



THE WAY OF THE CROSS: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

"Let us pray for each other. Let us accept the cross that God gives us. You have had in your life without doubt days of great sadness. You have borne them as a Christian. It is fitting that we the ministers of a crucified God participate in the cross of our Divine Master"

(Polycarpe TUFFIER, April 26, 1871)



The way of the Cross for our brothers in Paris

One way to begin to appreciate the experience of our four brothers who were shot in the Paris Commune is through a selection of texts taken from the book "*More Than Their Life! The Picpus Vocation in a Time of Terror*" by Fr. Marcel Bocquet, ssc.

Fr. Bocquet vividly paints the backdrop to their last day and last journey on this earth, a way of the cross that came as a consequence of making their own "the attitudes, options and tasks of Jesus". (Const. 3)



• 'This time the cortege left the courtyard by the principal gate facing the church. It was five o'clock. The last time the hostages could salute their Master for whom they were going to die and **whose ascent to Calvary they relived in this moment.** They had been already promenaded for a whole hour under the jeers of the crowd. They had again to take up the way of the cross. Fr. Radigue had commented very often to the novices and to his confreres the article of the preliminary chapter of the Rule: "Finally, we must retrace, as much as we can, the crucified life of our

Divine Savior by practicing with zeal and prudence the works of Christian mortification, above all by restraining our senses.'"

- 'Anger becomes blind. It has to be recognized that on this day, Friday, 26 May, 1871, one would have had difficulty in finding a setting more appropriate for the drama that was to unfold: a courtyard where the hostages appear, a balcony from where one declares the sentence, an empty lot where the firing squad and escort are placed. While on the other side of the pond where the crowd is massed, there is a closed recess, a sort of closed off wall or screen against which the bullets can ricochet. **Nor is there missing a mound of land which recalls Calvary.'**
- 'Calvary-like, all the witnesses of Christ were as their divine Master, heaped with opprobrium, tortured in their soul no less than in the flesh. And here on Rue de Haxo, drenched with outrages the whole distance of their sorrowful way, their cadavers were handled violently. They were led to the ordeal with military fanfare. They had known the rattle of death in the accents of an inimical fanfare. Now they are lying in bulk in the foundations of a future dance hall. But their sepulchre also would become glorious to them.'

"SHOT DURING THE COMMUNE"
Personal and community guide

Jesus falls many times ...

“An old priest with white hair and a shade taller than the others was seen to fall in an attempt to guard the lodge marshal with the rampart of his body. ‘Three blows for this guy there,’ so said the women who were slipped into the first rank of the killers. Struck head on, Father falls, and then lifts up his arms as if to continue his act of protection... Tradition has recognized Fr. Tuffier as the old priest”. (*More Than Their Life!*)

Because Jesus identifies himself with the least of his brothers and sisters (Matt. 25:45), we can say that Jesus continues to fall today. In solidarity he falls with the unemployed, with the homeless, with the young woman who is being trafficked, with the old man having to stretch his pension to feed his family, with children who are being abused ...

At the same time, Jesus also identifies himself with the Church (Acts 9). The Church, like Jesus, is called to carry the cross and like Jesus, the pilgrim Church must expect to fall – as exemplified by our four brothers in Paris - as it carries out its mission of participating in the salvific passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Unlike Jesus, the Church also falls under the weight of her own sins. Even so, God has invited us – the people of God - to participate in making visible and real - in and for the world - all that had been fully achieved through the incarnation of his Son. As a community of wounded “missionary disciples” we are called “to complete in our flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). As St. John Paul paraphrasing Jesus puts it: “Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world, a salvation achieved through my suffering!” (*Salvifici Doloris*, 26) Thus the pilgrim Church which carries the cross is that people who, through Christ and his Spirit, try every day to step outside of their wounded selves and enter into the painful path of love, enter into a redemptive solidarity with wounded humanity. It is clear that not only is the death of Jesus reparative and salvific but so too is the way that led him to offer himself as an essential part of his redemptive work.

