

FOLLOWING JESUS ON HIS JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

André Myre

It is a great privilege for me to address such an assembly and as we begin I wish to tell you how I understand my role. First of all it is not without apprehension that as a man I am addressing myself to a group composed mostly of women and as a man of the First World, I am about to speak of the Christian mission to a number of women coming from countries where mission must be lived as a priority.

I am essentially a Bible scholar, but paradoxically, it is not first of all the ancient text that speaks to me but rather the Voice which has left its traces. This Voice touches my heart and for centuries it has challenged humanity, contesting radically how human life and the life of the planet are managed. Nothing can ever escape this fundamental challenge, not even the Church, especially not the Church.

I was a Jesuit for about forty years. During that period, I learned everything. I studied science, I learned about the subversion of the Nazarene, therefore, I learned about liberation and how it leads to the cross. From those years I have cultivated the greatest respect for Religious Life. Those who choose that road commit themselves to live the mission of Jesus in all its radicalism: share the condition of the poor (poverty), serve them with loving care (chastity), commit to engage in significant action (obedience). The charism of Religious Life is precisely the discovery of the major thrusts of mission in the footsteps of Jesus. Religious Life does not place itself at the service of the Church, but of the world, so that the world will taste what is good and will see clearly (“salt of the earth and light of the world”) – Mt 5, 13-14.

Furthermore, based on the Gospel message, Religious Life reminds the Church of its essential reason for existing. Gift to the world and gift to the Church, it remains a paradoxical reality for the gift that it offers the world is to make the world aware that it will never find peace unless it aligns itself to the needs of the poor. On the other hand, the gift that Religious Life offers the Church is to help the Church understand that it will never be faithful to its mission unless it ceases to focus from on itself and places itself at the service of the poor. Religious Life is a constant source of great tension in the world and in the Church and this, of course, is inevitable since it follows the road mapped out by the Nazarene.

In this presentation, I will try to illustrate the mission of Jesus as it appears in the Gospel of Mark with the impact that it could have in the exercise of your own mission. Of the four evangelists, Mark is the one who is the most explicitly interested in the mission of Jesus and in following Him. Mark wrote the Gospel about forty years after the death of Jesus. He is targeting a community which lives in the shadow of “the White House” in Rome where Caesar, the emperor of the Roman Empire, was residing. His intention is to map out the road for the mission of that community, which, as I hope to demonstrate, was no easier to do at that time than it is now.

Later, I will talk about the resurrection and the Lordship of Jesus always in tandem with the exercise of your own mission.

1. THE MISSION ACCORDING TO GOD’S REGIME

When Mark sent the partisans on mission, he had already written five chapters. (In this presentation, I will speak of “partisans” rather than of “disciples”, for Jesus was not a teacher surrounded by disciples or students, but rather a man of action accompanied by people who, ‘having sided with him’, had committed themselves to follow the way that He had traced for them.) In the context of Mark’s Gospel, as illustrated in chapter eleven, Jesus had accomplished half the things that He had to do before going up to Jerusalem. In his opinion, Mark believed that the partisans had seen enough for Jesus, it was time to send them “to proclaim the imperative that a conversion of life had to take place” (Mk 6, 12). However, the conversion of life about which Jesus is speaking is linked to the great upheaval that the future Regime of God will bring about. We must grasp clearly the expression Regime of God or Reign of God if we are to understand Jesus and the mission to which we are called.

1. The Regime of God

Regime of God, this expression is typical of the Nazarene and speaks of the core of his hope. However, in the Gospels, the expression Regime of God as such, is never clearly defined. It fell into oblivion because the first partisans of Jesus of Jerusalem soon decided to center their faith and their expectation on the resurrection and the Lordship of Jesus rather than on the coming of God’s reign. If the expression has never been defined it is probably that, at that time, it was easily understood. It is evident that the total of the books of the Old Testament is one of the great cultural sources out of which the New Testament has emerged. However, in the book of Psalms can be found a text, which is seldom referred to, but which helps us to understand what was meant by the famous expression Reign of God.

Praise Yahweh, my soul
I will praise Yahweh all my life,
I will make music to my God as long as I live.

Do not put your trust in princes,
in any child of Adam, who has no power to save.
When his spirit goes forth he returns to the earth,
on that very day all his plans come to nothing.

How blessed is he who has Jacob’s God to help him.
His hope is in Yahweh his God,
Who made heaven and earth,
the sea and all that is in them.

