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(Letter n°55)

“For the grace of God has appeared,
bringing salvation to all,
training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions,
and in the present age
to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly.
(Titus 2:11-12)

We invite you to reflect on an extract from a speech given by Blessed Paul VI while on his journey in the Holy Land. On Sunday 5 January 1964, he visited the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth and declared:

Nazareth is the school of initiation into the understanding of the life of Jesus. It is the school of the gospel.

Here one learns to observe, to listen, to meditate, to penetrate into the profound and mysterious meaning of that simple, humble, lovely apparition of God among men. Here one learns almost imperceptibly to imitate Him. Here one learns the way by which we can enter into the understanding of Christ. Here one understands the need of observing the setting of His dealings with us: the places, the time, the customs, the language, the religious atmosphere — all of which Jesus used to reveal Himself to the world. (...)

It is here, in this school, that one comes to grasp how necessary it is to be spiritually disciplined, if one wishes to follow the teachings of the gospel and to become a follower of Christ. Oh, how we would like to become children again and to return to learn our lessons in this humble, and yet sublime school of Nazareth.

How we would like to repeat, so close to Mary, our introduction to the genuine knowledge of the meaning of life and to the higher wisdom of divine truth.

But our steps are hurried, and we must leave here the desire for this never-ending education in the understanding of the gospel. But we cannot depart, without recalling briefly and fleetingly some fragments of the lesson of Nazareth.

The lesson of silence: May an appreciation of this stupendous and indispensable moment of spiritual opportunity return to us, deafened as we are by so much tumult, by so much noise, by so many voices of our chaotic and frenzied modern life.

The silence of Nazareth teaches us recollection, reflection and eagerness to heed the good inspirations and words of true teachers, it teaches us the need and the value of preparation, of study, of meditation, of a personal and interior life, of prayer which is seen by God alone in secret.

The lesson of domestic life: May Nazareth teach us the meaning of family life its harmony, its simplicity and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable character. May it teach us how sweet and irreplaceable is its pedagogy, how fundamental and incomparable its sociology.

The lesson of work: Nazareth, house of the "Son of the Carpenter," how we would like to understand and to praise here the austere and redeeming law of human labour, to restore here the consciousness of the dignity of labour, to recall here how work cannot be an end in itself, and how free and elevated it becomes, beyond its economic value, in proportion to the values which motivate it to salute here all the workers of the world and point out to them their great CoWorker, their Divine Brother, the champion of all their rights, Christ the Lord. (...)

Christ in His gospel has spelled out for the world the supreme motive and the noblest driving force for action and hence for liberty and progress: love. No one can surpass it. Nor can any one subdue or supplant it. The only sound law of life is His gospel. The human person reaches his highest level in Christ's teaching. Human society finds therein its most congenial and powerful unifying force.

We believe, O Lord, in Thy word, we will try to follow and live it.

Now we hear its echo reverberating in the souls of the men of our century. It seems to tell us: Blessed are we, if in poverty of spirit we learn to free ourselves from false confidence in material things and to place our chief desires in spiritual and religious goods, treating the poor with respect and love as brothers and living images of Christ.

Blessed are we, if having acquired the meekness of the strong, we learn how to renounce the perverse power of hate and vengeance. Then we shall have the wisdom of preferring to the fear of armed force, the generosity of forgiveness, the alliance between freedom and work, and conquest through goodness and peace.

Blessed are we, if we do not make egoism the guiding criterion of our life, nor pleasure its purpose, but learn rather to discover in sobriety our strength, in pain a source of redemption, in sacrifice the very summit of greatness.

Blessed are we, if we prefer to be oppressed rather than be the oppressors and constantly hunger for the proof of justice.

Blessed are we, if for the kingdom of God in time and beyond time we learn to pardon and to struggle on, to work and to serve, to suffer and to love.

We shall never be deceived.



✠ From 25 July to 5 August, Br Benoît was with his family in France.

✠ From 5 to 12 August, Fr Mark-Ephrem was on the west coast of Ireland for a period of retreat and rest.

✠ From 17 to 19 August, Fr Mark-Ephrem was in Washington (United States) discussing the position of our community in Holy Trinity Monastery.

✠ From 25 to 27 August, Archbishop Gregory Venables preached the retreat for the ordinands from the Anglican diocese of Down and Dromore. Archbishop Gregory Venables is the Anglican Archbishop of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Primate of South America. In the course of a meeting with the community, Archbishop Gregory spoke of his friendship with Pope Francis, ecumenical matters peculiar to South America and the challenges currently facing the Anglican Communion.

✠ On 26 August, in Belfast, Fr Mark-Ephrem preached and Br Éric presided at the Eucharist for the jubilee of the profession of Sr Kathleen Savage (Sister of Mercy), a long-standing friend of our community.

