

Christmas 2008



The night is dark. The sheep are asleep, huddled together to protect themselves from the cold wind, the shepherds are looking up at the moonless sky with its shining stars, what a marvellous sight! No sound is interrupting the silence. It is at this moment that the angels choose to proclaim, to the great sound of trumpets, the Identity and Mission of Jesus who had just been born in a nearby stable:
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests!" (Luke 2, 14).

The identity of Jesus, it is He who is truly the Glory of the Father in Heaven: "Yes, the life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us." (1 Jn 1, 2). And Jesus was going to spend his time revealing his Father to us ("Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." Jn 14,9) and telling us that with his Father, He wants to come and make his home with us (cf. Jn 14, 23).

For the past two years in Faith and Light, we have been working to define our identity and we are going to pursue this reflection in the provinces and in the communities. Father Jim Corkery, in Lourdes, helped us with this by presenting, from the outside, a mirror that reflected our identity:

"You witness, in your finding God's face in those with intellectual disabilities, in those whom the world neither esteems nor consults, that "God has chosen the weak, the 'crazy' and the despised to confound the strong, the clever and the respected." The New Testament text that has come to my mind is from Paul's letter to the Philippians: 'you will shine in the world like bright stars because you are offering it the word of life' (Phil. 2:15-16). This is the word that you have heard in God's call; and you live it out in trusting faith. As you do, you shine in the world like stars, stars shining out their light. So you see: faith and light – foi et lumière. That's what you're doing! And the world needs just that! »

At this Christmastime, if we are like stars shining in the universe, I cannot help imagining the angels coming to proclaim the birth of Jesus accompanied by all our communities and by their light, not very strong, but so beautiful when the night is dark. Marie-Hélène Mathieu, (cf. her book 'Mieux vaut allumer une lampe que maudire l'obscurité' [Better to light a lamp than to curse the darkness]), along with Jean Vanier has lit more than one lamp, since 1500 communities shine throughout the world!

The mission of Jesus is to bring peace to those who he loves. We are really in need of this peace in these troubled times:

- Financial and economic crisis, from which those suffering the most are not those who caused it,
- Terrorist attacks in India,
- The unending war in North Kivu,
- Political troubles and the cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe, which plunges further into chaos with each passing day,
- And plenty more in Georgia, Haiti...

Jesus, there is work to be done! And we feel powerless to help You! Even if our prayer says:

"Jesus, you came into our world to reveal the Father to us,
your Father and our Father.

You came to teach us to love one another.

Give us the Holy Spirit, according to your promise,
so that he will make us instruments of peace and unity,
in this world of war and division."

So if our identity is to shine in the night, if our call is “to be with” rather than “to do for”, let us begin by showing our face to the world, by revealing to it the beauty of the face of our disabled friends. I take up the mirror that was held out to us by Jim Corkery:

“An image that suggests itself to me, then, as I read about you, and get to know you, is that you are *imago Trinitatis* (Families/Parents –image of the Father, Persons with Disabilities – image of the Son, Friends, especially young friends – image of the Spirit,) [...] with the Reciprocity in equal Relationships that characterises it, [each of the three persons] whole reflecting a beauty and a unity that the parts alone could not, None of these acts alone, they are turned towards each other in love...”

Therefore, our mission is to show the world this *imago Trinitatis*, to show how we live these relationships of unity and love in the communities and to proclaim our good news. We will then truly be instruments of peace and unity. Since 1971, we have done a lot to develop the movement, which now covers 80 countries throughout the world. Now, what we hear, is that the world needs us, that it is awaiting our message. Jim Corkery, as well as Jean Vanier, Marie-Hélène Mathieu, Jean-Christophe Pascal and Christine McGrievy (international coordinator and international vice coordinator of l'Arche), told us this in Lourdes in October.

So, let us set off, with the shepherds, on the road to the manger to worship and revere our God made man. We can feel close to this infant-God who wanted to become so fragile and vulnerable. We do not have a lot to give, but we come with our stars and we can decorate the manger with beautiful garlands of light.

I will end with a memory from this summer: It was a very beautiful day in Brussels on the last Saturday in August and a wedding service was being conducted at the Abbaye de la Cambre. Isaure, my brother's daughter, was marrying Thibault: the two families and friends were there with them on this great day!

I was struck by a passage from the homily where the celebrant mentioned the projects that a newly married couple could do; he gave them this advice: “Begin by giving birth to Jesus in your home before any other project!” It is true that it is important, before starting a life together, to open up to one another, towards the Other One.

At this Christmastime, two months after our great and beautiful Assembly in Lourdes, let us also put ourselves in this welcoming frame of mind! Guided by the Spirit, we have laid the foundations of a "new" Faith and Light to enable us to better ensure the life of the communities throughout the world. Our heads are full of projects, the enthusiasm is there and very discernable almost everywhere in the provinces... It is perhaps the time to put all that to one side and to concentrate on the birth of Jesus amongst us. Perhaps, we will hear him call as Zacchaeus did: “I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19, 5).

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year for 2009 to everyone in each community, in each province and let us sing together our joy:

" Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests!"

Ghislain du Chéné

