

# Conversion

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Chapel at the **Sacro Eremo di Camaldoli** (Italy)  
The tabernacle where the reserved Eucharist is found in an earthen vessel,  
with reference to 2Cor 4:7 (“we hold this treasure in earthen vessels”).  
The images of Jesus and Mary frame the vessel

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We all know the story. Henriette and her mother spent nearly a year (from October of 1793 to September of 1794) in the Hospitalliers’ Prison in Poitiers. Arrested for having given refuge to a persecuted priest, the two lived in prison, threatened with execution, awaiting the day they might be taken to the scaffold.

Upon leaving the prison, Henrietta was a 27-year-old young woman who had begun to experience a profound change. As she herself said a few years later in writing to the Good Father, **“I was shaken up by the events but not converted”** (letter of January 7, 1803).

Being bowled over, shaken up, rocked is not the same as converting. In the case of the Good Mother, the passage from one thing to the other happened thanks to adoration. As she herself adds in the same letter to the Good Father, *“When you established adoration at Moulin<sup>1</sup> and you gave me an hour, without a doubt, you determined my destiny”*.

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<sup>1</sup> It refers to Moulin-à-Vent Street in Poitiers, where the Society of the Sacred Heart was established (L’Immensité) on February 15, 1795.

It seems to me that this spiritual experience of the Good Mother can be paradigmatic for all of us.

## Shaken up

It is a good thing to see yourself shaken up by reality. The opposite, indifference towards others and towards events leads to the death of the soul. It is good that we allow ourselves to be touched, shaken up, rocked by our own and other peoples joys and sorrows; that we are affected by the sufferings of the poor, the hopes of the people, the loneliness of the sick... There is no need to be frightened if our own heart hits us; sometimes broken by doubts or bewilderment, hurt by our own sin, suffocated by helplessness. Qoheleth already says it: *"Sorrow is better than laughter; when the face is sad, the heart grows wise."* (Qoh 7:3).

In visiting the Congregation, I see brothers who are concerned about the fate of young people, moved by the plight of refugees, frightened in facing old age or disease, devastated by the death of companions or relatives, combative against what they consider unjust, unsettled by the decline of what was once strong, discouraged by unfruitful works.... Also, brothers who are enthusiastic about new projects, excited in uplifting work, eager to communicate their things, scintillating as party hosts...

Blessed the community made up of brothers who are shaken up and concerned. How sad the one where brothers settle in bored, indifferent, absorbed in their small interests. How good it is to live shaken up, shoved around! How good... but it's not enough.

## Converted

The impact of dramatic or rapturous experiences is not sufficient to orient our lives as disciples of Jesus. For as strong as what happens might be (such as the Good Mother's confinement in prison), the energy that it generates can easily become smoke that is carried away by the wind or sand swept away by the current (Mt 7:26-27).

I fear that on many occasions we evaluate what happens to us with too much superficiality, considering positive that which seems exciting to us or makes us feel appreciated and content; and rejecting as negative that which seems to us to be questioning and demanding. It is worth considering the affective impact of events, but what we are seeking is not a particular emotional equilibrium, rather it is to make our own the attitudes, options and tasks of Jesus (Const. 3), to have the sentiments and the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5; 1Cor 2:16). For this, it is not enough to calculate and plan, one has to discern. It is not a path of adapting to circumstances but one of

conversion.

## Adoration

The practice of adoration was decisive in order that the Good Mother might take the step from being shaken up to conversion. Adoration is our privileged place of a one on one encounter with the Lord. There this friendship grows, nourished by few but true words. In the silence of adoration, the Gospel more clearly reveals its fire as well as its consolation. In adoration, we place upon Jesus the weight of the grief and the sin of ourselves and others. In adoration, we learn to trust that *God binds up in love what seems to be scattered in the world* (cf. Divine Comedy, Paradise, canto XXXIII, 85-87). In adoration, events cease to be a spectacle in order to reveal themselves as the language of God's mercy (*"Whoever is wise will take note of these things, and ponder the merciful deeds of the LORD,"* Psalm 107[106]:43). In adoration, the clay of our vessels is baked in the fire of the Spirit, we are being converted into the Son, and we understand better the call of the Father.

The representations of the Sacred Hearts (whose feast we are about to celebrate) speak to us of the events that shook up Jesus and Mary (the sword, the thorns, the cross, the lance's wound), as well as the profound transformation that happened in them (the hearts, the fire). The symbol of the Sacred Hearts is a call to conversion.

Blessed the community in which the brothers humbly approach adoration each day. Their hearts will continue to suffer with passion, and their minds will find light to guide the way.

Happy Feast of the Sacred Hearts!