He keeps faith forever,
gives justice to the oppressed
gives food to the hungry;
Yahweh sets prisoners free.

Yahweh gives sight to the blind,
lifts up those who are bowed down.
Yahweh protects the stranger,
He sustains the orphan and the widow.

Yahweh loves the upright,
but he frustrates the wicked.
Yahweh reigns forever,
Your God, Zion, from age to age.

Psalms 146 is important because it defines the major themes of the reign of Yahweh and because it situates our hope in a precise context. In fact, paradoxically, this hope is founded on constant failure. It appears radically impossible for the powerful to govern their people with the intent of liberating them. They are always taken up with other priorities and, in rare cases, even if they have good intentions, too often, their grandiose plans die with them. The psalm gives us a lesson of political realism. *Since the leaders reveal themselves incapable of liberating their people it is best not to place confidence in them.*

Do not place your trust in princes,
in the human person incapable of liberating you.

The verdict is without appeal. As a result, one must turn to the seat of real power, the one which resides in Yahweh. He is the One who has given proof of this by creating the universe. He can be depended upon because He keeps his promises. Depending on Yahweh, the psalmist resolutely chooses a reading of reality by starting at the bottom, basing himself on the ordinary folks, on those who do not profit from the existing system.

Out of their situation, he presents a long list depicting the reality as it is. In fact, not everyone agrees to say that things are going badly. Certainly not those who are more interested in oppressing others, in exploiting them, humiliating them, arresting them and having them thrown in solitary confinement depriving them of daylight because they are threatening the privileges of the powerful. These are the criminals whose plans will be overturned, while the righteous, the strangers, the widows and the orphans will see their cries for justice prevail. The Psalmist concludes by saying that the reign of God is exercised in their favor.

For Jesus, the reign of God is a new way of living which, one day, according to the priorities expressed in Ps.146, will be established effectively by the living God his Parent. What is presented here is a new system which, for those who hope in Him, will replace all that exists in

the present. Here can be found all the dimensions of life in society: political, economic, financial, social, communal, religious, cultural, etc. Consequently, it may not be false to say, even though the contrary is too often affirmed, that Jesus was not involved in politics. One must recognize that his actions led to evident political implications, a fact that is not stressed often enough. In any case, those who put him to death had understood very well the danger that He represented for them.

The reign of God is an expression that speaks of hope. Like all expressions of hope the connotation has a future dimension and also a present one. This comes from the fact that all hope is a projection in the future of a desire or a dream that is already present in our heart. The nature of hope is exactly to try to achieve a 'little' now of what will happen in 'fullness' some day. It is impossible to hope for the end of oppression without tackling it today, or the end of famine without feeding the people now. The Reign of God is not only present and is not only future. It is present in my hope and in the tension of striving to actually achieve now what will be full realization in the future.

2. The mission

When Mark sent the partisans of Jesus on mission, they certainly saw and heard things! First of all, I will call to mind a few of these things reported in chapters 2-3-and 5. I am warning you that I will talk at length about Mark. This is because all that we need to know about mission is right there in Mark's Gospel. Of course, one needs to read it and especially accept the stern lessons that he gives us.

After five verbal skirmishes...

In the section of the Gospel that spans 2, 1 to 3, 6, Mark reports five very serious verbal skirmishes between Jesus and his adversaries. From these we have a great deal to learn.

1. In the first one (Mk 2, 1-12), Jesus cured a paralytic and declared him capable now of going forth freely to accomplish his life's destiny. However, the paralytic is the very type of a lost person (a word usually translated by 'sinner'), destitute, one who has lost his way, one who no longer deals with his own life. This scene took place in Capernaum where the scribes were centered, those sent by the powers of Jerusalem to force the Galileans to follow the laws and customs of Judea. These officials are under the illusion that they are the only ones authorized to represent God's intentions in what concerns the lives of the people. In order to save itself, the system prefers to see a paralytic remain ill rather than cured if they were not the ones deciding this for him. However, the behavior of Jesus challenges the very depth of the pretensions of this system claiming to know how to manage people's lives. By placing this skirmish first, Marc indicated how he understood the following ones and how they should be read: these are not simply anecdotal confrontations, but rather a death struggle between the system and the Nazarene.

Lesson to be retained:

This is a condition for exercising one's mission in the footsteps of Jesus: beware of all those – institutions or persons – who want to impose on others a way of living one's life.