“Do this in memory of me”

There is clearly a cost to discipleship, a cost to “doing this in memory of me”. The way of the Cross for Jesus ends with him being stripped of everything, including his abiding sense of being loved by the Father. Many of those closest to him, those whom he loved, will betray him, deny him and run away from him. As he prayed in Gethsemane, the mental and spiritual dread at what lay ahead of him must have been awful. Equally, from their letters from prison, we also gain a sense of the agonising interior journey that each brother had to make as they responded to the unceasing call of Jesus to follow him and his example. Jesus was nailed to a cross upon which he died. The four brothers in Rue Haxo along with 46 others were shot down “like rabbits” (Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, 1871).



To ‘do this in memory’ of him is to embrace Jesus’ whole life. This is what so many of our brothers and sisters were doing in Paris in 1871. And four of them in particular fully incarnated the words of Jesus recorded in the synoptic gospels:

“The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things,” he said. “He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead.”

“When Christ calls you, he bids you come and die.”

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship)

In many ways it can be said that the way of the Cross is really a journey that every person born has to make. It is the invitation to die to self, to become less selfish, more loving, more compassionate, more reconciled with the shortness of life, with what life throws at us. Not all people are able or want to make such a journey – for all kinds of reasons. In the Christian community the way of the cross flows directly from a conscious choice to follow Jesus. Wanting to be like Jesus – a man with a passion for God and a passion for humanity - usually involves one step forward and two steps backwards, but still we try. Discipleship is something that evolves and develops.

Ronald Rolheiser identifies three stages in discipleship that in some ways can be compared to human development: *Sacred Fire: A Vision for a deeper human and Christian maturity*. The first stage which he calls essential discipleship has to do with the struggle to get our lives together (who am I, what is the meaning of my life? etc.) The second stage, mature discipleship, is about the struggle to give our lives away (living less for ourselves and more for others). The third and final stage is radical discipleship, the struggle to give our deaths away (in short, wanting and hoping that our deaths can also be as useful to others). In some ways this insight may help us to understand how the way of the cross unfolds in our lives.

“There is such a thing as a good death. We are responsible for the way we die. We have to choose between clinging to life in such a way that death becomes nothing but a failure, or letting go of life in freedom so that we can be given to others as a source of hope.” (Henri Nouwen)

“The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others”. When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfilment. For “here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means”. Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that “delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ.”

(*Evangelii Gaudium*, 10)

For personal and community reflection

- 1) For sharing with the community: What in this reflection sheet has caught your attention the most, and why?
- 2) For personal reading: Read Chapters XII and XIV seeking to place yourself into the shoes of our four brothers shot.



ADORATION

Introduction

The way of the cross is to be found wherever there are people. It inevitably involves suffering. Suffering, although often unbearable, can bring with it certain gifts: Think of St. Paul in his letter to the Romans who states that suffering can bring endurance, character and hope (Romans 5:3). Suffering can also help to sensitize us to the suffering of other people as well, it can evoke compassion and respect. Christ's way of the cross saw him going about doing good, moving close to people who were in need, physical, emotional, spiritual. He wanted to be close to them and help them in their suffering. At the same time suffering can prove to be a wake-up call, a moment of conversion. It can lead too, in some cases, to a deeper prayer life, a deeper relationship with God.

Opening Hymn

Gospel: Luke 7: 11-17

Soon afterward he journeyed to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd accompanied him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, "Do not weep." He stepped forward and touched the coffin; at this the bearers halted, and he said, "Young man, I tell you, arise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, exclaiming, "A great prophet has arisen in our midst," and "God has visited his people." This report about him spread through the whole of Judea and in all the surrounding region.

Reflection



"I wonder how much we are moved by the social mobilisations and the cries for justice and dignity that are being voiced in our various countries from Ecuador, Chile, through France and the United States to India and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And how much do we let ourselves be affected by the pain of the victims of the abuses of power, sexuality and conscience in the Church and how affected are we by the shame of the perpetrators, who are also among us." (Alberto Toutin ssc).

Silence

Time for sharing

Our Father

Benediction

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for the gift that our brothers Ladislav, Polycarp, Marcellin and Frézal are to the Congregation and to the Church. May their example of faith and trust in you in their final dread-filled moments move us to reach out to others who are faced with difficulties. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.