

Letter from Taizé

1 February – March 2000 Bimonthly 3.50 FF

Translated into 58 different languages (including 23 Asian ones and 7 African ones), this letter was written by Brother Roger of Taizé. It will be a starting point for reflection during the weekly meetings at Taizé throughout the year 2000.

ASTONISHED LETTER 2000 BY JOY

1 God says to each person: "You are precious in my sight, and I love you." (Isaiah 43,4)

2 A thinker from Romania, Dimitru Staniloae, who had been in prison for his beliefs, wrote: "I looked for God in the people of my village, then in books and in ideas. But that brought me neither peace nor love. One day, while reading the Church Fathers [texts by Christians of the first centuries], I discovered that it was possible to encounter God really, through prayer. I gradually realized that God was close to me, that he loved me, and that if I let myself be filled by his love, my heart opened to others. I realized that love was a communion, with God and with others."

3 Matthew 5,3.

4 Worry uses up our vital energies and paralyzes them. See Matthew 6,25-34.

5 In the fourth century, Saint Gregory of Nyssa wrote: We go "from one beginning to another by way of beginnings that are always new."

Wherever you may be across the continents, you want to become aware of the mystery that lies at the heart of your heart: can you sense the profound beauty of the human soul?

What is this hidden beauty? It lies in the audacity of a longing. Even if we are unaware of it, one of the most intimate desires of our being is to love. Without love, could our life find meaning?

God loves me — this reality sometimes seems almost beyond our reach.¹ But the day of a discovery can dawn: when I let myself be touched by God's love, my life opens up to others.²

As he welcomed those who came to him, Christ said: "Happy are the simple in heart!"³

A simple heart is attentive to living in the present moment,⁴ ready to go forward from beginning to new beginning.⁵

Faith is like a surge of very humble trusting, repeated again and again our whole life long.

A simple heart accepts that it cannot understand everything in the gospel. It can say to God: "I am not relying on my own faith alone. Others understand what I cannot grasp, and they will shed light on my path."⁶

Such simplicity awakens us to compassion; it makes us attentive to those who, all over the earth, are experiencing forms of abandonment or humiliation.⁷

There are days when we have the impression that we are praying with almost nothing. We can feel as if we had been stripped bare, but God enables us to consent to this.

Even when a distance arises between God and us, we can entrust everything to him, placing everything in God's hands.⁸

Happy, then, is the one who can say to Christ: "Christ, you know how difficult it is for me to express my desire for communion with you."⁹ But your Holy Spirit reawakens within me the boldness to surrender myself to you.

"You see who I am. You were familiar with the human condition."¹⁰ I do not want to hide anything in my heart from you. You know that I am sometimes pulled in different directions at the same time. But when my inner being experiences an emptiness, the thirst for your presence remains within me. And when I am unable to pray, you yourself are my prayer."¹¹

Prayer is a treasure of the Gospel.¹² It opens a way forward which leads us to love and to forgive.

Forgiveness can change both our heart and our life: severity and harsh judgements recede and leave room in our hearts for goodness and kindness. > 3

⁶ We can find support in the faith of all those who have gone before us, from the first Christians down to those of today.

⁷ Could God be behind our suffering? No. God is never the author of evil; God does not want human distress, still less wars, earthquakes, violent accidents.... God never inspires fear or anguish, but shares the suffering of those who are going through trials.

In some parts of the world, today there is an awakening of the conscience in the face of human suffering. Disconcerted by the incomprehensible trials of the innocent, many young people are asking themselves: how can we be witnesses to the Gospel? And by the lives they live, they seek to give tangible expression to the consolation of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish acts of solidarity.

⁸ God never wants to make us worry; God never imposes faith. Trust in God cannot be communicated by intellectual arguments.

⁹ Some children understand prayer more than we think. Happy are those who were awakened to communion in God by those closest to them when they were still very young.

¹⁰ Saint John writes these surprising words: "Among you stands someone whom you do not know." (John 1,26) Who is this "Someone" in our midst? It is Christ, the Risen One. We may hardly be aware of him, yet he remains close beside every human being.

¹¹ When we are by ourselves and do not know how to pray, our lips may remain closed, but in silence our soul is open before God and speaks to him. And the Holy Spirit prays within us. The Holy Spirit can even awaken in us an aspiration to contemplation. See Romans 8,26-27.

¹² Speaking about song in prayer, Olivier Clément wrote: "There is a whole tradition of calming repetition which can empty the intellect of its agitation and allow it to become ready for prayer. Some people, who know almost nothing of this mystery, are introduced to it in this way. Such prayer cannot be something too complicated. The essentials in Christianity can be expressed in a few words. There is a gentleness that comes with this repetitive singing, an inner peace." (From the book *Taizé, a Meaning for Life*, GIA Publications, 1997.) In this way we can sing: "Jesus Christ, inner light, do not let my darkness speak to me" (words from the fourth century); "All God can do is give his love" (seventh century); or again "You love us; your forgiveness and your presence bring to birth within us the brightness of praise."

