

ST JOSEPH SCHOOL FOR LEADERS

How to train members to be responsible and obedient

Introduction

As we read in art. 3 of the Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* we understand that the school of St Joseph was, for Our Lord, the school of witness. Therefore, we can conclude that in order to succeed in forming responsible and obedient members, we can learn two great lessons from St Joseph: the first is the power of example; and the second is the importance of having an angel to accompany us.

The power of example

Pope St Paul VI taught: *"...for the Church, the witness of an authentically Christian life, abandoned in God, in a communion that nothing should interrupt, but equally given to one's neighbour with boundless zeal, is the primary means of evangelisation. "Contemporary man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers," we said last year to a group of lay people, "or if he listens to teachers he does so because they are witnesses" (Evangelii Nuntiandi 41).*

Surely St Joseph was the best human example that Jesus had for his formation and what he learned from St Joseph he learned through the exemplarity of his life. This is so important in the formation of a Christian disciple that St Paul says: *"Make yourselves imitators of me, as I am of Christ".* (1 Cor 11:1) and the Lord Jesus himself said to St Peter: *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has sought you out to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when you have repented, confirm your brethren".* (Lk 22, 31-32)

The testimony of the cell leader or another member entrusted with the direct training of another brother is the best teaching material one can devise. There is a phrase attributed to St Francis of Assisi that says: *"Be careful how you live your life, perhaps it is the only gospel that people will ever read".*

An accompanying angel

For the member to benefit from this lesson in life, something is needed that St Joseph treasured and certainly passed on to Our Lord, it is the presence of an accompanying Angel.

We read in the Old Testament that God sent the Archangel Saint Raphael to accompany and instruct Tobias on his journey (cf. Tb 5:1-15) and the Archangel manifested himself in the form of a man, as a companion on the journey. On the other hand, St Joseph saw the angel in a dream by mystical revelation, but we need companions to accompany us as angels, to share our daily bread: indeed, the verb "to accompany" originates from the Latin *"cum panis"*, the one with whom one shares the bread.

Just as the angel accompanied St Joseph and our Lord accompanied his disciples closely, it is also very important for us to value this service or ministry of accompanying members, to form them by example.

Alliance to "cell pacts"

Once we understand the centrality of these two elements, the power of example and the role of an "accompanying angel", we must also understand that, for them to be put into practice effectively, it is necessary to establish a solid alliance between the one who assumes the role of formator and the member to be accompanied on the path of formation.

The formation of an obedient and responsible character in a cell member depends on commitment and covenant, therefore the member must make a concrete covenant to be formed in the process of personal accompaniment and this covenant can be expressed through a covenant of love.

The formation of those who want to serve must consist first of all in being willing to die.

It is true that we cannot give our lives for our brothers and sisters in the same way as Jesus, who accepted to die for us, a vicarious and substitutionary death. But, of course, there are many other ways to give and share life: to devote time to our brothers and sisters, to believe that it is always possible to make an extra effort, to trust, to make ourselves available, to be outspoken, responsible, to pray and even to fast for our brothers and sisters.

We can consider that this process of the practical formation of a member in obedience and responsibility requires in concrete terms that at least ten life commitments be made:

1. Commitment of Loyalty (cf. Col 3:12-14) - The member must be united to Christ, remaining faithful to the principles of the Gospel which are manifested through participation in the life of the community, obedience to the pastors, and through the reciprocity of Christian love. Generating strong loyalty to such a way of life and standing firm even in the face of intense persecution and opposition should be a goal firmly anchored in the heart of every member; this is what we call loyalty.

2. Commitment to honesty (cf. Eph 4:25-27) - This is a crucial condition for growth, because being honest is a matter of character, a rule of life, filial piety and obedience to God. Being honest is a decision, because being honest is about personal values. Life in communion, whether in a couple or in the Christian community, requires honesty, because it is one of the most important qualities of a happy relationship; not lying means choosing transparency over appearance.

3. Commitment to transparency (cf. I Jn 1:6) - Jesus taught that the lamp is lit in the house to give light to all, and that it is not wise to hide it under the bed (cf. Mt 5:13-15), which is why Scripture exhorts us to walk in truth towards one another; and here is a very valuable teaching for the cell which, like a house, needs to be illuminated by the light of Christ through the life of each disciple. The light will shine when others see the good things that are done by those who have been regenerated; and so they too will praise the Father.

4. Commitment to sensitivity (cf. Jn 2:1-12) - It is necessary to cultivate a Christian life of relationships that sensitise members to the needs of others. In this sense, we clearly understand how the cell is a school of sensitivity, and that if we refuse to learn the lesson, we begin to feel marginalised because of our own self-defence mechanisms, which inevitably lead to self-exclusion. With the miracle of the wedding feast at Cana, we learned from Mary Most Holy what it means to be attentive to others, and we must walk in the same direction to be a community in which mutual relations are marked by sensitivity.

5. Commitment to self-conquest (cf. Mt 28:19-20) - No one can remain stationary or perpetually under guard in the authentic Christian community. In order to move forward, each member of the community must accept a COMMITMENT TO PROGRESS. It will serve little purpose if only a few play their part; all must commit themselves.

6. Covenant of responsibility (cf. Pv 27:17) - The role of the body of Christ is to transform us into saints. In society, being independent is a sign of maturity. One grows up to be independent, and the highest aspiration is not to be accountable to anyone. Is this the best path to fruitful relationships and to our maturity? The standard for the Christian is interdependence, not independence or dependence.

7. Commitment to trust (cf. Ecc 27:17) - Trust makes us different from the world and similar to God. Our generation has produced a host of covenant breakers and compromise-makers, people who do not understand the nature of loyalty! But through our cells, God is raising up a people who will testify that trust and integrity are values that can be lived.

8. Commitment to prayer (cf. Jas 5:16) - In the cell we can care for each other through a commitment to prayer, because when members pray for each other, the spiritual environment is completely free from bitterness and capriciousness. If the member is part of the body, it is necessary to commit oneself to pray for the brothers.

9. Commitment to assiduity (cf. Heb 10:25) - When one learns to recognise the mystery surrounding the Church of Christ, of which one is a valued member, one can look differently at other things in life. That is, one understands that above all things one must love God and seek first the things of His Kingdom. Thus, the member can order his time, activity, work, study and leisure for the greater glory of God.

10. Commitment to availability (cf. Acts 2:44-47) - Availability is a powerful remedy for worry. When we give in to worry, we move away from inner peace and joy (cf. Pv 12:25a). Therefore, the member must learn to focus on the essentials and entrust the direction of his time, material goods, professional and family life to the Lord, who is always available to take care of his children.

Conclusion

Cells are providential because, besides being a place where one can preach to the "new ones", it is the place where the "old ones" live their communion with God and with each other, thus favouring the new converts because it allows them to see how Christians live, think, have fun, treat each other and solve problems.

A person will become a disciple if we manage to lead him from an understanding of the truths of the faith to the ability to live them concretely, so that he does not divide his life between a sacred moment (in the Church) and a secular moment (outside of it).