

HOLY CROSS FORUM

OPENING WORD

CAP-ROUGE, JULY 26, 2009

Dear sisters, dear associates, lay missionary and *companions*,
Dear collaborators,



Introduction

1. Who among us has not experienced outstanding moments that radically changed the course of our life, unforgettable moments that we remember as if they happened yesterday?
2. This is all the stronger when it is a matter of life passages that are experienced collectively. Such experiences bond a group together and fashion for it a new identity. Let's imagine those peoples, those groups who have survived a catastrophe; who, together, vanquished dangers, successfully realized projects; peoples and groups who faced repression, organized together a resistance movement and triumphed over dictatorships, etc. This common experience of passage, of survival and of victory renews the pride of belonging, and the dynamism of the entire group concerning choices to be made and ways to be followed.
3. These are foundational moments whereby we enter into a new meaning, into new possibilities, into new hopes.
4. These foundational moments can come to bear on our experience without our having chosen them. However, when a given group, a Congregation, such as ourselves today, together chooses this foundational moment and decides to experience it as one body, it is a spiritual experience of availability and of openness to grace that makes God smile, one in which God profoundly rejoices. God rejoices in seeing us here together...
5. In these times when wars; a financial and economic crisis; political repression; systematic destruction of our ecosystem and of indigenous peoples; hunger; the market's dictatorship; pandemics, natural disasters and violence of all kinds are reaching worrisome proportions... , let us take a brief moment to think of the difficult passages through which are going the peoples that we represent as well as those in difficulty throughout the world: Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Honduras, etc...

In these times when "*all of creation is suffering and groaning still in one great act of giving birth*", (Rm 8:22),

in these times when we also, as a Congregation, together with all of creation, are suffering and groaning in the hope of our new birth in the Spirit,

we have chosen, for a year and a half now, to undertake our journey, to begin our Forum-pilgrimage by begging our Trinitarian God to give us "*available hearts, open to*

the challenges of our time, attentive to the surprises of the Spirit, and ready to risk the following of Jesus Christ in the footsteps of Basil Moreau...” and to accompany each other on the way... so that we might learn more and more how to live as from **one heart and one same passion**.

6. We know that choosing to meet here at Cap-Rouge—with all that that means by way of expenses—is already, in itself, a risk at this time of acute economic crisis. We have heard and pondered the voices of all those who questioned this, reminding us of the seriousness of the moment... We have tried to be simple in our choices—you understand why the logistics are very basic and why everyone was so informed—but we have chosen nonetheless to risk this forum endeavor, convinced that at the heart of the great worry of our world, God is awaiting us so as to tell us again of the solicitude inherent to the resurrection project for the world, and to tell us again the share of mission being entrusted to us today..., and this, with full divine blessings.
7. We have chosen to undertake this journey while keeping in mind the paschal mystery which recalls that life can rise to fullness from any death, and this strengthens our faith. We have chosen to undertake this journey, convinced that the world is not bad news only; that increasingly there are groups who do not declare themselves vanquished by “the great worry” and by its threats of extinction, but who choose to invent roads to the future. And ourselves, we want, one more time, to choose resolutely to be part of this caravan wherein we know that God is going before us.
8. We have chosen to undertake this journey with God, and we have asked Sister Jacqueline Boudreau, snjm, and Brother Daniel Cadrin, op, to accompany us throughout our pilgrimage to remind us at all times of why we undertook this journey, and to keep us centered on the Essential. Let us take a brief moment to beg, for Jacqueline and Daniel, all the necessary graces for their full cooperation with the Spirit at work among us and in them.

The Holy Cross Forum, a spiritual and foundational undertaking

1. This summit of the Holy Cross Forum—which will be experienced with the large group and in communion with those who are participating off-campus, and that will then continue with some fifty of the youngest members of Holy Cross—is, above all else, a spiritual undertaking,
 - a pause for celebrating who we have become;
 - a sacred space for the sharing of the Word, a space that would be inscribed in our heart in a language of communion, so that we might live more and more from *ONE HEART AND ONE PASSION*...
 - a space for the profound aspirations of the soul, of ardent and continual desire for the good that comes from God, a place of passion for life where we are ready to risk all so as to receive the blessings of God and the mission being entrusted to us today by God.
2. By thus describing the Forum, we are taking up again the same description which Father Moreau utilized to speak of prayer, in his book on the *Exercises* that he proposed to his Congregation in 1855. Yes, this Forum is a space of prayer, “*a space for the profound aspirations of the soul, for ardent desire, for passion*”. This Forum is a prayer,

a prayer that is both a celebration of thanksgiving and of committed intercession, full of hope for ourselves and for the world towards which we are sent on a resurrection mission by God and in God.

3. For having seen us live this endeavor since a year and a half, and prepare ourselves for this summit that we are beginning tonight, here and off-campus, I felt the desire that is ours to move towards our encounter with the blessings of God. The Central Committee and the sub-committees committed themselves body and soul to this process so that they might help us to live fully this encounter with each other and with God. The question I ask this evening to each one of you and to all persons present here is this: What is the intensity of your desire for God's blessings? What is the strength of our conviction? What is the ardor of our passion? To what extent are we **ready to risk TOGETHER** for the sake of obtaining God's blessings?
4. When I speak of an ardent desire for the blessings of God, I think of two great biblical figures: one from the Old Testament, Jacob, and the other from the New Testament, Mary Magdalene.
5. You certainly know the twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca : Esau and Jacob. Do you also remember the dish of lentils? Let me reread for you this passage from Genesis 25:29-34.

