

Being of Service

If we truly want to encounter the Lord, it is not enough to place ourselves in his presence, we must also live as Jesus lived. On many occasions Jesus refers us to the will of his Father. At least fourteen times in the Gospel he tells us that he is attached above all to the will of He who sent him among us. Jesus clearly and precisely demonstrates that service and the choice of last place are the means of attracting his Spirit and of acquiring the Gospel way of living.

We will become persons of service when we recognize that the Holy Spirit is a living being who inhabits us; when, following the example of Jesus, we devote ourselves body and soul to the will of the Father. Then the Holy Spirit will create a new heart for us: a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone which ignores all that belongs to true friendship.

To get a better grasp of the substantial difference that exists between the accomplishment of an occasional act of service and the service lived by those whose are endowed with faculties and mechanisms totally oriented toward service, it is good right from the beginning to give a descriptive definition of each individual term. Therefore, we will define a "being," a "service," and a "being of

service." As attempts that have been successful, we will use the example of two Secular Institutes approved and encouraged by the Church. Finally, we will conclude by contemplating Jesus who shows himself to us as a being of service and invites us to follow him.

I. Terminology

a) *Being*

A *being* is a living, active, intelligent, reasonable person, endowed with a free will, having an exceptional capacity to act, to love, to accept the love of others, to understand, to listen, to express his ideas and to respect others. Someone who is able to maturely assume serious responsibilities. This person, created in the image and likeness of God, is endowed with numerous positive qualities i.e.: natural gifts, talents, aptitudes, attractions, energies and dynamisms, as well as with a free will, that unique faculty which permits each of us to determine our choices.

Among all earthly creatures, we are the only ones who can say "yes" or "no" to whatever happens or to any person. Endowed with a conscience, which is like a videocassette, recording the moral value of memories, thoughts, desires and deliberate acts, we assume the burden for illogical, brutal or senseless responses. The conscience feels comfortable with what is good; it is tormented when involved in evil: when it cheats

or when it deviates from good. The conscience is only free when it is in peace.

Claude Robert Eatherby, a young American pilot, was only 24 years old when they ordered him to drop the atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. He did not see the bomb explode on August 6, 1945 but in the days that followed, he saw the devastation caused by the bomb and his nerves broke. For 33 years — until his death in July of 1978 — he was never able to free himself from guilt and for 15 years he slept very little. The stress became so overpowering that he became mute in the last years of his life in Houston, Texas.

His brother James tells us that for years Claude Robert walked back and forth both day and night saying that his brain was on fire and that he could see the Japanese of Hiroshima dying in a furnace. (Houston, 7-7-78)

Conscience is often a mirror that reflects a brutal truth. If this truth is not assimilated, it destroys a human being by torturing him with remorse. Claude Robert acted in response to an order given him by his commanders. Still, the resulting brutality was so sudden and so horrible that his brain could not tolerate it.

Living beings that come forth from the hands of the Creator can become children of God through baptism. This sacrament enriches them with incomparable supernatural capacities and makes them powerful enough to reach the summit of perfection which will always remain an enigma for the majority of persons.

As living beings who play such a marvelous part in the divine plan we must, nevertheless, accept to be of service and to freely submit our will to God who, without using physical violence, gives us a precise commandment which allows for no ambiguity. *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* (Mk 12:30-31)

In order to be reasonable, we must recognize that all our qualities, faculties and powers, all the mechanisms within us that make us unique beings are free gifts from God; they are special charisms that must be used as instruments of service.

As reasonable beings we must naturally be on the side of God, especially if we are baptized and consecrated, privileged children of God. Built to be dependent, we will gradually discover our full potential by becoming aware of our positive possibilities and the mechanisms of power within ourselves, and by being in communion with God who has made us administrators (not proprietors) of so many gifts, talents, tendencies and goods freely given to us.

A reasonable person is a work of art, an authentic representation of God. In his divine plan, God created us for service. He gave us a remarkable intelligence, will, sensibility and depth, and even a marvelous physical body. We can aim at the heights of perfection insofar as we accept our mission of service.

b) *Service*

The word "*serve*" is taken from a Latin word meaning: to be a slave, to be submissive or devoted. This word frightens us when it relates to a relationship of inferiority with masters inclined to abuse their powers or when it indicates certain persons in authority who do not have enough discernment to recognize that they must command not in their own name but in the name of God who has given them a mandate.

