the profane culture, illustrating his sermon with examples and quotations from the Pagan classic literature, from public law and his contemporary historiography and philosophy which he has researched meticulously. All these rhetorical elements borrowed from the laymen culture, conveyed the sermon briskness, naturalness, spontaneity, erudition and oratorical pathos.

They never attributed the success of their sermon to the craftsmanship of their words, but to the grace of God working through them. They were aware that *“And so, neither he who plants, nor he who waters, is anything, but only God, who provides the growth”* (1 Corinthians 3:7). All their toil of molding and guidance was driven and warmed by the flame of love, to which they dedicate famous hymns (1 Corinthians 13) and which they define marvelously in paradigms, syntagmas and appellatives, as Saint Apostle Paul outlines it in the advices to his follower Timothy: *“But you, man of God, pursue righteousness,*

godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:2). Naturally, these fruits of love are also obvious signs of the spiritual joy, “*and such shepherds, like clean mirrors of the Sun of justice shall reflect and share to the flock light and spiritual warmth*” (Galeriu 1978, 547).

Because the life of the first Christians was built on the foundation of love, „*The Church has made an obligation for its members from the preoccupation for the fellow man, for his well-being, thriving and happiness*” (Oltramare 1925, 26), totally complying the Savior’s teaching. Who has laid down for us the commandment of love as ground rule of Christian coexistence (John XIII, 34). The Church considers Saint Apostle Paul “*the apostle of Christian love par excellence*” (Mercier 1933, 186). He sings the praises to this virtue, practices it exemplary and warmly recommends it to his spiritual sons to put it into practice: “*But concerning the charity of brotherhood, we have no need to write to you. For you yourselves have learned from God that you should love one another*” (1Thessalonians 4:9).

The Person of Christ the Savior and His divine teaching were the barometer which the Apostles used to guide their life and pastoral-missionary activity. They were aware that they cannot remain steadfast in faith, clean in soul, patient in temptation and unaffected by passions and immoral deeds, except well-grounded and permanently rooted in Christ, in His Spirit, for “*For no one is able to lay any other foundation, in place of that which has been laid, which is Christ Jesus*” (1 Corinthians 3:11). “*I know in whom I have believed, and I am certain that he has the power to preserve what was entrusted to me*” (2 Timothy 1:12), would say Saint Apostle Paul to his follower Timothy. Therefore, “*Christ was working in them through their words and deeds*” (Staniloaie 1947, 22).

Conclusions

In all their missionary and pastoral activity, the Apostles were driven by the love for Christ the Savior, about whom Saint Apostle Paul confesses so beautifully and convincingly: „*Then who will separate us from the love of Christ?*” (Romans 8:35). Looking into the founded communities, He sees the fruit of His toil and remains impressed that His followers remained steadfast and consistent in His commandments and urges, as He Himself said: “*We ought to give thanks always to God for you, brothers, in a fitting manner, because your faith is increasing greatly, and because the charity of each of you toward one another is abundant*” (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

Therefore, the complex methods of work, the craftsmanship, knowledge, wisdom, pedagogical tact and dedication of the Holy Apostles remain over centuries landmarks and major coordinates of the pastoral and missionary activity of the priests of our holy altars and their wholesome and saintly life, lived genuinely in the spirit of the Gospel of Christ, remains for us the guideline on which we orientate our steps in life in the work of salvation.

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