

Taste and see

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio
Superior General

INFO SSCC Brothers No 119 – December 4, 2017



“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the stalwart one who takes refuge in him,” exclaims Psalm 34 (v.9) The first letter of Peter quotes this Psalm when it says, “for you have tasted that the Lord is good,” referring to Jesus Christ, who is “a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God.” (v. 4) This same image is what the Good Father had in mind when he wrote to the sisters of the community in Le Mans (8/7/1828) and tells them, **“Taste God along the path of life (...)** Outside his heart there is nothing but bitterness (...) All is nothing, except the love of God (...) That is true happiness.”

“Savor” in the New Testament

The verb used in First Peter (γεύομαι) appears fifteen times in the New Testament in different contexts and with diverse meanings.

For example, the headwaiter at the **wedding** in Cana “tastes” the water changed into wine (Jn. 2:9) and, even without knowing where it came from, recognizes that it is “good wine.” Jesus has the opposite experience on **Golgotha**. He “tastes” the wine mixed with gall (Mt. 27:34) but he refuses to drink it.

The letter to the Hebrews uses the same verb to explain Cristian initiation (or "enlightenment", as the primitive church called it), in which they "tasted the heavenly gift" and "the good Word of God." (Heb 6:4-5)

Death is also tasted. Jesus "tasted" death to save everyone (Heb. 2:9). In the eschatological discourses, Jesus warns that some will not "taste" death until the coming of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 16:28, Mk. 9:1, Lk. 9:27). The one who keeps his Word will not "taste" death forever (Jn. 8:52; it's interesting to note that in the preceding verse, Jesus says that they will not "see" death; again "taste/see" appear together.)

As we can see, what is "savored" is always something that touches the heart, that penetrates to the depth of existence: the joy of new wine in the Kingdom (the wedding), the desolation of abandonment (Golgotha), the power of the Spirit and the Word of God (initiation into the faith), goodness, death.

What does it mean "to savor"?

Like Psalm 34, the Good Father makes a connection between "savoring" God and finding true happiness. It is not easy to speak of happiness, because when it all comes down to it, we don't know what it consists in. However, we do sense that happiness has a lot to do with anything that has **the power to move us** and make the tears flow, what makes us quiver within and fills our spirit with air and light, what, because it's so intimate and splendidly disconcerting, our modesty hides from the eyes of others, with what really moves us and makes us appreciate some things enthusiastically and viscerally reject others.

So when we speak of "savoring", we don't mean to get into a wise discussion of great concepts. We are all able to do that quite well. We are quite able to hold our own, more or less, in a religious discussion using the language currently in fashion. We admit that this type of talk is often only good for letting us hide behind a mask, not exposing ourselves to a true encounter with the other. In the final analysis, everything stays the same, nothing changes. Apostolic courage comes from within, and not from solemn declarations of principles.

So what are we talking about? It has to do with what Saint Ignatius of Loyola says in his Spiritual Exercises (n. 2): "*For it is not knowing much, but **realizing and relishing things interiorly**, that contents and satisfies the soul.*" To the extent that our ideas and reasoning, our plans and programs, connect with our deepest affections, we can be better disposed to the process of conversion.

Conversion does not take place without struggle. The experience of the saints shows that God's goodness is really savored **when we go through trial**, when we risk our life and accept suffering. This is what happened in the Exodus of Israel, in the Pasch of Jesus, in

the ministry of the Good Father, in the dedication of Damien, in the death of the martyrs. This is what it means to enter into the "crucified life" of the Lord.

This taste of God within is what causes us to change. In other words: if God does not impact our heart, it is useless to waste our time discussing projects and strategies. "Unless the LORD build the house, they labor in vain who build." (Ps. 127:1) This "house" to be built, brother, is your heart and mine.

The process of **the upcoming General Chapter** is meant to get us into this whole matter of "savoring". We already asked about your "desires" and you were asked to put your thoughts in the form of a prayer (Questionnaire 1). Soon you will receive a second questionnaire, where we will ask you again to express the movements you experience within. It's certainly a methodology that is rather ambitious, which will make some of us uncomfortable. To look into what God is doing within us requires prayer, silence, detachment and humility. Just getting to the point where we can name the inner movements of the soul requires a good deal of spiritual wisdom and a disciplined effort to overcome psychological blocks that are a burden for all of us. What's more, many of us may find it embarrassing sharing these things with our brothers in community.

In spite of it all, it's good that more and more we dare to **share from the heart**. It's a nice reminder of the fundamental reason for our life in common: faith in God and in Jesus. What we know and we share from the heart, is what can really give satisfaction and meaning to our life and lead us to give ourselves in complete freedom to a specific mission.

Apostolic discernment

We are an apostolic community. We don't analyze our feelings just to wallow in our own psyche or to "feel good" at all costs. We take time to savor what we taste within for two reasons:

- a) To search for the direction **God's mission** is to take in the real circumstances in which we live. This will help us better be part of it
- b) To know the human spirit more profoundly, so as to connect more effectively with **the people to whom we are sent**. If we understand what is happening in our own insides and in others, we will be better able to help others to be affected by God's goodness.

"To savor God along the journey of life" is a test that measures our Congregation's capacity today to be a place where people can be truly initiated into the Christian life and the love of God. It is also the way for us to find that courage with which the Good Father left his granary, **willing even to die if necessary**.

Christmas

Look closely at the image that is on the first page of this INFO. It shows a young couple, overcome by fatigue and sleep, protecting the newborn in their arms. Looking at it a feeling of tenderness and kindness springs from within. Perhaps it is a refugee family, fleeing the horrors of war and finding no welcome anywhere. And then perhaps we may also feel a wave of indignation and anger.



When faith tells us that here is “**God-with-us**” (Mt. 1:23), the heart leans out over the bottomless abyss of the mystery of saving love and we are left without words. In the presence of Jesus, one can only “savor” within.

We prepare to celebrate Christmas with the whole Church. In Luke’s account (Lk. 2:1-20), everything invites us to “**taste and see**”. In Bethlehem, what happens is seen (the glory of the Lord enwrapped in light, the sign of a child laying in a manger) and, at the same time, it is savored (it provokes fright, admiration, praise...) “And Mary kept all these things (the events that are seen), reflecting on them in her heart (tasting them within).” (Lk. 2:19)

So, let us open our eyes to see and our heart to savor. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten our senses. Let us speak about these things as we prepare for the General Chapter during this year. Our authenticity as people who are believers and who are consecrated depends on **something happening within us**; something which is capable of exciting us and bring us even to the point of dying for it with joy. Merry Christmas!