Often, we seem to accept this authority, but we are high strung, our nerves are on edge and we grumble, not because of what we are asked to do but because of the way in which a command or an order is given. Our defense mechanisms are delicate, subtle and reveal our limitations of impatience, egoism and self-love.

The word "*serve*" — that we accept at least in theory — also has other meanings, but none of them free us from those who have authority over us. Each meaning describes the necessity of submitting, of taking the last place, of deferring to others and of serving.

The dictionaries Robert and Larousse affirm that *to serve* is to sustain someone we want to help. It is to carry out certain obligations towards those whom we must obey; it is to aid someone by supporting their credibility, favoring them, being available and useful to them; it is being open to the needs of others. It is also to place ourselves at the disposition of others: to give, offer, present. It

means to willingly and freely be instruments in the hands of others.

c) *Beings of Service*

To become *beings of service*, we must recognize our strengths and be sensitive to the example that Jesus brings us regarding his Father. We must pray much and labor to study the behavior and conduct of Jesus, who in the eyes of his Father, succeeded in living his life as Messiah better than any union leader struggling for the demands of others whether they are just or not. The more Jesus is experientially accepted, the more that service in his name will appear possible, logical and satisfying.

A *being of service* is an intelligent being who willingly and freely stands on the side of God, who strives to be a docile instrument of his will, as soon as this will is known.

When Joshua grew old, he gathered together at Shechem all the elders, leaders, judges and scribes of the tribes of Israel. As he addressed them, he tried, first of all, to help them become aware of the Lord's goodness to them; then he strictly warned them against tepidity and weakness. Finally, he tried to convince them of the necessity of serving God above all. Joshua — burning with fervor, overflowing with eloquence — calls upon all the Israelites to bind themselves to God alone:

If it does not please you to serve the Lord, choose today whom you wish to serve, the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River or the gods of

the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Jos 24:15)

Won over by the word and example of Joshua, the people solemnly swore to serve only the Lord, and to unconditionally put aside their idols. On that day, the people of Israel recognized once more that in the thought of God they are a *people of service* who prefigure all the believers in the world. To believe in God is to dispose ourselves to follow the commandments, to put them into practice each day of our lives, and to imitate the example of Jesus.

Jesus is the most perfect model of a *being of service*. He encourages us to follow him by asking us to aim for perfection because his heavenly Father is perfect. Walking in the footsteps of Jesus, we rediscover Mary — his mother and ours — the apostles, and the successive generations of committed Christians from all parts of the world. The Church is a *being of service*; communities, societies, institutes, families, and individuals are all *beings of service* in the plan of God. Each group, as well as each individual, must try to define and insert themselves into their special place in the Church.

Jesus, a living person, attaches himself to each of us. He makes himself the marvelous link that binds us to one another in the same love and the same sense of service. He moves us to generously seize the thoughts, desires and will of his Father, so that we may truly become the *beings of service* that the Church expects us to be.

2. We Must Define Ourselves as Beings of Service

Here I would like to give you the example of two Secular Institutes; their manner of expression will surely help each group or each individual to think of themselves and to describe themselves as beings of service.

a) *The Voluntas Dei Institute*

This institute is well-defined by its name: *Voluntas Dei*, two Latin words that mean "the Will of God." The founding of this Institute was suggested to me at the end of February 1958 by Father Leo Deschatelets, then superior general of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, at the Oblate Mission House in Montreal. To my way of thinking, this foundation was the will of God expressed through legitimate authority. As the result of a series of providential events, I asked myself why each member of this Institute could not be a concrete sign of the will of God, a being of service.

A member of this Institute is, above all else, one consecrated to seeking, adhering to and carrying out God's will. The five attitudes, used to encounter Jesus and to assimilate his life, rapidly created in the Institute's young founders a mentality of suppleness, simplicity, mutual aid and fraternity.

In their Constitutions they describe themselves as *persons of service*: "...accepting all acts of devotedness asked for by legitimate authority; being faith-

ful to their responsibilities, and always being of service by training themselves to respond to every request." This simple article reveals the distinctive quality that characterizes the members of the Institute as people who have attained a certain maturity, who have a sense of responsibility, the desire to seek the will of God and the assurance that, as servants of the Church and respectful collaborators of legitimate ecclesiastical and civil authority, they stand with God.

Thanks to this spirit which characterizes the person of service, members of the Institute become adults faithful to their commitments and profoundly attached to the Church and to the authority that governs them, even on the level of the Institute. The members of the Institute *Voluntas Dei* develop their adhesion to the will of God especially by cultivating a spirit of recollection, humility and fraternal charity.

