

Translated into 58 different languages (including 23 from Asia), this letter, written by Brother Roger of Taizé, was made public during the young adult European meeting in Paris. It will be a starting-point for reflection throughout the year 2003 during the weekly meetings in Taizé as well as those held in other parts of the world.

Letter from Taizé

A God Who Simply Loves

Letter 2003

1. "All God can do is love": this conviction was expressed by a Christian thinker of the seventh century, Saint Isaac of Nineveh. He reached this conclusion after studying Saint John's Gospel for many years and meditating on the words "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Today more than ever it is important to remember that suffering never comes from God. God is not the author of evil; God wants neither human distress, nor natural disasters, nor violent accidents, nor wars. God shares the pain of all who are undergoing times of trial and enables us to comfort those who are suffering.

2. At all times, everyone can make this simple prayer their own, saying it over and over in their hearts: "My soul finds rest and peace in God alone" (Psalm 62:1).

All across the world, many among the younger generations are searching and asking themselves: is there any hope for our future? How can we go from worry to confident trust?

Our societies are sometimes shaken to their foundations. There is the uncertain future of humanity, with poverty constantly on the rise. There is the suffering of so many children, and all the broken relationships that leave hearts wounded.

And yet, even in the world's most troubled situations, do we not see on the horizon signs of an undeniable hope?

In order to go forward, it is good to know this: the Gospel offers such a shining hope that it can bring joy to our soul.

This hope is a path of light that opens up in our depths. Without it, all delight in living could vanish.

Where is the source of this hope? It is in God, a God who simply loves and can do nothing else,¹ a God who never stops seeking us.

Our hope is renewed when we entrust ourselves humbly to God.²

There is a force which dwells within us and which is the same for everyone. This force is called the Holy Spirit, and

whispers in our hearts, “Surrender yourself to God in all simplicity; the little faith you have is enough.”³

But who is this Holy Spirit? He is the one Christ Jesus promised in his Gospel when he said, “I will never abandon you. I will always be with you through the Holy Spirit, who will support and comfort you.”⁴

Even when we think we are alone, the Holy Spirit is with us. His presence is invisible, yet it never leaves us.⁵

And gradually we realize that the most important thing in life is to love with trust.

Trust is one of the humblest and simplest realities that exist, and at the same time one of the most basic.

When we love with trust we bring happiness to people around us, and we remain in communion with those who have gone before us and who are waiting for us in God’s eternity.

When times of doubt arise in some people’s lives, we should keep in mind that doubt and trust, like shadow and light, can coexist within us.⁶

Above all let us remember these reassuring words of Christ: “Do not be afraid or let your heart be troubled.”⁷

Then it becomes clear that faith is not the result of effort, but is a gift from God. It is God who enables us day after day to leave our hesitations behind and move towards trust in him.

All God can do is love, and his compassion is a source of life. May the day come when we can say, “God of mercy, even if we had the faith to move mountains, without your love what would we be?”⁸ Yes, your love for each one of us remains for ever.”

One of the clearest expressions of God’s love is forgiveness.

When we forgive in our turn, little by little our life changes.

Finding in forgiveness a breath of joy, we see all forms of severity towards others fade away; it is essential for harsh > 3

3. A century after Christ, a believer named Irenaeus, from Lyons, had the clear certainty of a communion in God. He left these lines: “The splendour of God is a human being fully alive. The life of human beings consists in the contemplation of God.”

4. See John 14:16-20.

5. Even if at times we are less aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence, we can always find in him the support and the consolation with which God comes to flood our lives. Could it happen that we forget the presence of the Holy Spirit within us? As we rest in him, we find him wherever we are—at home, at work, in a life filled with activities. . .

6. We already find this in the Gospel, where we see a man say to Christ, “I believe.” But he immediately adds, “Come and help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

7. John 14:1.

8 See 1 Corinthians 13:2.

9. See Baruch 5:1-9.

10. Joy, which can sometimes be as light as a feather, is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in us (see Galatians 5:22). Joy causes us to marvel. It allows us to discover life’s poetry in every season, in days of brightness as well as in frozen winter nights.

11. In the Bible, hope is not a creation of the imagination; it is rooted in the presence of God that will never be lacking: “I have for you, says the Lord, plans of peace and not of misfortune, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). This hope is sure: “There is a future, and your hope will not be cut off” (Proverbs 23:18). The New Testament goes further still, viewing hope as a reality that is already at work in our lives: “Our hope will not disappoint us, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

12. Over the centuries, Christians have been plagued by a host of divisions. Will we commit ourselves today, without delay, to do all we can to live in communion with one another? For years now, the call for reconciliation among divided Christians has led to dialogues and to positive conversations. But we cannot put off reconciliation itself until the end of time. It is more urgent than ever before to enter upon the road which Christ points out in the Gospel. "First go and be reconciled" (Matthew 5:24). "First go!" he says, not "Put it off until later!"

Today there are men, women and young people deeply aware of how urgent it is for reconciliation to become a reality with no delay. In March 2002, Pope John Paul II called for "an ecumenism of holiness that will lead us finally to full communion." Then, in October 2002, the pope and the Orthodox patriarch Theoctist of Romania wrote a common declaration that underlined "our dedication to pray and to work to achieve the full and visible unity of all the disciples of Christ. Our aim and our ardent desire is full communion, which is not absorption but communion in truth and love."

