

(Christus medium)OMNIUM TENENS, n. 6

St. BONAVENTURE, *Collationes in Hexaemeron* 1, 10

Recuperating the Sense of the Word

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Dearest Brothers,

“Whenever I find his Most Holy Name or writings containing His words in an improper place, I make a point of picking them up, and I ask that they be picked up and put aside in a suitable place. We should honour and venerate theologians, too, and the ministers of God’s word, because it is they who give us spirit and life (*The Testament of St. Francis* – 1226)

An academic institute like the Seraphicum is born from the desire to give form to *words* and express with them through ideas, thoughts, and concepts; to scrutinise the truth from within and to share it with others. All of this revolves around the *word*: by it we are nourished and with it we transmit, written or spoken words, words that hand down the Franciscan and ecclesiastical patrimony of the past and suggest how to better live it in a new multicultural and multinational context. In this continual use of the word, one also risks losing sight of the importance of the word itself and of the importance it has.

We live in a time of communication, when the means of transmitting information are placed ever more at the centre of life, and in a certain sense, regulate it. To communicate essentially means to make use of words whether in the sector of communication, within daily, interpersonal relationships or in important public discourses, lessons, and the use of the mass-media. The word is absolutely necessary.

It has above all an anthropological dimension: the mind creates and gives shape to ideas, thoughts, concepts, and sentiments. The word sends them into motion, giving them life that we could define as independent and autonomous. The idea expressed by words assumes an autonomy, and with its movement gives birth, in turn, to new ideas and thoughts. Thus, the word becomes a vehicle of ideas that find in it the voice to diffuse themselves. The results of this process are material and tangible.

Such is the power of the word and the importance of communication that stems from it. The word that communicates has a creative power. It can form opinions and it can influence them in one direction or another. The philosophy of today has particularly discovered its importance, creating a true science of the analysis of the word called *hermeneutics*. This term indicates the art of interpreting what an author has written, and all the methods that must be applied to comprehend a text in the best way possible. This is the mission to which Jesus dedicated Himself: “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.” St. Paul says: “Be eager to present yourself as acceptable to God, a workman who causes no disgrace, imparting the word of truth without deviation” (2 *Tm* 2,15).

The objective in applying the hermeneutic principles is that of “imparting the word of truth without deviation” (2 *Tm* 2,15), diligently applying oneself to discern the original significance of the text and its relevance.

Therefore, we must be conscious that words can illuminate or perplex, help or harm, build or destroy. Human relationships, their quality and intensity, are fruit of the action of communication effected primarily by words. The language of the mass-media in today’s world often uses words with a polluted tonality - illusory words. These methods have an almost exclusive scope to stimu-

late the most unrefined sensibility, the most disharmonic passions, the desire to satisfy one's personal and material *ego*. This type of speaking has an end in itself. It humiliates the transcendent value of the word.

There is much need for words that are developed in profundity, from careful and attentive reflection, in the light of the Truth; words that contain light with a positive value, and that foster science and transport objective truths.

Human beings cannot build a community or lead a group life without communicating with one another through words. Indeed, without verbal communication, a community is neither born nor does it live. There is not a true and proper exchange between persons. The community bases itself on interpersonal contact, which is first born in the mind of the individual. However, if this contact does not first manifest itself in gestures, glances, and above all in words, the community does not flourish. It is a spiritual reality that passes, nevertheless, through a human reality, and most of all through the concreteness of spoken words.

The experience of Francis of Assisi was also similar: the encounter with the Word *par excellence* – Jesus Christ and His Gospel – drew together and presided over the community. The encounter with his brethren, a gift of the Lord, sprang forth from and found its final sense in the Word of the Lord and in the words that came from it. So it is today. The ultimate meaning of our Franciscan life still resides in the encounter with the *Word* of God and finds its significance in the adequate and coherent use of words between us; words which are light and life that form the community and help it grow. These are true words.

If words are very important in their creative power, just as important is the capacity to *listen*. It is in the light of the word that listening regains its whole significance, richness, and interior density. To listen means to open oneself up to another and to make room so that his words might have the possibility to express him or her. To listen, therefore, it is necessary that one keeps *silent* and concentrates on the other and on serving him. This entails a difficult but indispensable art so that words do not fall into nothingness, but find human space to germinate and bear fruit. One must not only listen with his ears, but first of all with his heart, his mind, his glance, and his whole self. True communication depends very much on the capacity to listen. To emerge, the community needs words, and to grow, the community needs the capacity to listen. The life-giving dimension of the community matures the reality of relationship, but at the same time, it is very fragile. The community lives if it is nurtured by the sequence: *word-listening-welcoming*, and it enters into crisis when one of these components is lacking.

It is necessary to comprehend the importance of words, especially in a time like ours, which easily offers access to the diffusion of words. It is also necessary to understand their value — from what and how much is said, their contents, the tone with which they are pronounced, the ideas and feelings surrounding them—which one generates when he or she speaks. Here we return again to our *Alma Mater*. She takes on the commitment to study the truth; to be able to understand how to adequately speak of it, to communicate the truth to others, creating therefore a more profound communion. This communion becomes alive and vast, and as a result, constitutes a fraternity that is united around the *Word*.

In Christ,

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