In 1958, the year the Institute was founded, I had deliberately chosen the term "will of God" to indicate each individual member of the Institute. I rejoiced to see the young men giving themselves with such ardor and generosity and I said to myself as I looked at each one: he is truly a "*Voluntas Dei*," i.e., a concrete, visible manifestation of the will of God. With enthusiasm I watched the growth of these young men who came from all the corners of the earth: Canada, United States, Sri Lanka, Haiti, France, India, Laos... for me each one was a living, active, loving, and present "will of God." This appellation responded to the needs of my faith; I found it suggestive, fulfilling, and inspiring.

The Church asked us to call the group of young men "*The Voluntas Dei Institute*" instead of simply "*Voluntas Dei*." We accepted the desire of the Church as a will of God.

Nevertheless, we can say that each member, in the depths of his heart, strives to merit the title "*Voluntas Dei*" because the Church has chosen us to be persons of service.

b) *The O.M.M.I.'s and the Volunteers of God*

The Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate also strongly express their belonging to Jesus through the quality of their being of service. The word "Oblate" means offering. The Oblate is an offering that Mary Immaculate constantly presents to Jesus. She is an commissioned offering to which a specific mission has been assigned.

To give more emphasis to the quality of their attachment to God, the first 500 Oblates each chose an attribute of the Virgin Mary which they inserted into the motto of the Institute: the Charity of Christ through Mary Immaculate. For example, one lived the charity of Christ through Mary of Peace, another through Mary Mediatrix, another through Mary of the Sacred Heart, etc... It seems that linked to Mary their model, their alliance with Christ as a *being of service* was more thoughtful, more conscientious, more practical and more attached to the present moment.

The Oblate must serve wherever Christ has his rights. We can find her in all types of milieu, in all

trades, in all climates, wherever the Church needs witnesses of love, beings of service. We must not be surprised therefore if she is in 25 countries: in Asia, in South America, in Africa, in Europe and in North America. They are also in communist countries; nothing stops their zeal. They are efficacious insofar as they remain in the spirit of their five attitudes which they call their five points: the distinguishing characteristic of their fervor and their dynamism.

The Oblate is Mary's offering to the heart of Jesus; she is a gift prepared by the Holy Spirit, to bring about in the Church a special way of serving the world, of living in the midst of the world like a leaven of generosity, simplicity and spontaneity.

In a spirit of faith, the Oblate cooperates in the plan of salvation by accepting — according to her strength and possibilities — the acts of devotedness requested by legitimate authority. She works with the Lord and with her brothers and sisters in the construction of a new world by accomplishing her temporal tasks in a spirit of constant availability so as to manifest in peace and joy the love by which God loves the world. This availability which commits her whole life to the service of others, identifies her with Christ who perfectly followed the will of his Father.

The Oblate, a *being of service*, identifies herself with Jesus, endeavoring to imitate his conduct towards the Father, accepting to collaborate with suppleness and submission in the work of Redemption and the plan of salvation. She puts her entire availability, with her strengths and her potentialities,

into accepting and carrying out all acts of devotedness indicated to her by legitimate authority.

Oblate accomplishes her personal tasks, lives in a state of constant availability and manifests, by living as a being of service, that peace and joy which are the fruits of the Holy Spirit and the evident signs of the Father's love for each of us. Moreover, the Oblate never seeks to be isolated or to work alone. Rather, inspired by the thought and example of Jesus, she remains united to her sisters and to all others concerned with building a new world.

In the countries where they work, the Oblates have drawn together a considerable number of laity of all ages, forming them into groups of committed Christians called the *Volunteers of God*. Each day these people live the experience of the five attitudes, or the five points. These laypeople, spread throughout many countries, make a formal promise each year to consciously, willingly and freely live the five attitudes in order to be sowers of peace, harmonious and pacific elements in the world and builders of serenity.

3. The Thought and Example of Jesus: a Being of Service

Jesus abandoned himself to the service of his Father with complete confidence; he gave himself unconditionally. He was attached to the Father like a stream is attached to its source, like rays draw their brilliance from the sun. He admitted that his

vocation of God-Man came from his Father; that his thoughts, desires and actions were under the inspiration of the Father. He affirmed that his submission was to be taken seriously. It was not limited only to the spirit but it engaged all his activity, directed his whole life, presided over his death, and continued in the resurrection and in the sending of the Spirit who completes his gift.