✠ On 27 August, Fr Mark-Ephrem preached at the Anglican Cathedral of Armagh.

On the same day, Br Éric occupied his canon's stall in Downpatrick Cathedral for the ordination of clergy in the Anglican diocese of Down and Dromore.

✠ From 31 August to 3 September, Fr Mark-Ephrem was in Cracow with his family for a period of relaxation.

✠ On 5 September, Fr Mark-Ephrem and Br Thierry were at the An Cuan Centre in Rostrevor for a time of reflection with our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters. The encounter was centred on the biblical passage of Abraham's Sacrifice (Genesis 22).

✠ On 7 September, Fr Mark-Ephrem represented the community at the funeral of Rev Bert Armstrong, a Methodist minister. Bert was a great friend of the community who fulfilled an important ministry of reconciliation after the death of his brother and sister-in-law in the course of an IRA attack. On 17 January 2004 he was one of two such contributors at the vigil for the dedication of our monastic church.

✠ From 16 to 28 September, Fr Mark-Ephrem was in the United States on a visit to Holy Trinity Monastery.

✠ From 2 to 6 October, the annual retreat of the monastic delegates of MID (Monastic Interreligious Dialogue) took place at the monastery. A member of the Community of the Resurrection (England), Benedictine monks from Holland, Germany and Korea, a Carmelite nun from Portugal, a brother from Bose (Italy), a Trappist monk from the United States and a Trappist nun from Norway were led by a Buddhist monk from Bhutan.

✠ From 5 to 15 October, we were delighted to welcome Sr Anne-Emmanuelle, prioress of the community of Grandchamp (Switzerland).

✠ On 7 October, Günter Frahling (from Germany) made his profession as a secular oblate.

✠ On 8 October, the community participated in Evensong at the Anglican Cathedral of Armagh to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation by Martin Luther. The service was presided over by the Anglican Archbishop, Archbishop Richard Clarke, and the sermon was given by the Catholic Archbishop, Archbishop Eamon Martin.

✠ From 8 to 16 September, Br Joshua was at Ealing Abbey (London) for a session on the Rule of St Augustine.

✠ From 12 to 19 October, Fr Mark-Ephrem was in Ghana with Fr Abbot Charles-Eugène Galichet (Abu Gosh, Israel) and the general bursar of our Congregation, Dom Andrea Santus (Abbey of Mount Olivet, Italy) to visit the monastery of Akwaboa and the Archbishop of Kumasi. The community was closed a few years ago and a Ghanaian monk is the warden of the monastery. This visit was to enable the three members of the Definitory (the advisory group of the Fr Abbot General) to ascertain the state of the buildings.

✞ On 30 October, to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, we invited Fr Fintan Lyons, a Benedictine monk from the Abbey of Glenstal (Ireland) to give a talk on Martin Luther.

✞ On 1st November in the evening, Br Éric was in the Anglican Cathedral of Downpatrick where he participated in the ceremony of installation of new canons to the Chapter.

✞ From 2 to 7 November, Fr Brendan Comerford, a Jesuit in Dublin, preached our community's retreat.

✞ From 8 to 10 November, Bishop Ken Good, the Anglican Bishop of Derry and Raphoe (a diocese situated within both political jurisdictions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland) was on retreat with us.

✞ From 9 to 11 November, Bishop John Stroyan, Bishop of Warwick, suffragan bishop of the Church of England Diocese of Coventry (England), paid us a visit before going to Larne to participate in an official encounter between the Church of England and the United Protestant Church of France (created in 2012, the United Protestant Church of France is the union of the Reformed Church of France and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of France).

✞ On 10 November, Fr Mark-Ephrem was in the Anglican Cathedral of Armagh to say farewell to Rev Donald Watts, of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, in his role as an ecumenical canon. On 12 November, Rev Tony Davidson, also a member of the Presbyterian Church, was installed as a new ecumenical canon. Fr Mark-Ephrem was invited to preach for the occasion.

✞ From 13 to 17 November, Br Thierry was with the Passionist Fathers of Crossgar for a period of rest.

✞ From 20 to 22 November, Fr Mark-Ephrem attended a meeting of the Union of Monastic Superiors in London. He took the opportunity to visit our fellow Olivetans who live in London.



Not only is the Church a field hospital (as Pope Francis has said), the family too is a field hospital, where it is necessary to bind many wounds, dry many tears, and establish reconciliation and peace time and again.

God can write straight even with crooked lines. As people's companions, we should, therefore, not be prophets of doom, but rather bearers of hope, who dispense solace and give courage for carrying on even in difficult situations.

(Card. Walter Kasper)



Happy Christmas and Blessed New Year 2018.