

The strength of desire

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio
Superior General

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Sacra Congregatio Emorum, et Amorum S. R. C. Cardinalium Negotiorum, et Consultationibus Episcoporum, et Regularium preposita, referente Emo Scotti Ponente, attenta relatione Vicarii Capitularis Parisiensis, et aliis videndis, consideratis considerandis, ac re mature perpensa, exhibitas Constitutiones Congregationis sub titulo Sacratissimorum Cordium Jesu et Mariæ, et Adorationis perpetuæ S. Sacramenti Altaris, una cum Statutis juxta præinsertum Tenorem approbat, atque confirmat: Ita tamen ut quoties in Capitulis Generalibus enunciati Instituti Decreta, et Statuta noviter edi contigerit, eadem subjiciantur judicio Sacre Congregationis, ad effectum obtinendi necessariam ipsius approbationem,

ac confirmationem; et ad Dominum Secretarium cum Sanctissimo. Romæ die no: Decembris 1816: — — — — —

Et facta de præmissis relatione Sanctissimo Domino Nostro ad infrascripto Domino Secretario in Audientia diei 10: Januarii currentis anni 1817. Sanctitas Sua benigne annuit in omnibus juxta Votum ejusdem Sacre Congregationis. Romæ Decem

H. Card. Matthæus

The two final pages of the document of the Pontifical approbation of the Constitutions

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“By what authority are you doing these things?” (Mk 11:28), the leaders of the temple ask Jesus. Why does this man act this way? “Where did this man get all this?” (Mk 6:2), exclaim the astonished and scandalized people of his home town. It is a good question: Jesus, what moves you inside to make you act the way you do? What is within your heart? What are you seeking? What do you want?

“If you knew the gift of God!” (Jn 4:10), Jesus sighs. If they knew the compassion that Jesus feels facing people who are wandering around lost (Mk 6:34); if they knew that stirring passion that united him with his Father in heaven (Jn 4:34)... Perhaps then they would understand.

So, too, it is with us. Many actions are not understood if one does not know that passion from which they arise and the desire that guides them. At times a brother may seem to us to be pigheaded, stubborn, impertinent, disproportionately engaged in a particular task or initiative. We can superciliously judge him or even attribute deviant intentions to him. That is, until the day we take the time to listen to him, trying to understand his desires and motivations, and then we discover a passionate soul, who aches from the suffering of the poor, or the abandonment of the little ones, or the hopeful look of the young. That day awakens our respect for that brother, perhaps our admiration, too, and maybe we might even feel the desire to let ourselves be infected by the fire that resides in him.

“The meaning of God’s love is no longer known”, the Good Father complained, faced with the sorry state of the Church and society in France in his time. Because of his character and vocation, Fr. Coudrin could not acquiesce to this callousness toward God, and was, throughout his life, a man of energy and action. Often he encouraged his friends to have zeal and resolve in the stormy times in which they lived. He himself was so zealous and so resolute in his own positions that there were plenty of people who considered him a “dense and narrow-minded spirit” (Châteaubriand, March 15, 1829).

Where did the Good Father get all of this zeal and energy? From where did such a vehement desire come? Without doubt, from that intense interior experience that led him to say: “He (God) alone is good. His will is the only good. Outside of his heart, all is bitterness ... I myself feel it. All is nothing except to love God” (July 8, 1828). Hence his passion for “reintegrating men into the trust and love of Jesus Christ” (December 6, 1816). As the Rule of Life reminds us (no. 24), Fr. Coudrin “promoted the most demanding projects, having himself the daring courage of the humble”.

In my visits to the Congregation, I have also come across **passionate brothers**. In order to understand them better, it is good to look into the roots of the fire that burns within them. It helps a lot to listen, with respect and interest, to the way in which they themselves recount certain experiences that have marked them throughout their lives. They are often experiences that mix faith in Jesus (being suddenly amazed by some fascinating aspect of the Lord) and direct contact with poor, abandoned or suffering persons. The determination that is shown in their apostolic commitments has its origin in something that aches in their soul, something that makes them cry out "it cannot be!", and mobilizes all of their energies. To act boldly, sublime ideas are not enough; one also has to get angry, to feel in one's own flesh the evil bite that harms others and to stand up ready to give one's life to ease the pain of those people God asks you to love.