*One day, Jacob had prepared a dish of lentils and Esau came in from the wild **exhausted**. Esau said to Jacob "Let me gulp down some of that red stuff, **I am exhausted**..." Jacob replied: "First give me your birthright in exchange for it." Esau said: "**Look, I'm on the point of dying. What good will any birthright do me???**" But Jacob insisted, "**Swear to me first!**" So he sold Jacob his birthright under oath. Jacob then gave him some bread and lentil stew; and Esau ate, drank, got up, and went his way. Esau **cares little for his birthright**.*

6. Nearing exhaustion and living under the specter of certain death, are we, like Esau, looking solely for a succulent dish of lentils that will satisfy our hunger of the moment, and then spend our time exhausted, waiting for death? Are we ready to sell our birthright and the blessings of our God for immediate satisfaction because, in any case, there is no future? Or do we find within us the ardent desire of Jacob who, while facing the same present and the same uncertain future as his brother, continued to believe deeply in the blessings of his father and who meditated day and night on the possibility of having them? He was keeping watch for this moment and was ready to seize it. His brother thought only of dying and was no longer expecting anything from life nor from his birthright, nor from the blessings of his father. Jacob believed in these so much that he joined with his mother and risked everything in order to obtain the blessings he had always desired...
7. It is this same Jacob, a quiet but determined man,—if we're to believe the description of him relative to his brother Esau who was a skillful hunter, always roaming the steppes for prey (Genesis 25:27)—this same Jacob who, always filled with this ardent desire for divine blessings, struggled an entire night with God and refused to let go until God had blessed him, even if it meant coming out of this struggle with a broken hip!!! (Genesis 32:23-33) One time yet again, his ardent and untiring desire brought upon him the blessings of God whose designs for Jacob included gratifying him most

generously. And ourselves, what are we ready to risk for the sake of obtaining God's blessings?...

8. And what about our sister, Mary Magdalene? Neither abject death, nor empty tomb, nor the long night, nor terrible fear..., nothing deterred her from her ardent desire to seek Him on whom she had staked her entire life. All of her being "*gravitated towards God*", to use this beautiful expression of Basil Moreau.

"Mary Magdalene's tireless quest renders active the grace of God, which allows her **to re-cognize** by a simple word "Marie!"—beyond appearances—the One her heart was seeking. (John 20:16) This re-cognition, this capacity of Mary Magdalene **to know Him anew, to re-cognize Him, to come to birth anew with Him** comes from the gift of Jesus... at the heart of her ardent desire to find Him; it is not a con-quest at the end of a struggle made of tactics and clever strategies. In this space of openness to surprises from God and to "*amazement*"..., ... in her great availability, Mary Magdalene was able to *adjust her way of seeing*. This gift *of being able to adjust one's way of seeing, of being able to see in a new way* is offered there where openness and availability are unconditional. What a beautiful gift to ask, for the adventure of these days together... Not only was Mary Magdalene able to adjust her way of seeing and to see in a new way, but she was recognized in her very identity, she was called by name and she saw herself entrusted with the important mission of announcing to the disciples the joy of the resurrection, the beginning of a new era, the era of fulfillment of God's promises."

9. The Forum, as a space of conviviality, requires that we go towards the other, that we go **meet the other in a meaningful way, that we be blessing each for the other**. And perhaps by adjusting our way of seeing a little bit, we will be able to **see ourselves, to re-cognize ourselves, to be "born-anew-with", as the etymology of the French verb "re-con-naître" says, and risk being "born-anew-together-with" so as to be, together, companions on the journey of our mission**, and this beyond the frontiers of our regions, our cultures, our countries, our races, our languages..., in our beautiful diversity.
10. During this meeting meant to be lived meaningfully, let us take into our communion-without-borders all our sisters and all the lay men and women who share in our charism and who are living the Forum off-campus. There are some who so very much wanted to be here... Thanks to the materials prepared by those coordinating the Forum, the entire Congregation and its associates can experience this high moment in an alternative way, and in communion with our assembly here. Let us keep them present to us at all times.
11. As Walter Wink reminds us in *Prayer and the Powers*, when we are gathered together in prayer, in celebration and in intercession, "*we are engaged in an act of co-creation, an act in which a small part of the universe rises up and becomes an incandescent fire, a powerful, vibrating center that radiates all around it the very power of the universe.*"

Conclusion

Wherever we may be, let us rest assured that in this Forum-space, we are engaged TOGETHER in an act of co-creation, an act of re-creation with God, and that we constitute a **small incandescent sector at the heart of the universe, a powerful center of communion that radiates around itself the very power of the universe!** May our Forum be a space of Pentecost, a fire of blessing that sheds its light over the entire world.

It is up to each one to let the Spirit reveal Herself through her or his entire being, and to let Her accomplish Her marvels in us, in our Congregation and through us. *“Let us not control the springing forth of our generosity! Let us let the Spirit shine forth!”* In the space of sacred fire, let us not forget that ***God’s grace is enough!***

Kesta Occident, C.S.C.