

Chapter Five

VERBO VIVERE, VERBO SE REGERE

SUMMARY.—The third quality of the Spouse : “to live for the Word,” this life is summed up in the word “Fervour” – Love is the support of this life – The “Reign of the Word” in the soul : its universal character – The resulting fruit for the Spouse.

A fidelity which is constant and all-embracing necessarily enables the soul “to live for the Word”: *Verbo vivere*. This is the third virtue necessary for the spouse.

What does “to live” mean as applied to the soul? The soul lives by the movement and exercise of its faculties. She “lives for the Word” when she does not concern herself, nor act save for the interests and glory of her Spouse; when she applies her memory, imagination, intelligence, heart, will, all her powers, all her activity in the service of the Word, to know him better, love him more, and also to make him better known and loved by others. The soul who lives only for the Spouse does not seek her own satisfaction in anything, nor her personal interest; she seeks solely the good pleasure and glory of her Lord and Master.

In a spiritual manner she is jealous for the honour of her Spouse; the acts of betrayal, infidelity, the injuries inflicted by so many souls wound her, and stimulate her ardour and generosity : *Defectio tenuit me, pro peccatoribus derelinquentibus legem tuam.*¹ She gives herself wholly, gives all she possesses that the Spouse may be honoured, exalted, loved. She makes her own that prayer of Our Lord, “Father, glorify Thy Son”²; she employs herself without ceasing to realise this glorification, first in herself, then in others. Devotion, properly speaking, is that prompt, cheerful, tranquil movement of the generous soul, which causes her to forget herself in the interests of her Spouse and those of His Church.

But in this aspect what is the mainspring which, as it were, both animates and stimulates her? It is love.³ Love, the master of the will, possesses all the roads leading to the heart, all the powers of the soul, all the springs of its activity. Given up to love, the soul has nothing of its own, lives no longer for itself, but entirely for its Well-Beloved. “What is love if it is not to have always and everywhere the same will, eliminating absolutely the slightest contrary desire, thus effecting a total subjugation of the heart?”⁴ Such a love transforms, makes the soul like to its Spouse. Listen to St. Bernard, from whom we have borrowed the theme of our conference whilst he tells of the astonishing grandeur of this union: “Such a conformity with the divine will marries the soul with the Word, to which it is similar in its spiritual nature, for loving Him as it is loved by Him, it is now similar in Will. What can be sweeter than

this conformity of wills? What more desirable than this love, which renders the soul discontented with the teachings of man, makes her approach the Word with confidence, rest united to Him, remain contentedly near Him, and consult Him in all things, being as eager to know as her intelligence makes her capable of knowing. This contract of marriage is truly holy, truly spiri-

¹ Ps. 119(118):53

² Jn 17:1

³ Cf. *In Christ the Ideal of the Monk*, Chap. VII, pp. 183-187; exterior observance ought to be animated by love.

⁴ Bossuet, *Méditations sur l'Évangile*. LI Jour. Ed. Marbeau, p. 284.

tual; but the term contract is not sufficiently expressive; it is a commingling, a veritable embrace, such an identification of wills that the two make but one.”⁵

The entire conformity of view, of feelings, of wills that St. Bernard depicts here, is only possible inasmuch as the soul allows herself in all things “to be conducted by the Word”: *Verbo se regere*.

More even than “the eyes of the servant are on the hands of her mistress,”⁶ to know her orders and execute them, the true spouse of Christ feels herself interiorly compelled to turn a glance of love upon her Spouse to find out the indications of His will. In this manner she continuously contemplates the sacred person of Jesus, in the various stages of His life and in His mysteries.