13 Our brothers in Taizé as well as those who live in other parts of the world, often among the very poor, are aware that the vocation of our community calls us to be utterly simple. That means not imposing ourselves, not being spiritual masters, but people who listen and who try to understand. We have discovered that with a great simplicity of heart, often with very limited means, we can be enabled to live out a hospitality which we did not believe we were capable of. We have been welcoming young people for so many years. They spend a week at Taizé, but we do not organise them into a movement centred on our community.

14 “The evil of the past, full of separations and of violence, remains within us and nourishes fear and hatred. Therefore we must allow God to wipe away the evil of the past.” (Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople.)

15 The year 2000 is a time marked out for realising forgiveness and reconciliation in concrete ways, not only among Christians, but in the different situations round about us, with non-believers too. At Taizé, pursuing the “pilgrimage of trust on earth”, every Friday of the year 2000 will be dedicated to reflection and prayer in order to look for ways of living out forgiveness, with the joy that it sustains.

16 During his visit to Taizé on 5th October 1986, Pope John Paul II spoke these words:

“...you will be instrumental in making sure that the effort desired by Christ to recover the visible unity of his Body in the full communion of one and the same faith never slackens. You know how much I personally consider ecumenism a necessity incumbent upon me, a pastoral priority in my ministry for which I count on your prayer. “By desiring to be yourselves a ‘parable of community,’ you will help all you meet to be faithful to their church affiliation, the fruit of their education and their choice in conscience, but also to enter more and more deeply into the mystery of communion that the Church is in God’s plan.”

17 Acts 2,17.

18 John 14,16.

19 In this year 2000, the “Jubilee” invites us to welcome the spirit of “jubilation”, not only for a certain length of time, but our whole life long. Jubilation in the Holy Spirit is a joy that Jesus experienced (Luke 10,21) and which we can also live out ourselves. It is intimately connected with the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

And we become capable of seeking to understand rather than to be understood.¹³

All who root their lives in forgiveness are able to pass through rock-hard situations like the water of a stream which, in early springtime, makes its way through the still-frozen ground.

However meagre our resources, one of today’s most urgent tasks is to bring about understanding where there are oppositions. Certain memories from the past are enough to keep individuals or nations apart.

Nothing is more tenacious than the memory of past wounds and humiliations.¹⁴ When we seek tirelessly to forgive and to be reconciled, a future opens up beyond all our expectations.¹⁵

And what is true for each person is true as well in that mystery of communion which is the Body of Christ, his Church.¹⁶

Can we not find everywhere humble men and women who are preparing the paths of the future? What fascinates them is to let a hope shine out. The most profound changes are not necessarily determined by prestigious talents or great expertise but, more than we suppose, by a burning charity.

The Holy Spirit, poured out on every human being,¹⁷ gives freedom and spontaneity. The Spirit restores a zest for life to those who had lost it, and comes to deliver us from discouragement. Neither doubts nor the impression that God is silent can take his Holy Spirit away from us.

All who open themselves to the breath of the Spirit and welcome it by humble listening find themselves setting out on an inner adventure.

In the great troubles of our life, the Holy Spirit is a support, a comfort,¹⁸ in whom the wellsprings of

jubilant, ¹⁹ of joy light as a feather, are always offered. And this joy brings us closer to those who are going through suffering. ²⁰

Six centuries before the coming of Christ, God spoke these challenging words: “Forget what has gone before; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” ²¹

Yes, we are astonished by an unsuspected joy: the Holy Spirit wants to turn us into beings who are utterly transparent, like the sky on a spring day.

The Gospel bears within it such a radiant hope and such a call to joy that we would like to communicate them to people close at hand and far away, by going even to the point of giving ourselves.

Where is the source of hope and of joy? It is in God, who tirelessly seeks us out and finds in us the profound beauty of the human soul.

PRAYERS

Holy Spirit, do not let our hearts be troubled; reassure us in our darkness; give us joy; and we will wait in silence and in peace for light from the Gospel to dawn upon us.

Christ Jesus, you discern a contemplative longing in the deepest part of our being: a thirst fills our soul, to abandon ourselves in you.

Jesus our hope, with the little that we understand of the Gospel, you enable us to discover what you want of us.

Christ Jesus, when we pray, our poor words are often scarcely able to express our desire for communion with you, but already you welcome us.

²⁰ Olivier Clément wrote this meditation: “Some people will ask how it is possible to rejoice, considering that there can be such trials in a human life. We carry within us a great joy, but that great joy is not going to make us insensible to the suffering of other people. On the contrary, it can make us even more sensitive, and we will be able both to carry deep within us this great joy of the risen Christ and to enter profoundly into the distress of our neighbour at the same time. We must be open to sadness while at the same time bearing joy within us, because we know that ultimately the resurrection will have the last word.” (From the book *Taizé, a Meaning for Life*.)

²¹ Isaiah 43,18-19.