13. Forty years ago, the man who perhaps had the deepest impact on our community at Taizé, Pope John XXIII, was able to find words that inspire us not to stop but to keep going forward. He said, for example, "The Church would rather make use of the medicine of mercy than the weapons of severity."

14. If some people find it hard to pray alone, the beauty of a sung prayer, even with just two or three people present, is an incomparable support for the inner life. Through simple words as well as singing that goes on and on, it can radiate joy. At Taizé and in meetings on different continents, we discover that a sung prayer with others allows the desire for God to well up in us and helps us enter into a contemplative prayer.

15. Saint Augustine also wrote these words: "If you desire to know God, then you already have faith."

words and deeds to be replaced by boundless kindness.

Even before the time of Christ, a believer expressed this call: "Leave your sadness behind; let God lead you to joy."⁹

This joy heals the secret wound of the soul. It lies in the transparency of peaceful love, and needs our whole being in order to burst forth.¹⁰

Very many people today aspire to live in a time of trust and of hope.¹¹

In human beings there can be impulses to violence. For trust to arise on earth we need to begin within ourselves, making our way forward with a reconciled heart, living in peace with those around us.

Peace on earth is prepared insofar as we dare to ask ourselves: am I ready to seek inner peace and to go forward in selflessness? Even if I have very little, can I be a ferment of trust in my own situation, understanding others more and more?

As we remain before God in quiet waiting, will we open ways of peacemaking wherever oppositions arise?¹²

When young people make a resolution for peace in their own life, they become bearers of a shining hope whose light radiates ever further outward.

At this time in history, the Gospel invites us to love and to say it by our existence. Faith becomes credible to those around us above all by the lives we lead.

This is also true for the mystery of communion that is the Body of Christ, his Church. A credibility that has often been lost can be reborn when the Church lives in trust, forgiveness and compassion, and when it welcomes with joy and simplicity. It then succeeds in communicating a living hope.¹³

When our personal prayer seems poor and our words awkward, we should not let this bring us to a standstill.¹⁴

Is not one of the deepest desires of our soul to live in communion with God?

Three centuries after Christ, an African believer by the name of Augustine wrote, “A desire that calls out to God is already a prayer. If you want to pray ceaselessly, then never stop desiring...”¹⁵

Great simplicity of heart sustains contemplative prayer. Simplicity is a source of joy.¹⁶ It enables us to surrender ourselves to God, to allow ourselves to be led to him.

In this life of communion, God, who remains invisible, does not necessarily communicate with us by means of human words. God speaks above all by silent intuitions.¹⁷

Silence in prayer seems like nothing. And yet, in this silence the Holy Spirit can enable us to welcome God’s joy, a joy which reaches down to touch the very depths of our soul.

In simple prayer, many people understand one day that God is calling them. What is God’s call?

God wants us to prepare ourselves to be bearers of joy and peace.¹⁸

Will we listen to God when his words ring out in us: “Don’t stop; keep going forward; let your soul live!”

Then we may realize that we have been created to head towards something infinite, something absolute. And we can make this discovery: it is sometimes in demanding situations that human beings become most fully themselves.

When we are supported by one another¹⁹ and do not let ourselves be brought to a halt by obstacles, when we know where to find the courage to keep going forward, then we realize that there is heartfelt joy, and even sheer happiness, in responding to God’s call. Yes, God wants happiness for us!²⁰

And then something we never dared hope for appears. We leave behind us the long nights with hardly a glimmer of light. Walking at times along ways of darkness, instead of weakening us, can even build us up within.

What means most to us is going from one discovery to another. Welcoming the coming day as God’s today. Searching for peace of heart in all things. And life becomes beautiful... yes, life will be beautiful.

16. For my brothers and myself, searching for simplicity of heart and of life is more than ever at the center of our vocation, whether we are living at Taizé or in small groups among the very poor in the Southern continents. The more we go forward, the more we remember that we are poor people of the Gospel. And so we say, “Let us be people who listen, not spiritual masters!”

17. Speaking about prayer, Saint Augustine said, “Praying a lot does not mean praying with lots of words, as some people think... So let us not use a great many words when we pray, but let us take time to pray in the silence of our heart.”

18. “We are called to go beyond the limits of our closed communities, to transcend our prejudices, hesitations and fears, and to witness to the risen Christ, as far as we can, to go to meet our contemporaries and the burning problems they have to deal with. This does not mean becoming indistinguishable from the world, but helping it find an orientation (...) to enable every human being to attain freedom and dignity.” (Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, primate of the Orthodox Church of Albania)

19. Isolation leads to discouragement and does not allow the gifts of each person to blossom. For years now, we have been inviting the young to take part in a “pilgrimage of trust on earth” as a way of helping them to be supported by one another. It enables them to realize that they are linked to many other young people by a common search for God, by a common hope, and by complementary commitments. We have done this, moreover, without creating an organized movement around our Community of Taizé.

20. In life’s trials, little by little we realize that the source of joy does not lie in extraordinary abilities or great expertise, but rather in the humble giving of ourselves, in order to understand others with kind-heartedness. Joy is always there, lying in wait for us, when simplicity is united to kind-heartedness in our lives.

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