2. The following confrontation, (Mk. 2, 13-27) is caused by Jesus' choice of friends and acquaintances. He is close to the marginal of society ("sinners"), those that are easily dismissed. But it is precisely in their favor that God's regime will be established. Marc's Jesus does not want to know anything about the system and its representatives. There is absolutely no change to be expected from them.

Lesson to be retained:

Mission is lived and discovered at the base of society.

3. The third confrontation deals with fasting (Mk 2, 18-22). In this text, all of Jesus' radical views come to the surface. Contrary to his adversaries and even to the partisans of John, He did not fast nor did his own partisans. When speaking of fast, we need to grasp the whole of the traditional rites defended and protected by the officials of the Temple and by the gatherings in the synagogues. But Jesus was living something else, He could not find anything nourishing in any of that, therefore He avoided getting involved.

Lesson to be retained:

Mission is lived in a perpetual state of discernment and does not make an absolute of any practice, institution or way of thinking.

4. The fourth skirmish deals with the most sacred institution of all, the Sabbath (Mk 2, 23-28). In one phrase the point is made:

The Sabbath has been instituted for the people, and not the people for the Sabbath.

In one swoop, all the traditional legislation, as well as the one being elaborated, loses its legitimacy. The Nazarene causes the limits of a self serving - system to explode. Nothing comes from God that does not have at heart the good of the people. No one has any authority if it is not for the service of the people. No appeal is possible to this radicalism.

Lesson to be retained:

Mission opposes itself to everything - even the most sacred - if it is not at the service of the people.

5. The last confrontation deals with the cure of the man with a withered hand (Mk. 3, 1-6), who cannot provide for his family. In this case the scene takes place the day of the Sabbath, a day where it is forbidden to cure a person who is not in danger of death. Jesus is angry. He cannot get

over the fact that the people of the system are so cruel and closed (v 5) and he cures the man of his handicap. Mark resolves all of the five confrontations with the following words:

Those apart (expression usually translated by “Pharisees”) hurry out to hold a meeting with the Herodians in order to get rid of Jesus. With the representatives of Herod Antipas, potentate named by the Empire to govern Galilee, the delegates of Jerusalem agree to neutralize the Nazarene.

Lesson to be retained:

It is a fact that mission will be accomplished in a context where those who have established the system for their own profit will do everything to defend it.

In just a few paragraphs at the beginning of his Gospel, Mark has succeeded in showing how the proclamation of the instauration of a new Regime through gestures was judged subversive by the different levels of power ruling at that time. If the people begin to believe what this man is proclaiming, it is the end of the powers that be. One or the other must die. This is the essential drama of the Gospel. Mark uses the rest of the text to illustrate this in various ways.

...two cures...

After his fourth chapter on the parables, Mark wrote a section in the middle of which he has inserted the narration of two cures which I will briefly evoke here. The first deals with exorcism (Mc 5, 1-20). The sick man is possessed of two thousand demons, (in the culture of the time of Jesus, when a number was beyond the possibility of counting, one would refer to “a thousand”). When Jesus asked the man for his name, a single voice answered in the following manner:

^{Mk 5,9} My name is legion, for there are many of us.

In this narrative, one must remember that Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome! -, the reference is to the Roman legion, symbol of the oppression exercised throughout the whole Empire, which is transposed to the world of the demons. Jesus allows the legion to enter a herd of swine which drowns its self in the sea, the original residence of evil being

In God’s Regime, that is where the Empire will find itself. It is not surprising that the subversive action of Jesus had frightened the witnesses. A great proprietor of herds had just seen a considerable part of his wealth disappear. His reaction, with the support of the authorities chosen by Rome, cannot be anything but shocking. Therefore, Jesus must leave the territory, for to announce God’s Regime is much too dangerous where the Empire’s authority is in full sway. Evidently, the Evangelist was focusing on the situation of his community in Rome, and, in the way that he has actualized the actions of Jesus, he showed that he had understood the sense and the impact of those actions.

Lesson to be retained:

Mission is dangerous for inevitably it is lived in the shadow of an empire and threatens its interests.

In the narrative of the cure according to (Mk 5, 25-34), Jesus attacks the taboo dealing with blood. Since blood was considered sacred, no one was allowed to touch it. Such an interdiction had disastrous consequences for the woman who, according to the narrative, had been losing

blood for the last twelve years. The people in her surroundings, particularly her husband, could not have any physical contact with her or with anything that she had touched. She is condemned to solitude. However, not only does Jesus accept to be touched by a woman in public, first interdiction, but what is more, a woman losing blood, second interdiction, and then He goes on to say that because of her audacity and initiative, she has cured herself:

^{Mk 5, 34} My daughter, it is your own confidence that has cured you.

