

Silver Jubilee of Monastic Profession  
fr. Thierry Marteaux, OSB  
Bec 31.10.1990 - Rostrevor 31.10.2015  
(Ephesians 3:14-19/Luke 8:19-21)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the altar today are two lighted candles adorned with the Taizé cross in silver. That same cross is reproduced on the Profession Scroll of our Bro. Thierry, who, on this day, twenty-five years ago, offered his life to God in the community of the Abbey of Bec, for the Feast of the Dedication of the Abbey church.

I was Bro. Thierry's novice master for the latter part of his novitiate and his formation director right through to his Solemn Profession some years later.

Bro. Thierry made his pre-Profession retreat in the Carmel of Mazille in Burgundy. While there he had the opportunity to go to pray at Taizé with a group of people from Mazille – which included a young German pastor (Emmanuel was the pastor's name).

This experience had a profound impact upon our brother.

On his return to Bec, in accord with a spiritual intuition given to him in the *Church of Reconciliation* at Taizé, I agreed with Bro. Thierry that he would make his Profession carrying in his heart the particular intention of the unity of the Church.

I believe that what was lived on 31 October 1990 (his Profession day) prepared our brother for what he lives here today in Northern Ireland in this Monastery of the Holy Cross.

Mind you, little did I think on his Profession day that one day we would be celebrating his silver Jubilee together here in Kilbroney Valley, but, I am confident, the Lord already held that plan in His heart for our brother and our community.

Let me back-track a little...

Bro. Thierry arrived to Bec on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1988 to begin his postulancy.

I remember clearly walking along the banks of the river at Bec on the day of his arrival into the community – it was the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Holy Hope. I found myself giving thanks for this new brother whom I did not know. As I prayed for him that day, intuitively I knew his arrival into the Bec community would hold a special significance for me. I also recall fr. Claude hinting the same thing to me a little later on. As I walked through the workshop fr. Claude said to me: *given the date of the arrival of this new brother his presence here will be particularly significant for you.*

With time, I came to see what was being played out without any of us fully realising then what was going to emerge.

Before the end of Bro. Thierry's novitiate I was to become his novice-master – and already before that (when he was still a postulant) I was asked by the abbot to introduce fr. Bernard and himself to the Old Testament.

They say: *Hindsight is a wonderful thing.*

Later on, with hindsight, I recalled something Abbot Paul Grammont had said around the time Bro. Eric and myself were called back to Bec in 1987, from what I sometimes refer to as *our first incarnation in Ireland*. I call still hear Abbot Paul's words: *Someone new will arrive into the community here at Bec and he will receive the call for Ireland which will open everything up again.*

While I was very careful not to influence the brother confided to me for formation at Bec in any way, and even despite my efforts to distract his thoughts away from Ireland by changing the subject every time Ireland came up in conversation, all the while the Holy Spirit was working upon Bro.

Thierry's heart.

I had a few indicators of this along the way which I preferred to ignore. I had decided that whatever happened had to be God's business and not my affair.

Among the indicators I think, for example, of Bro. Thierry's use of a cross which the artist Ray Carroll had designed for Cardinal Daly's transfer to the See of Armagh on the *Faire Part* (invitation card) of his Solemn Profession. There were also a few other signs that hinted the Spirit was at work, but these too I chose not to pay heed to, and then came the day one Holy Week when Bro. Thierry told me he had received a call to live his monastic life for unity and reconciliation in Ireland. I told him this was something I could do nothing about, insisting that I couldn't even listen to him on this subject, adding that if this was God's will, then somehow the Lord would find a way to make it happen.

The only person he should speak to about his call was the then abbot Dom Philibert Zobel.

*The rest is history*, as they say.

I said *the rest is history*.

Understand me.

I would say it is History, in the sense of **His** story (with a capital H): that is *God's story*

Of course, it is also history in the sense of *his* story (with a small h): that is *Bro. Thierry's story*.

Bringing the two together, **His** story and *his* story, it is also *our* story, part of the history of our community gathered here today. I include each one of the brothers in saying that, and, I also think of all of you, the faithful who join with us in prayer in this place today.