Let's take time to meditate the words of Jesus who reveals the depths of his heart to us and demonstrates the absolute dependency of his being, fully disposed to carry out his Father's least desire. Among the apostles, it is John — so close to Jesus for a number of years — who points out the reflexes of his Master whom he presents to the world as a *being of service*.

"My food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to finish his work." (Jn 4:34)

"I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgement is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the One who sent me." (Jn 5:30)

"...because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the One who sent me." (Jn 6:38)

"When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. The One who sent me is with me. He has not left

me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him." (Jn 8:28-29)

"...the ruler of the world is coming. He has no power over me but the world must know that I love the Father and that I do just as the Father has commanded me." (Jn 14:30-31)

"As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete." (Jn 15:9-11)

If we take time to reflect on Jesus and his way of recognizing his dependence on the Father, we will be profoundly touched by his attitudes and perhaps we would become more deeply conscious of this truth: we must behave towards Jesus as he behaved towards the Father. If he claims to have received all freely from the Father, what are we to conclude? "*What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it?*" (1 Cor 4:7)

Therefore, we must admit candidly that God created human beings to become *beings of service*. We must practice a certain humility accepting God as the Principle of our being, the sustenance of our existence, the Pinnacle from which we take flight and rediscover our rhythm as children of God.

When we pray to the Lord in the secret of our room we are not tempted to lie; the truth flows

forth from our hearts with humility and spontaneity. Jesus often prayed to the Father in secret. For thirty years he lived at home with Mary and Joseph in obscure villages of Egypt or in Nazareth. We would think that at certain moments he must have suffered from being confined within such narrow boundaries. We have difficulty seeing ourselves attached to our home for thirty years, practicing a seemingly monotonous trade. We could say that at the beginning of his public life he felt the need to know that his Father was thinking about him. The heavens open twice to publicly allow the word of the Father to come through. When he is baptized by John the Baptist, witnesses hear a voice say: "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*" (Lk 3:22) And one day when Jesus is transfigured before three of his apostles, this same voice repeats the same terms, adding: "*...listen to him.*"

To pray in a natural, relaxed manner, there is nothing better than solitude; Jesus often goes aside to pray. (cf. Mk 6:46) One day Simon Peter sets off to find Jesus; in the early hours of the morning he discovers him in a deserted place in prayer. (cf. Mk 1:35) Before choosing from among his disciples the twelve who would become the pillars of his Church, Jesus goes alone to the mountain to spend the night in prayer to his Father. (cf. Lk 6:12) One day, Jesus is in prayer surrounded by his disciples; he asks them: "*Who do people say I am?*" Peter, in this atmosphere of prayer, lets the Holy Spirit speak through him. (cf. Lk 9:18-20)

Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, so that their faith will not fail, so that they will have the power to drive out a special kind of demons, so that they learn to be submissive; submission is the backbone of service. (cf. Mt 6:6ff.)

Jesus envelops us in the force and charm of his personality. Even though his prayers are frequently addressed to the Father to whom he is totally abandoned, he does not forget us and he wants each of us to participate in his same glory.

In chapter 17 of John's Gospel, we find Jesus placing himself between the Father and us, to bind us together and to make us all one:

"I glorified you on earth, by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do... I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ...the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I pray for...the ones you have given me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine and I have been glorified in them. Holy Father, keep those that you have given me in your name, so that they may be one just as we are one." (Jn 17:4-11)

To Jesus' way of thinking we must be prayerful, submissive people, servants, beings of service. These are the conditions necessary if he is to absorb us into an intense union with himself and bind us to the Father. Jesus is a being of service. He

states in all simplicity that he is but a docile instrument of the Father, that he has received everything from him, that all he is and has, all he thinks and does, all that he teaches comes from the Father. This is his strength, the extraordinary dimension of his personality in regard to service. We must pass through him to reach the Father; we must acquire his mentality of being submissive, of being servant which He sums up thusly:

"Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many." (Mt 20:28)

"I am among you as the one who serves." (Lk 22:27)

"The Father will honor whoever serves me." (Jn 12:26)

"If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. (Jn 13:14)

Even though he is dependent on the Father, Jesus is relaxed and serene, full of life and vigor in serving others. He promises this same liberation to all those who model themselves on his example. "*I live and you will live.*" (Jn 14:19) "*The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*" (Jn 6:63) "*Whoever keeps my word will never see death.*" (Jn 8:51) "*I came so they might have life...*" (Jn 10:10)

It is in following the example of Jesus that we will accomplish what the Lord asks of each of us.