By doing this, Jesus attacks head on the traditional system of social relationships founded on Scripture and defended by the representatives of the system.

Lesson to be retained:

Engaging in mission presupposes that, first of all, we free our minds from that system.

...a mission of discovery...

At this point in his narrative, Mark considered that the partisans of Jesus had seen enough. It is time to send them off on mission. He sent them to their own people so that they might become aware of the situation and make them understand the importance of a radical change of behavior based on the new Regime of God destined to replace the old existing system.

Therefore, they go forth to proclaim that a change of life must take place.

Lesson to be retained :

The meaning of mission is learned at the base with the people.

...a lesson of life...

When they returned to Jesus, his partisans saw a great hungry crowd milling around. Because of their kind heart, they asked Jesus to do something:

^{Mk 6, 35} This is a lonely place and it is getting very late, so send them away and they can go to the farm and villages round about to buy themselves something to eat.

Jesus is dumbfounded!

^{Mk 6, 37} But it is up to you to give them something to eat!

It is exactly because they should become aware of their task that Jesus had sent them on mission. They are the ones that have the responsibility of feeding their people since those who are responsible are not doing it. Mark says this explicitly at the beginning of his text, the people are hungry because the leaders are not doing their work: “there they are, a flock without a shepherd” (Mark 6, 34). His partisans could not believe what Jesus had just told them. Not only were they conscious of the dangers of the task – but they knew that one does not tread on the toes of those responsible without facing the consequences - in fact, his partisans believed the task impossible:

^{Mk 3, 37} What! Are we to go out and spend two hundred denarii on bread for them to eat?

And so, Jesus will teach them how to do this (Mk 6, 38-44). It is a question of using the food already available; it is shared, distributed and without knowing exactly how it happens, everyone has had something to eat. Not only that, there is some food left over, and oh, what a surprise! There is enough so that each partisan can fill his own basket for tomorrow's distribution. Indeed, the task of feeding people never ends.

From the start, one must know that the success of the mission is an impossible task when it is lived with the meager means of poor people and know also that it never ends.

...a lesson of courage...

Mark understood very well that the task of Jesus' partisans was a terrifying one. In his narrative, the multiplication of the loaves follows the walking on the waters (Mk 6, 45-52). The narrative must be interpreted by the conclusion of v 52, which shows clearly that the Evangelist understood the event symbolically. Even if Jesus invites his partisans to show some courage,

^{Mk 6,50} Show a little courage, it is I, do not be afraid,
they remained paralyzed.

^{Mk 6, 50} Actually, they did not understand a thing concerning the loaves, impossible for them to be moved to compassion.

Jesus and his partisans are divided by their different interpretation of the exigencies of life. By opposing themselves to him, his partisans are rowing upstream against their own existence and this is devastating. Jesus wants to walk in front of them to show them how to cross a difficult situation, but they are paralyzed by fear. We must take note here that they are not called to do occasional volunteer work, nor to generously distribute some surplus that has fallen into their hands. If they have been sent to meet their people, it is to become aware of their misery. The time of the domination of the Roman Empire in the country has come to an end. The time of centralization of power in Jerusalem, in the hands of the High Priest or the King, even if he was of the line of David, has come to an end. It is the time of a brand new regime of life. It is easy for us to imagine the panic that gripped the partisans of Jesus when they perceived the meaning that He had in mind, when He asked them to distribute the bread to the people. His vision filled his followers with panic and greatly worried them, a fact which probably led Judas to become the traitor that we have come to know. In a way, the partisans of Jesus understood too well what He expected from them, but they did not want to have anything to do with it. Let us not forget that the most important ones among them had been John's partisans and they knew that John had just been decapitated. Neither Herod Antipas, nor Pilate, nor Caiaphas were men who would allow power to be usurped from them. The repression would be terrible. There was no question that they would allow themselves to be led by a "phantom". Mark grasped their mental state and, let us not forget, that his community, established at the heart of the Empire, was actually living the same fears.

Lesson to be retained:

To be involved in mission presupposes that one has faced one's fears, come to terms with one's illusions and learned what courage is all about.

...an important reminder...

Even if Jesus had accomplished a second multiplication of loaves, he will not succeed in calming the fears of his followers. For this reason, Mark wrote the long text that follows to convince us of this point. I am reading the full passage because it is important:

^{Mk 8, 14} The disciples had forgotten to take bread and they had only one loaf with them on the boat.

