

C.Ss.R.

PIRITUALITY

one body (Eph 4,4)

un solo corpo (Ef 4,4)

un seul corps (Eph 4,4)

un solo cuerpo (Eph 4,4)

jedna wspólnota (Ef 4,4)

um só corpo (Ef 4,4)

ein lieb (Eph 4,4)

01 - IN THE BEGINNING FAITH

The meeting may begin with a hymn, followed by some words of welcome and a prayer taken from the liturgy or some traditional Redemptorist one.

The serious question of faith.

'Where are you?' (Gn.3, 9) is the first question asked by God of a human being. The same question is asked to each one of us. It is also posed to me demanding if I consider faith as my most precious gift.

From being received as a gift in Baptism, Faith becomes a heritage which I am free to choose and is above all else the basis of my vocation.



What's about my faith today? Does it help me to live to the full my mission as a Redemptorist?

There are those for whom the Creed is just a formula to be recited or as if it were a part to be acted. Others experience faith as a thirst that is not satisfied while more regard it as demanding continual renunciation without the promised hundredfold. At times the number of theories imbibed or indeed the routine of ministry may prevent a simple faith. There are times also when human logic inspires our choices rather than the gospel.

If faith is a journey many of us have stopped at the edge of the street. We are all aware of the burden of history down the centuries that begins with the Church being called in question, then comes the denial of God followed by what we may describe as the insidious virus of suspicion and doubt in the relations between ourselves and God. We are all conditioned by ideologies: those which since a fragment - it is called matter, nature, technology, science - claims to explain everything, including the invisible. At the level of public opinion God is not dead, but often reduced to an object more of consumerism.

God and modernity cannot get along together, so we are told by the wise men of this world. Yet modernity has caused millions of deaths and hostile factions and post modernity has produced disillusion. The myth of unlimited progress has fired the ambitions of many who without scruple have produced a crisis situation for millions of families, mass unemployment and fear. To know that we share one world does not bridge the ever increasing gap between rich and poor, where 20% of the world population exists on less than one dollar a day. And greed at times is abusive of creation and disfigures its beauty.

In this scenario faith is called to vest itself in new clothes. Rather, to be without it. Today faith is naked. It can no longer depend on the power of the press or the support of politicians. There is no room for it on Television and it is ignored in the field of economics.

For us, however, faith is the most important of all questions. It can give life to everything, politics, economics and culture. Our own ministry if fired by the faith has the power to liberate and spread joy. Without faith everything collapses.

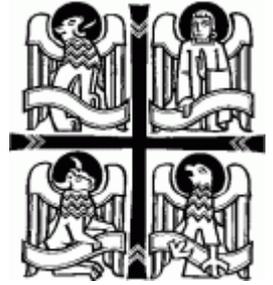
Your Word is a light for my steps

Introduced with a hymn (alleluia or similar) the reading from Lk. 17, 5-6 is proclaimed

The reflection on this extract may be shared according to the method of *lectio divina*. Perhaps here we might point out:

- The **context**: *before* the apostles said 'Increase our faith' (v.5) Jesus had stressed the importance of forgiveness. *Then* Jesus speaks of us as 'unprofitable servants'. When we have to bestow on others the mercy that God has enhanced to us we discover our inadequacy. It is faith alone that enables us to do this without pretending to be at the centre of attention.
- Although tiny and helpless like a *mustard seed*, our faith has enormous **potential**, because it allows God to act. It is in our weakness that we experience its strength (Phil. 4, 13).

After the sharing it would be well to have a period of silence and then a hymn.



From our Redemptorist tradition.

St. Alphonsus is the saint of the Enlightenment. Although living in a Christian society, he was aware of a growing hostility to the Church and the ever increasing importance assigned to rationalism. In 1775 one of his letters laments the ever increasing diffusion in Naples of books inspired by an atheistic vision of life.

Even he himself had difficulties with the faith. Tannoia says that when he took up residence at the Chinese College (1729-1732) he experienced aridity and desolation. He did not find devotion in the Mass, prayer was tiring and tedious: he searched for God but did not find him: 'I go to Jesus Christ but he ignores me, I have recourse to the Madonna but she does not hear me', he used to say in this period.

Alphonsus, however, did not abandon his efforts and had the sole hope of pleasing God even in that condition. This perseverance in the dark night enabled him to find again the joy that comes from the faith. The faith of Alphonsus sprang from regarding the person of the Redeemer and seeing in Christ the key which explains all history. Jesus is not an object to be known and studied in order to be used in our preaching. It is by loving him that we will understand him, that love that is insuperably well expressed in the *Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament and Most Holy Mary* or in the *Novena for Christmas*.

That 'useless subject', St. Gerard, can also teach us much about the faith. This is especially true when we read in his letters where he speaks of 'faith that is life for him' and 'life that is faith for him' and when he hopes to exist and to live like 'something fashioned by holy faith'. This continual and mutual interaction between the simple duties of his life and the demands of a journey in faith, following the steps of Jesus Christ is something that moves us even today.

Here we might make use of some simple rite with a symbol indicative of faith. Then follow with a hymn.

Our Constitutions today

It is just a little over 30 years since our Constitutions were approved.

When we consider how they speak of faith it seems a much longer period. The portrait they give us of the Redemptorist is that of a man 'strong in faith' (Const. 20) who nourishes his faith with a

spirit of contemplation (Const. 24). However a warning cloud appears on the horizon when speaking of formation: the candidates must be animated also by unwavering faith if they want to be adequately prepared for the trial of loneliness and for the uncertainties which accompany the apostolic ministry (Const. 81).

In this context we are all aware today that the faith is a journey to be undertaken each day. We all feel the threat of nihilism and incoherence and we realise how topical are the words of Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii nuntiandi*: 'As an evangeliser the Church has to begin by evangelising itself' (No. 15).

We have to be aware of the danger of regarding faith simply from an intellectual point of view, as something we have acquired and made our own from study. There is also the danger of seeing the faith as a matter for other people such as those to whom we preach.

If we are to rediscover our faith today we must get rid of all excuses such as lack of proper formation, the fault of superiors and structures which were not functioning properly. Each one of us can make a new beginning today.

We ought to follow the example of the poor and simple people in order to find the simplicity of the faith. Then it must become life for me, my life. It must become something that I experience, my own experience. It must lead to an encounter with a person, Jesus Christ.

*At this point if desired there could be a fraternal sharing on the subject and it would be a good thing if each member made a kind of 'resolution' or a commitment that he intends to carry out in line with the theme discussed.
This is followed by silence and then a hymn.*

Conclusion

Before concluding it would be a good thing to have some prayer of intercession, inspired by the subject. The following are some possible examples:

- That faith may direct and become the criteria of the choices we make in life.
- For confreres who have ceased to search for faith
- For those in doubt and in darkness
- That we may find again the faith of the simple people
- That we may learn to give more space to the Word of God
- That we may recover apostolic courage.

Conclude with an Our Father and a liturgical prayer and finally a blessing and hymn to Our Lady.



Translated by Anthony Mulvey, cssr