Above all, in this contemplation she loves to dwell upon “the mountain of myrrh”⁷ that is, the foot of the Cross, because by His blood the Spouse conquered her. Her joy is to traverse again in thought the life of the Word. She regards Him in the bosom of the Father, in the immaculate womb of the Virgin, where He became incarnate, in the crib at Bethlehem, in the workshop at Nazareth, follows Him to the desert, on the roads of Judea, enters with Him the Temple and the synagogues. Accompanies Him to Bethany, to the last supper, the Garden of Olives, the Pretorium and Golgotha; she dwells with Him on Calvary, sharing the pains and humiliations of her bleeding Spouse. With Magdalen on the morning of the Resurrection, she recognises in Him the “Rabboni” and adores. Receives His divine benediction the day of the Ascension, and at Pentecost the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Everywhere it is the same Word, the Lord and Master, Friend and Spouse that she seeks, in order to discover the secrets of His works, the sentiment of His soul, to measure “with eyes illuminated with love, the breadth and length and height and depth of the mystery of His love.”⁸ Lovingly she scrutinises all His actions that they may become the models for her own, re-reads His words that they may be springs of wisdom and light; judges all things in the clearness of the Gospel. What Christ loved she loves, what He hated – sin – she hates, says “Amen” to all that He reveals, and “*fiat*” to all that He commands or permits.

“The Spouse,” says St. Bernard, “loves ardently, but being so beloved, to herself she seems to love but little, even when she surrenders herself entirely to love; and in this she is right. For what great thing can she do to repay so precious a love – but a little grain of dust – how with all her powers can she love in return the supreme Majesty, who has been beforehand with love, and shown Himself entirely devoted to the work of her salvation?”⁹ Entirely consecrated to the Lord, her soul is completely under the domination of the Spouse, He who “draws all things to Himself,” draws her to Him. *Omnia traham ad meipsum*.¹⁰ The Word possesses her entirely, directs everything in her, *Omnia subiecisti sub pedibus ejus*: He reigns in her as the adored Master, as Sovereign whose power is uncontested, as Supreme Lover, whose love conquers everything; reigns over all the desires of her heart, reigns alone, because she only seeks always and in all things His good pleasure: “I do always the things that please Him”: *Quæ placita sunt ei facio*

⁵ In *Cantica*, sermo LXXXIII.

⁶ Ps. 123(122):2

⁷ Sg 4:6

⁸ Cf. Eph. 1:18; 3:18.

⁹ *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*. Chap. V (*Traduction nouvelle* par H.M. Delsart, p. 39.)

¹⁰ Jn 12:32

semper.¹¹ The soul can then really appropriate to herself the words of the Apostle: “I live, now not I but Christ liveth in me”: *Vivo autem jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*.¹² “Christ is her life, and to die is gain,¹³ because then the hour will sound when the soul will be always united to Him who is her all in all.”

Far from being vanquished in love, the Spouse remains always first and foremost. He shows Himself to the soul full of tenderness, repeats those words which are the adequate expression of His love: “All my things are thine, and thine are Mine” *Mea omnia tua sunt, et tua mea sunt*. The bounty of the divine Spouse equals His tenderness; He brings to His bride to sustain, adorn and beautify her, the price of His sufferings, the riches of His merits, the nobility and wealth of His divinity.

In this happy state that promise of the Psalmist is accomplished in the virgin: “The Lord ruleth me, I shall want nothing.” *Dominus regit me et nihil mihi deerit*.¹⁴ She proves the realisation of the prayer addressed to God in the Pontifical for the consecration of virgins, at the moment when the solemn

promises are exchanged: “Be to her, O Lord, honour, joy and delight. Grant her comfort in sadness, light in doubt, protection in injustice ; give her patience in tribulation, abundance in poverty; in fasting be her food and beverage, in illness her remedy and cure. May she find all things in Thee who desires to love Thee above all”:¹⁵ *In te habeat omnia quem diligere appetat super omnia*.

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Next in the series: Chapter Six, *Means of Union with the Spouse*

¹¹ Jn 8:29

¹² Gal 2:20

¹³ Phil 1:21

Jn 17:10

¹⁴ Ps 23(22):1

¹⁵ Pontifical for the consecration of virgins.