¹⁵ Then he gave them this warning, 'Keep your eyes open; look out for the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.'

¹⁶ And they said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread'.

¹⁷ And Jesus knew it, and He said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not understand, still not realize? Are your minds closed?'

¹⁸ *Have you eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear? Or do you not remember?*

¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect? They answered, 'Twelve'.

²⁰ 'And when I broke the second loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' And they answered, 'Seven'.

²¹ Then He said to them, 'Do you still not understand?'

Everything is significant in this text, so much so, that when it is understood the whole of the Gospel can be grasped. Jesus addressed these words to his partisans, but through them, Mark is targeting those for whom he is writing his Gospel, that is to say, His Church, and in particular its leaders. Through them, of course, he is also addressing us.

The great temptation that faces all humans is to live in a bubble of unawareness, simply trying to survive as best they can, in a world that has been organized by forces which ferment the leaven of death. Mar names two of these forces: The Pharisees, sent by Jerusalem to subdue Galilee and Herod, the potentate at the service of the Empire. If they want to follow Jesus, the partisans must open their eyes, understand how the world functions, forget their little personal comforts (the "bread" that is their obsession), see clearly and especially remember the lesson of the multiplication of the loaves. At every multiplication of the loaves, there were baskets of bread left over. Why? So that the partisans, according to their capacity, could do the same thing that Jesus had done and realize that it is their turn to distribute bread to the people. However, this task is never completed; it must be done over and over again. But if the believers always want to hear other things than what the Gospel proposes, it is because they are trying to give themselves another mission rather than the one conferred upon them by the Gospel. Their fidelity to Jesus resides more in being enlightened by the Church than by becoming themselves light for others living in chaos and darkness.

Lesson to be retained :

Impossible to undertake the mission if we place our confidence in those who, like the followers of Herod and the Pharisees of times past, control the world today and demand adhesion to their decisions.

...the willingness of the blind and deaf to be cured...

In chapters 8-10, Mark takes great pains to make the partisans of Jesus accept their mission. He begins and ends this section by a narrative of the cure of a blind man. This cure is remarkable because it is the only one where Jesus had to try twice to succeed (Mk 8, 22-26). In the middle of the narrative, he has placed the cure of the blind and deaf man (Mk 9, 14-29). But Jesus will not really be able to convince his deaf and blind partisans (no doubt, neither Mark, nor his Roman community...). All of them are upset:

^{Mk 10, 32} They are on their way up to Jerusalem. Jesus walks in front of them. His partisans are perturbed. The others follow fearfully.

Finally, only Bartimaeus, the blind man, who had been cured as related in the last narrative of this section, will follow him willingly toward Jerusalem (Mk 10, 52).

...in flight regardless of the Last Supper...

According to Mark, on the eve of his death, Jesus will bring to mind the multiplication of the loaves to signify the orientation that He wanted to give to his life:

^{Mk 14, 22} As they were eating, He took bread and gave it to them.

Take it, this is me.

²³ Then, He took up the cup and gave it to them.

This is my life, a life that is committed, a life poured out for many.

His hope was that his followers would continue in his footsteps. Unfortunately, just a few hours later, Mark reports this devastating phrase:

^{Mk 14,50} And they all deserted him and ran away.

Following this, and since then, instead of understanding his last supper as the ultimate appeal for them to take over the mission that He had wanted to confide to them, that is to feed their people, also his people, faithful to themselves rather than to him, they decided to see a ritual destined to feed themselves.

Lesson to be retained:

The Last Supper is a reminder that the mission of Jesus' partisans consists in feeding humanity (bread), in giving them the taste of a fullness of life (salt) and in enlightening it in its darkness (light).

...even the women were afraid...

In the Gospel of Mark, the mission of Jesus does not interest too many people. Therefore, it is not surprising that Mark's gospel ends scandalously. In fact, at the tomb, just as a young man of celestial origin has sent the women to tell the partisans of Jesus to meet him in Galilee, the gospel ends with these words:

^{Mk 16, 8} The women came out of the tomb and ran away because they were frightened out of their wits and they did not say a thing to anyone, for they were terribly afraid...

According to Mark, the Gospel was not transmitted by official proclamations. The men are elsewhere, the women are silent. The three little dots which bring to conclusion the Gospel of Mark hold a question for his readers: and you, how do you see the mission in the footsteps of Jesus?

