

**"He has loved us up to here"**

**"He has loved us to the cross..."**

## Introduction

Is it not surprising and foolish to undertake such a reflection on the meaning of the cross at the end of a formative journey? And yet this cross is the mark of the Christian. To those (catechumens) who ask for Baptism, the Church proposes a first step that involves the giving up of the cross. In his passion, Christ reveals the three components of the whole Christian existence: unity in Christ, the way to the Father and the gift of the Spirit. It is to gather together the scattered children of God that Christ offers his life, says John 11:52. His death constitutes his passage to meet the Father (John 13:1) which Luke calls his Exodus (9:31). And from his open side flows the fountain of living water, the Spirit (Jn 19:34).

This torn apart and given body offers us the beginning of communion. The crucified one gives his Spirit to his Father and then pours it out on all humanity.

**Archbishop Albert Rouet expressed himself as follows:**

"The cross provides the key to reading life. It is the goal of Christ's life: he came (the Incarnation) for this hour" (John 12:27).

When Father Rouet says "goal", it seems to me that he is telling us that the whole life of Christ is directed towards the will of the Father, towards his mission and this from his Incarnation. "Not my will, but his," Jesus said. At the same time, the cross presents the starting point of his mission. United to his Father, Jesus sends his disciples (today we are his disciples).

And St. Paul only wants to know Jesus crucified (1 Cor 2:2). The cross is the source and the summit of the life of the Incarnate Word and the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the life of the Church.

The Church is born of the cross and returns to this offering.

In 1996, in their Letter to the Catholics of France, a document proposed for the reflection of all Christians, the Bishops of France wrote the following:

The "sign of the Cross", the "mystery" of the Cross fully reveals God's humanity in the trial of evil, in all its forms: violence, betrayal, denial, abandonment. But Jesus, when he is betrayed, makes his death on the Cross an act of freedom".

When Jesus passes from this world to his Father through the torment that is the cross, he inscribes another logic that is not that of the world: it is the logic of disarmed Love that wants and creates a reconciled world at the heart of evil. St. Paul writes this:

"In his person he has killed hatred."

Throughout history, and even today, we can verify this fruitfulness of the cross. It is lived by Christians who give their lives to the end.

In a small document "Going to the Heart of the Faith", which follows the letter to the Catholics of France (quoted above), our bishops invited us all to reflect by taking a detour through the Easter Vigil.

I quote: "By making us spend the night of Easter, the celebration in fact plunges our lives into what makes our common vocation: to form together a people of disciples who walk behind their Lord. Disciples, we incessantly become such by the power of the Spirit. By saying "no" to everything that prevents us from being disciples, we choose to follow Christ who died on the cross and rose again".

**Our baptismal vocation introduces us into this following of Jesus who died and rose again, and, like him today, we are called to face the test of evil with the strength of faith to open up paths to the resurrection. For us it is a question of "going to the heart of the faith"... with "the most fragile", with "the poorest", as Montfort invites us.**

"Experience shows it to each and every one of us: It is the reality and the scandal of evil what constitutes the main test of faith in God. How can we continue to affirm God's goodness when we witness these outbursts of hatred and violence that destroy individuals and peoples?", the bishops wrote in the Letter to the Catholics of France.

**We all face evil and suffering.**

### **I. Let us turn our eyes to Christ**

**It is important to see how the Incarnation-Mission, Passion and Resurrection are linked.**

In the symbol of Nicaea Constantinople, which we sometimes recite on Sundays, it is written:

**"For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven; through the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate in the Virgin Mary and was made man". Crucified for us, he suffered his passion and was buried. He rose again on the third day..."**

When we read the New Testament, we can notice that, since his Incarnation, everything in Jesus' life: his message and his activities are unified by his reference to God the Father. Jesus shows us a God who forgives, who loves and who wants the happiness of all; a God who offers **salvation** and who calls all to conversion. Jesus could perceive that this service of God, **this mission that had been entrusted to him**, was going to lead him to death, and that this death would be the logical result of the conflicts and oppositions arising from the exercise of his mission.

In fact, this face of God that Jesus presented to his contemporaries (especially to men of the law: scribes, Pharisees, priests...) upset too many customs, disturbed too many interpretations and theological schemes. What Jesus lived or said did not correspond at all to the way Israel expected the Messiah. Israel expected a very human liberation, that is, the overthrow of the Roman power. And religious power was deeply rooted in a faith in God that could not be questioned. Ex: the Sabbath...

Luke writes (Ch. 13:31-33):

*"At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said, 'Go away, get out of here, for Herod wants to kill you. Jesus said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and heal today and tomorrow, and on the third day it will be over. But I must go on my way today, tomorrow and the day after, for it is not possible for a prophet to perish outside Jerusalem".*

Jesus is aware of the danger, but he continues the mission for which he came. Jesus is free in the face of his death. "No one takes my life from me, I give it. He will say. Jesus entrusts himself totally to God and trusts him completely. This filial and loving relationship was necessary for Jesus to continue his journey to Jerusalem, the place of his passion and death on a cross. He had to continue his journey, his mission as the one sent by the Father.

When he healed the blind man on the way, the evangelist tells us that the blind man, leaving everything behind, began to follow him on this road that led him to Jerusalem.

Only after the resurrection of Jesus will the disciples understand the full meaning of his life, and it is the term "obedience" that they will use to speak of his fidelity to the Father and to the mission; fidelity maintained to the end.

*St. Paul will say in his beautiful letter to the Philippians (2:6-8): "...He who is of the divine condition did not covet to be equal to God...but emptied himself...becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.*

Jesus died for faithfulness to God, yes, but he also died for faithfulness to the face of God that he preached. Let us remember his attitude toward sinners and the varied opposition he raised against him. **Jesus also died for faithfulness to sinners.**

Both by his way of life and by his preaching, Jesus had proclaimed that the God whose saving intervention he proclaimed was a God who excluded no one, a God whose grace was above sinners (The prodigal son; the Samaritan woman; Mary Magdalene; Zacchaeus... and many others). Now, what led Jesus to the cross was precisely sin, that is, everything that in one way or another prevents one from loving:

"Behold, the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of sinners." (Mk 14:41...).

The essence of the Law, which Jesus had preached, consists in loving, in loving even one's enemies, in loving to the end. Love has no limits. The Sermon on the Mount in Mt 5:21-26

reminds us that sin is everything that settles in the heart of man and makes him unable to truly love.

In the end, **Jesus died out of faithfulness to the poor.**

The Kingdom of God, he had proclaimed, is first and foremost for the poor. God excludes no one, we said a moment ago, but first of all he is on the side of those whom men always tend to exclude: the poor, the little ones, the defenseless and the marginalized.

It is to these that Jesus identified himself when he died on the cross. He accepted this death by crucifixion, an infamous torment normally reserved for slaves. Jesus dies according to his idea of God: after having announced a God who cares for the poor, the rejected, the despised, the persecuted, he himself faces the death of a poor, rejected, persecuted person.

In the Church's long spiritual tradition, the cross is the crucible in which God shapes the saints. It is the decision to follow Christ and, like him, to give his life for love.

This afternoon we will see how Montfort lived the cross in his life and what he wrote about it.

### **Working in Small Groups**

Let us take time to share fraternally our experience on this subject.

- ✓ Christ, how did he take up his cross throughout his public life?
- ✓ What do I retain from Father of Montfort's experience?

In handing over the cross of Poitiers

- ✓ How do we show concrete solidarity with men and women who suffer, who are wounded in their being or in their flesh, or who face evil? Let us take a good look at what is happening inside us.
- ✓ What is my experience with the cross?

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