My humble experience convinces me of this. I remember that, a long time ago, barely a year after my ordination, from the window of my room, I saw how a boy was searching in a garbage container. I leaned out, called him and we spoke a little. He was looking for a piece of junk to give to his little sister. Seeing that scene, a voice cried out within me, it cannot be! Something has to be done! Soon after, that flash resulted in some parish actions with children in the neighborhood and with unemployed families.

Similar things happened to me in Africa that also resulted in more or less appropriate actions. Recently, direct contact with refugees from the Middle East in European reception camps has inflamed, with even more intensity, the desire to put in action the work of mercy of welcome. It cannot be that this is happening at our own door and that we keep ourselves distracted with business as usual! Suddenly, the Gospel texts become crystal clear: "but his own people did not accept him" (Jn 1:11); "there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7); "a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35); "When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors..." (Lk 14:12); "you are all brothers" (Mt 23:8)... What emerges from this type of interior rage, for example, is an initiative like the one of hosting immigrants at the General House. I understand some might find such action out of proportion or unsuitable. Still, when the fire, of which I am speaking to you, burns in one's heart, what one cannot understand is why we do not do that and a great deal more.

Certainly one has to **discern the desires**, because, often, they can be simply the product of our natural character, or the fruit of an egoism disguised by beautiful intentions. In the Congregation there are also desires that kill us, that reduce our apostolic strength, or that sadly make us worldly. They are the desires that focus on ourselves: securing our standard of living, protecting our health, keeping us surrounded by a gratifying environment, feeling important and greatly appreciated, getting vocations at any price... All of this can be deceptive and narcissistic.

But if the desires arise from others' needs and the pain that causes us to see the dignity of the poor trampled, then we can trust them because they draw us closer to Jesus' desire for the Kingdom.

"Aware of the power of evil", our Constitutions say in their first chapter (no. 4), "that opposes the Father's love and disfigures his design for the world, we wish to identify with the attitude of Jesus and with His reparative work".

Let us not forget that the power of evil acts within ourselves. That is why, this Christmas, we are celebrating the fact that the child who is born is called Jesus, "because he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). Our sin, my sin, is there and is working.

The power of evil is also acting in the world, and it makes the most helpless, the smallest, and the poorest suffer most of all.

Welcome everything that makes us more aware of that power of evil and, as a result, fuels our outrage and our desire to fight it. Welcome the humility that makes us recognize ourselves as sinners. Welcome the contact that we might have with the impoverished and marginalized of this earth. The more we are hurt by the pain of others, the more the fire of Jesus' heart will burn in us and the greater will be our courage to leave what we may have to leave and boldly devote ourselves to the work of God in this world. If, on the contrary, the pain of the poor does not manage to affect us, nor their suffering anger us, I am very afraid that we end up quietly being overcome by the sadness of the rich young man (Mc 10,22) who, for as much as he had and as rich as he was, could not respond to Jesus.

Brothers: in this **Bicentennial** year of the pontifical approbation of the Congregation, we have asked you to reread the Constitutions. In doing so, do not forget that this text is the fruit of a burning fire. It arises from a **pain**: pain for the power of evil over people, pain because the love of God is not known. It is fueled by a **passion**: the passion that burns in the hearts of Jesus and Mary. It points to a **desire**: the desire to foster the life of a community that dedicates itself, body and soul, to the reparative mission of Christ.

As a follow up to the reading, be attentive to your own desires. Make a note of them and discuss them with your brothers in community. Our task is not to negotiate our small personal interests between us, it is, rather, to put into practice today the dream that God began dreaming in our Founders.

God continues to speak to us through the calls that he whispers in the hearts of our brothers, as he once spoke to Joseph in dreams. Like Joseph who just woke up and took action (Mt 1:24 and 2:14), let us hope we also might know how to listen, decide and act.



**to us
a son is given
(Is 9,6)**

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