II. THE MISSION TODAY

It is evident that not a single human being alone can define the periphery of mission for the whole world, not even for a Religious Community. We can become aware of this only after a continuous collective discernment process lived over a long period of time.

However, we can try to elaborate the necessary conditions for a greater awareness in view of moving toward action ("obedience"). Hoping to be helpful, this is what I shall attempt to do in my following presentation. I shall do so, however, with "fear and trembling" as Paul would say. I shall divide this presentation in two parts based on your commitment to be mystics and prophets. (CG 2011)

1. « Mystic according to the Parent's intent »

Mark presents an uncompromising description of the difficulties of following Jesus. As a result, one must dig deep for the motivations leading us to follow him. It is impossible to walk with him without having been called from within by that same millenary Voice that He himself had heard from the author of Ps 146 and from John the Baptist. Therefore, it is important that each one of you, from the depth of your heart, every day, you verify that it is not just any voice calling you forth, but the one precisely named by the Nazarene in this famous text:

^{Lk.10, 21-22} I bless you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children.
Yes, Father for that is what it has pleased you to do.

This is the text that says God for Jesus, the One whom He expected would establish the Regime. It is a profoundly critical text, a thousand miles from a streamlined God devoid of true challenges. Jesus experienced God from the base of the social pyramid with the poor and the

victims of the political, social, economic, familial and religious system in full sway at that time. We must constantly return to this text because it is so unfamiliar to us it is difficult for it to penetrate our life and our commitment naturally. The hope of the Regime is founded on the personality of the Parent and on the needs of ordinary folk.

At the base of the pyramid

Our mystique will not be in line with that of Jesus' if it is not aligned on that of the God of Jesus. Nor will it be aligned on the mystique of God, if, from experience, we have not verified that our God is the God of the little one. And here is a first aspect of the Gospel which incredibly complicates our commitment to be mystics, since the God of the gospel – and I apologize here for my lack of nuance – has, in fact, nothing to do with those images that surface in the Liturgy, in the prayers and in the official rites of our Church. Our prayers have not been formulated by people who share the life of the famished and of the oppressed, but rather by people who are comfortable and *pray* for those who are in misery. It is evident that the God to whom they pray, was not encountered there where they are talking about Him. We cannot be mystics just anywhere, with anyone and at the service of just any God. The 'we' of the Our Father, can only be uttered from the bottom of the pyramid with the poor people. By inviting the 'little ones' to address God directly, which was what He actually did with them, Jesus took upon Himself to take away from the priests their exclusive power to pray for their people. The priests were part of the 'great ones' from which the Parent kept hidden, He did not trust their prayers. Throughout the ages and cultures, the mystics have a constant responsibility to reinvent prayer with those to whom the Parent reveals Himself after having met Him in their midst.

Divest ourselves of the system...

In his words and in his actions, the Nazarene deeply disassociates Himself from *all* the institutions of his time. Having made the experience of the absolute reality of the Parent, He is moved to put into perspective all human systems which are incredibly irretrievable.

^{Mk 2, 21} No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse.

Perhaps the most difficult thing to do is to reflect upon our own encounter with the Parent of Jesus and to live the same consequences that He did. There are two reasons for this. The first is that having been taught to place Jesus above the human condition, we have come to believe that this radicalism was founded on his unique relation with his Parent and is, therefore, out of reach for us. The second reason lies in the fact that we conclude that Jesus lived in totally different conditions than ours, that he had good cause to put into question the dysfunctional institutions of his times. And yet, the truth is that the Parent looks upon the situation with the same gaze that Jesus did. The Gospel presents Jesus as the One teaching us how to react when faced with political, economical and religious situations *today*. The vision that Jesus had of his world must also be ours. It is in this way that the mystics learn to be prophets. By disengaging themselves, at least interiorly, of the control of all human systems forced upon them, no matter what they

may be, or in what domain they are to be found, day by day, throughout the ages, the partisans of Jesus, must be at the service of the one and only true Parent.

The marginal Parent is to be found with the marginalized, in marginality, and thus He fashions his partisans to be more and more marginalized. This experience or marginality, within all human institutions – including that of religious – is the necessary condition of genuine involvement in mission according to the vision of God's Regime. Thus, the prayer of the mystics allows them to assimilate the fundamental orientations of the personality of the Parent and to disengage themselves from the weight of institutions who want them to be at their service. The Gospel, read through the eyes of the mystics, renews the encounter with the Parent of Jesus, allows for re-learning the subversion of God, reaffirms that we do not have the right to give our life to just any institution and provokes a critical in depth analysis of the political, economic, ecological, social, familial and religious realities of life.