I include all of you gathered here, for we regard this monastery as not only the home of the assembled monastic community, but that of all God's People in this land. Holy Cross Monastery is as much the whole People of God's monastery as it is that of our community. This is *God's House* and *in God's House all are called to find their home*.

It seems to me that what we are presented with as we re-read things in our brother's life and that of our community – and in all our lives, I would say – is the story of God's Covenant love with us, His people.

These past weeks we have been reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans. At the heart of what Paul shares with us in that Letter is the apostle's sense of God working out His purpose, by crafting everything, *bringing all things together for our good* – even the pains and difficulties, the ups and downs, the twists and turns, the many vicissitudes of our lives.

In a conversation in which I outlined for him things as they were at that time, having been presented with the challenge to set out from Bec to make the present foundation, I can still hear the late Cardinal Daly say to me: *God writes straight with crooked lines*.

If Martin Luther King could share his spiritual intuition that was to so radically change life in the United States of America and, indeed, the whole world, when he spoke the famous words *I have a dream*, I would dare to say that I truly believe that God also has a dream in His heart for each one of us.

God has held in His heart a dream for our Bro. Thierry from the day of his conception – just as he has done for each one of us.

What the Lourdes hymn has us sing about Mary is also true for each one of us in some small way:

*When creation was begun, God had chosen us to be ...*

Understand me.

I am not saying that we do not have a choice in life and, indeed, many choices to make. We clearly have our freedom. We have to make many free choices over and over again. We must give our consent to whatever it is that God proposes to us to do.

Bro. Thierry experienced Christ, Christian community, Church for the first time when he was about

sixteen. (That was at Lourdes.) In the light of that experience he plucked up the courage and chose to walk into the office of the headmistress of his school to ask her a question that took her completely by surprise: *Who is Jesus Christ? I want to know him. I feel called to live a Christian life.*

The adventure of his faith story then took off. Sr Marie Wandrille asked Sr Marie de la Visitation to give him instruction.

All this was the work of God's providence. All this bears testimony to God's Covenant love.

Our brother who heard God's call, chose to respond. He engaged himself to walk with Christ who walks with him.

Sr Marie de la Visitation, who instructed Bro Thierry in the faith was someone close to him until the day of her death (a 17<sup>th</sup> of March, St Patrick's day – something I read as her seal of approval upon Bro. Thierry's Irish vocation!). He preached at her funeral. This Sister loved greatly a text by Cardinal Danneels which I am sure she shared with Bro. Thierry, just as she also shared it with me. I won't give the French version of the text which flows beautifully in the language of its composition. I share with you a rough English translation of what this text says:

*Father, Your Son always said 'yes'.*

*By His cross and resurrection, once and for all, He has planted in the earth the 'yes' which He pronounces eternally before Your face.*

*For this reason we can always say 'yes', following Christ's example and in His name, feeling fortified by the strength of His obedient heart.*

*His 'yes' has preceded us, as has that of Mary, His Mother, and our Mother too.*

*All that the heart contains by way of humility and readiness to do God's will, all that the heart manifests by way of listening obedience, is to be found already and find its consistency in Her 'Fiat'.*

*And so we pray: Pour into our hearts and place upon our lips the 'yes' of Mary – even and especially at those times when we ask in anguished perplexity: Lord, how will what You have said come about?*

*Father, accord us the grace to believe that with You all is possible and give us the joy of echoing Mary's response: May it be done to us according to Your word.*

The Lord's deepest longing and desire for us, His dream for us, is for our greatest good, our happiness and peace, but it is also more than that.

Our Father-God's dream for us always includes more than just ourselves.

Our Father-God always sees us as part of a family, His family.

The dream our Heavenly Father holds in His heart for us, and the call He addresses to us, also has to do with *the good of the Church and the salvation of the world.* (I still miss the French response to the *Orate Fratres: Pour la gloire de Dieu et le salut du monde.*)

It is to this end that we make the offering of our lives: to God's glory, for the good of the Church and the salvation of the world.

Our monastic Profession is about more than each one of us and God: it has an ecclesial dimension to it and, more than that, a significance for the world in which we live.