Therefore, we must hate our own life, i.e., sacrifice our own way of thinking which is not always in conformity with the plan of God. (cf. Lk 14:26) To lose our life is to offer it with love to the Lord. (cf. Jn 12:27) It is to sacrifice it totally in the service of those we love. (cf. Jn 15:13)

4. We Are Invited to Model Our Lives on Jesus

"Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn 6:68) He will not let us fall, we will have our quota of happiness and he will give us the necessary energy and dynamism. Let us set to work then and strive to live intensely the present moment. Thus we will eventually familiarize ourselves with the mentality of Jesus. We will explore his way of thinking, grasp his motivations, comprehend the sense of his luminous words and walk with him in intimacy.

To accelerate our rhythm, we will be assiduous in carrying out our exercises of piety each day in order to keep the sacred fire of fervor burning. We will never become professionals in serving until we have had a lived experience of Jesus, until we feel his living, active, moving presence within us, until we look upon him as our best friend — he to whom we can tell all and who has the liberty of determining and influencing our choices. We will be amateurs who work sporadically, and when our motivation cools down, we will end up by giving shoddy, indifferent, apathetic service.

Rivers are imposing and majestic as long as their flow is abundant and generous. It is the same for beings of service. They are true and efficacious as long as they are nourished by the presence of God, the spirit of prayer and regularity in carrying out certain exercises of piety. As long as they frequent the sacraments and dip into the other sources that the Church puts at the disposition of her children.

Not only should we dwell upon the life of Christ, scrutinizing it carefully, we must also endeavor to discover this life in others. It is impossible to be a being of service if we ignore others. We must first of all be attentive to those who are invested with the power of authority; we must be respectful and attentive. These people are channels by which God sends us his grace. Therefore, we cannot organize our lives alone, go promenading throughout the world letting ourselves be guided uniquely by our creativity and imagination. We must stop, take time to discover the obligations of our chosen state and accept them freely.

As *beings of service*, we must realize that the vocation of a Christian is exigent, that it implies discipline and a serious formation.

Each time we render a service to another, it is God who is served. (cf. Mt 25:35ff) Each time we give ourselves to others we resemble the Author of all good. To render a service and to accept all acts of devotedness is a way of giving our lives to the service of members of the great human family. It is a mark of friendship that causes the heart to celebrate.

Christians, conscious of the role they have to play in the plan of God, seek to become more perfect and to discover new talents, new aptitudes and powerful energies within themselves. They seriously analyze their dynamism to reactivate their optimism and enthusiasm. Inactivity, a lack of responsibility, frequent unemployment and laziness destroy more human beings than deadly wars. Beings of service are never inert, never on strike. They feel responsible, alive and endowed with abilities that enable them to help others.

To serve is good for the normal evolution of our personality, our character and our whole being. To accept to serve, to officially recognize ourselves as beings of service is an indication of psychological, moral and spiritual health. If we cease recognizing our possibilities to serve, we become sleepers, dreamers. The world comes to us insofar as it discovers us to be supple, simple and fraternal; thus we can create durable friendships.

In addition to what the Church gives us through the liturgy and the sacraments, we must dedicate time to meditating, praying, reading the Bible and participating in communitarian, family or team meetings. Thus we will become more accessible to others and much more open and welcoming.

Taking the example of Jesus, we will go to others without letting ourselves be blocked by the grimness of their character or by the mystery of their spiritual journey. Jesus, prototype of the *being of service*, invites us to imitate his technique for making contacts. He frequented intellectuals: Nicodemus, Simon the Leper, Joseph of Arimathea; and

he frequented people whose reputations left something to be desired, but who wanted to change: Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman, the woman caught in adultery, one of the two thieves on the cross. He accepts to visit them and to allow them to join the group of people who love him enough to form bonds of friendship with him: Lazarus, Zaccheus, Jairus, the widow of Naim, the centurion, etc... He manages to live and create unity among the apostles, all unique individuals: Peter, at times exalted and disconcerting; Judas, secretive and dishonest; Thomas, over-sensitive and argumentative, James, violent and drastic, whom Jesus calls a son of thunder.

If we keep our eyes open, we will not lack occasions to serve. To serve is to live as Jesus did:

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by others. Let us then pursue what leads to peace and to building up one another." (Rom 14:17-19)

"... learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart." (Mt 11:29)