Through the eyes of the mystics, the Gospel serves as a test for the Church. By making it discover the truth of its being, the Gospel humiliates the Church, it wounds it and disturbs it. The encounter with the All-Other, can only happen at such a cost. Through the vow of « obedience » Religious Life pushes its members to engage in concrete action. Therefore, it is a question of committing self to follow Jesus in line with God's Regime which will be established according to the Parent's orientations revealed to the little ones.

Once more, we must recall that Jesus was exactly in the same situation in which we find ourselves, minus the gadgets, and that our situation does not differ from his. The leaders of the political, economic, financial, and religious dimensions of existence have the same reactions as those of ancient times. They are neither better nor worse, neither are the institutions. And the Parent just like Jesus – this we will see later -, has not changed his way of appreciating one or the other. He continues to remain in hiding for the great ones and to reveal Himself to the little ones.

2. Prophets of God's Regime

To function effectively in History, a Church must engage itself in the mission following in the footsteps of Jesus, situating itself in the line followed by Jesus and John the Baptist and constantly renewing its way of doing, of thinking and acting according to the milieu in which it finds itself. Less than twenty five years after the death of Jesus, Paul of Tarsus was already convinced of this.

The three principal tasks of the Church

Concerning how the Church functions, Paul has written an important text:

^{1 Co 12, 18} And those whom God has appointed in the Church are:

first of all missionaries,

secondly prophets

thirdly teachers,

after them, miraculous powers, then gifts of healing, helpful acts, guidance, various kinds of tongues.

According to Paul, there are three great charisms in the Church and each one is a dynamic force engaging the receivers of these gifts to work in a very precise field of commitment.

- The missionaries are sent as followers of Jesus. Living as He did, like the people at the base of the pyramid they share in the experience of the Parent and work at gathering the people in small groups (Churches). Initially, it is sufficient to be two or three followers together (Mt. 18, 20).
- The teachers are the learned people of these communities. Having been trained to read and interpret Scripture, they are meant to situate the life experience of their group in line with that of those who had heard the Voice in the past.
- As for the prophets, they had the gift of knowing how to trace the journey of the present and of the future.

The experience of the Parent will fade away if it is not renovated by touching life at the base of society, and this, throughout the whole world (missionaries). There is a risk that the experience will not be perceived or will be badly perceived if it is not situated in line with that of the past (teachers). And, the experience will die if it is not engaged in the new paths of life (prophets). This is, all told, what is essential. Following this, Paul names all types of gifts to which he gives little importance, including that of pastors. In the course of subsequent history, unfortunately, the pastors have tried – and succeeded - in taking possession of all the other gifts, particularly, the first three. The only way the Pastors will be able to fulfill their role well is if they learn the mission of their community by looking at how the missionaries are living, if they can listen to the teachers who are tracing the orientations of the millenary Voice, and if they allow themselves to be challenged by the new roads opened to them by the prophets.

The pastors are not meant to tell the missionaries where to go, to the teachers what to say, or to the prophets which road they are meant to travel. Nor, on the other hand, are the holders of these charisms meant to tell the pastors how to direct their community.

An awesome mission

Following Jesus, Religious Life, and all those who more or less formally associate themselves with it, clearly situates itself as being responsible for mission. According to your vision of mission, you are indicating the intention of living it by placing the accent on prophetic openness toward the future. This is at once an awesome and courageous decision. I would like to help you identify clearly this dimension of your life, but I feel very limited, for I have received as gift, not that of mission, nor of prophecy, but that of teacher. It is much easier for me to revive the past than to interpret the present or to point the road to the future. However, my teaching experience could perhaps be of some use to you. We could expect that the task of saying what the past was all about and to help in the understanding of what Scripture is saying would not be the least bit compromising. But, I must say, this has been far from the case in my life's experience. The Church is interested in itself and reads the Gospel with the intent of comforting itself rather than with the goal of encountering a living challenge. If the Church rebuffs so

mercilessly those who simply try to tell it what the past was all about, how will it treat those who will try to open new perspectives for the future? For you, the greatest suffering will not come from the exterior but from the interior. As prophets of God's Regime, in the footsteps of Jesus, you are not allowed to face your mission as if you simply were to accomplish some good deeds while letting the system continue its purring as it sees fit. I am referring here to the « wide avenues of commitment » proclaimed by CG 2011. You need to live them in the manner of Jesus. Jesus does not cure for the sake of curing; he does not operate cures by closing his eyes on the reality around him.