Words of the late Abbot Paul Grammont come to mind. Abbot Paul spoke these words in the homily he preached at my own monastic Profession. He said: *Remember always that your life as a monk is to be lived in a vital constant relationship with all the varied ministries of the Church, the Body of Christ. One unique Spirit, that of the Father and the Son, animates the whole of the Church. The diverse charisms in the Church are the multiple reflections of the seamless garment of our Saviour.* (I like to think of Jesus' seamless garment, of which Abbot Paul spoke there, in terms of Joseph's seamless, but multi-coloured garment – which has been referred to in a musical as his *Dream coat.*) The point to grasp is that there is great diversity in the Church's unity.)

I know Bro. Thierry has read those words of Dom Grammont already and that he concurs with what they express.

Our brother lives and breathes and feels with the Church, as we are all called to do. He was offered a trip to Avila this year to mark his Silver Jubilee. Teresa of Avila, in whose footsteps he walked there, liked to say: *I am a daughter of the Church*. Bro. Thierry can say: *I am a son of the Church*. He finds his family in the community of disciples gathered around Jesus, among those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice. The ecclesial/community/spiritual family dimension to Bro. Thierry's vocation is very important to him.

It is vital for all of us to remember that there is always what could be called a *we* dimension to our Christian life – this is true, *a fortiori*, of those who are engaged in Consecrated Life.

St Benedict is clear on this in his Rule for Monks.

Benedict says at the very outset of the Rule (in chapter 1) that he writes for a cenobetical community.

Called by the *One God, who is Father of all*, we are meant to see and love each other, in community, *as members of one family should*, to take up a phrase we find in chapter 72 of the Rule of Benedict.

This family witness is integral to our testimony in the Church and in the world today. The recent Synod reminds us of this.

Commenting on the *we* dimension to our prayer, in a discourse on the *Our Father*, St Cyprian reminds his listeners (and us with them) that they/that we are *a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*.

Our fraternal life here at Holy Cross Monastery seeks to reflect the depth and riches of this mystery. This is something recalled to us each night at the end of the Office when we are sprinkled with the blessed water, which reminds us of our baptism, and blessed in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At that moment we sing: *There is One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism. One God who is Father of all*. The life we share in love is meant to be – I dare to say – is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion.

The late pope John-Paul II (now celebrated each year in the Church's Calendar of Saints on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October – the date on which you arrived to the monastery, Bro. Thierry) speaks of the importance of feeling with the Church.

Under the paragraph heading *Sentire cum Ecclesia*, he wrote in 'Vita Consecrata':

*A great task belongs to the consecrated life in the light of the teaching about the Church as communion, so strongly proposed by the Second Vatican Council. Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion, as witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design.*

He goes on to say: *The sense of ecclesial communion, developing into a spirituality of communion, promotes a way of thinking, speaking and acting which enables the Church to grow in depth and extension.*

How often we pray in this place, imploring the grace to grow in depth and in number!

We make that our special plea on this day when we give thanks for the response our brother made to God's call twenty-five years ago today.

Recently the ministry of vocations' promoter was confided to you, Bro. Thierry.

What really promotes any life is a wholehearted commitment of those already called to live that life.

May we all be renewed in our monastic Profession with you on this day!

In the secret of our hearts, dear Brothers Eric, Benoit and Joshua, let us renew our offering with Bro. Thierry as the gifts are carried to the Lord's Table in this Eucharist.

In the course of this celebration Bro. Thierry will lay his scroll of Profession on the altar, placing it under the altar cloth on which the bread and wine for consecration will be posed. This is a gesture

he accomplished twenty-five years ago when he first signed his Profession Scroll on the altar at Bec.

By this gesture our brother symbolises the renewal of his offering in this Eucharist, making it clear that he lives the gift he makes of himself in union with *Christ who loved the Church and gave His life for her*.

On your Profession Scroll, Bro. Thierry you chose to inscribe verse seventeen of the third chapter of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. *May Christ live in your hearts by faith and may you be planted in love and built on love*.

In light of those words taken from Paul's prayer, with and for you, this day each one of us of us here gives echo to the apostle's plea: We pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your heart, living within you as you trust in Him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvellous love; and may you be able to feel and understand as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep and how high His love for you (and all of us with you) really is. May your heart be filled with God Himself!

Amen!