I will bring to mind a few examples from the Gospel of Mark.

- Jesus cures a leper even if he did not have the right to touch him and that by doing so He is interfering with the function of the priests.
- He gives back to a worker the use of his hand even it was forbidden to do so on the Sabbath.
- He accepts that a woman, losing blood, touch him though this was strictly forbidden.
- He sends the legion of swine in the sea at the risk of his own security.
- He gives voice to the mute and this threatens the system which wants to control the voice of the people.
- He restores good health to the daughter of a pagan woman even though they were so many people in Israel that were ill.

Of course He is acting out of compassion, but Jesus never loses sight of the system which is the main cause of the people's misery. The mission of Jesus is to try *both* to relieve the victims of the system and reveal to the system how perverse it really is. According to the logic of the Gospel, you have no right to take up a part of Jesus' mission (mercy) and to leave aside the other part (prophetic protestation). Contrary to the idea that we want to project of him, Jesus was not a man of unity. He himself said that he had come to divide the families and to provoke a blaze that He was eager to see enflame all around him. According to him, one had to disengage oneself from the system and let the dead bury the dead. There was nothing to be expected from them. However, He was not a violent man. He could no longer stand to see the perverse effects and the sea of suffering that the policies of the great ones provoked on those that He loved and to whom the Parent was revealing Himself. He lived the anger and the impatience of love. Always and everywhere, prophets bring about tension.

Prophets also have a sense of discerning the present in view of preparing the future.

Today, the prophetic mission, following in the footsteps of Jesus, is necessarily difficult, dangerous, multifaceted and international. Since the system encompasses the whole of the planet and holds ramifications everywhere, it must be targeted the length and width of the world. We are not allowed to live comfortably here, while, for its own profit, it creates ravages for our sisters and brothers elsewhere. Nor is it possible to be faithful to Jesus while allowing the system to show a smiling countenance here when it is in the process of pillaging the resources of the planet elsewhere. Of course, it is impossible for us to accomplish everything but we are requested to do what we can in solidarity with our brothers and sisters elsewhere, who share the fate of those who are paying dearly for the well being of those living at the heart of the Empire.

We do not all have the same gift. I remember a word spoken by a liberation Theologian: during manifestations, when there was danger of harassment for the members of his community, he would open the doors of the Church so that the elderly members could enter to pray for the others. The same mission but lived differently. As for me, at a certain period of my life when I was questioning the coherence of teaching the Gospel in the comfort of the university, a companion, worker priest, counseled me to stay exactly where I was: he, in the cellar of his Hilton, and I, in my university for we shared the same objective; find our place and our style in the practice of a common mission.

Free hands

A last word, expressed clearly by John the Baptist:

^{Mt 3, 8/Lk 3,8} Produce fruit in keeping with repentance and do not presume to tell yourselves ‘We have Abraham as our father’, because I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these very stones.

The text is significant for us. In any case, it was meaningful for Jesus, who, on John’s word, made a complete turnaround which changed his life radically. If the Church decides to refuse the mission, the millenary Voice will speak to the heart of other human beings prepared to listen to it. This is an important warning: God’s hands are not tied by the Church.

Furthermore, it suffices to be attentive to what is going on around us to notice that John’s word is always in the process of being actualized. God – or Jesus – has already pushed faith out of the borders of the Church and mobilized a great number of young people who are now working in the line of God’s Regime through their solidarity with the neediest of the world, or through their commitment to ecology.

If you answer correctly to the call of mission, you will meet in this vast world a good number of brothers and sisters who do not want to know a thing about religion, and also, in the universal Church, a good number of brothers and sisters who do not want to know a thing about Jesus and his Parent. You will need to learn to go against the influence of the non-believers in the Church, just as you will need to be vigilant to recognize the nontraditional brothers and sisters with whom Jesus is calling you to be Church.

You will also need to take their needs into account, to gather them in a new type of fraternity and to let them know that they are also part of the millenary line. Therefore, when taking a prophetic stance to accomplish the task of Jesus, the missionary dimension will have lead you to the coming together of a new Church, devoid of all religious impediments.

This is what I hope for you.

Congrès Mission Sainte-Croix

Pierrefonds

le 3 juillet 2016

Unrevised Translation