

Tuesday Evening Series
Series #12: Prayers for Living
Session #3: Taizé Revisited
Tuesday, March 20, 2018

Taizé Meditations

Faith: What Is Distinctive About the Christian Faith?

Although faith is generally seen as a religion, since it concerns our relationship with that Absolute called God, that notion does not seem to be very helpful in order to grasp its unique character. Should it then be called a spirituality? Yes, in the sense that it offers a personal and lived-out way of penetrating the meaning of life more deeply. This way, however, is not left to the discretion of each individual; it is not made up of elements that we can take or leave according to our own whims. It is a pilgrimage in the steps of Christ, and it sets the pilgrim necessarily in a relationship to all those who are walking along the same road.

Is Christian faith a life in common, then? This definition has the great advantage of corresponding to the life of the early Christians as seen in the New Testament. Still, we must immediately add that this shared life is far from being a simple human sociability; it is rooted in God. It is a sharing in the divine Life, a Life that is Love and thus Life for others. This common life is by nature inclusive, universal; it radiates outward to encompass potentially every human being. In this sense, the boundaries of the Christian community are not defined once and for all; in the final analysis they cannot be distinguished from the entire human family, or even from the whole of creation.

In its essence, then, faith in Jesus Christ can be defined as the offer in progress of a universal communion or fellowship in God. First of all, Christian faith, far from being a human undertaking, is essentially an offer or invitation coming from the side of God. This was already true for Israel of old: that nation drew its identity not from geographical or genealogical criteria, but from the free choice of a mysterious and transcendent God. With the coming of Christ Jesus, this quality is even more salient. In him, however unthinkable this may seem, the very Source of life comes to encounter us.

If the Christian faith is an offer coming from the side of the Absolute, the role of human beings is essentially to welcome the invitation and to reply to it. It is not up to them to define its contours. And if God calls, through Christ, to a sharing of life, to a communion, then this invitation is addressed to the most personal dimension of human beings; it seeks to awaken freedom in them. For all these reasons, such an offer is at the opposite extreme from every form of constraint. Any attempt to impose it by coercion, whether overt or subtle, is absolutely foreign to its nature.

Secondly, the Christian message is an offer in progress, in other words an invitation that is real and not theoretical. Just as Jesus communicated the essence of his message by his life given for us to the point of dying on a cross, disciples turn their own lives into the message they want to get across. Christianity is perhaps unique in that, if it is not to be emptied of its substance, there can be no dichotomy between doctrine and practice. On the contrary, the doctrine is identical to the practice, for in both cases it is a matter of communion with God and among human beings. If Christians do not practice love for others, if the Churches live in mutual indifference or competition, their preaching will inevitably remain a dead letter.

—Excerpt from *Short Writings from Taizé 3* (Brother John)

What does it mean to evangelize?

In these days of marketing, we have learned to mistrust those who promise us good things. In this context, the New Testament verb “to evangelize” can frighten us. We are embarrassed to propose our faith to someone else, as if we were trying to sell something. And we are so deeply concerned to respect others that we do not want to give the impression of imposing our own ideas or to try and convince others. Especially when it is a question of a subject as intimate as trust in God.

But do we really know what the New Testament means by “evangelizing”? In Greek, the verb is used for the expression “to announce good news”: someone who is “evangelized” is basically someone who has been “made aware, brought up to date.” The verb can be used to announce a birth, an armistice or the inauguration of a new leader. It has no religious meaning in itself. And yet it was that word, almost too commonplace, that Christians used to describe the most precious aspect of their faith: the announcement of Christ’s resurrection. What is interesting is that, gradually, the word lost its complement. People didn’t say “make someone aware of Christ’s resurrection” but simply “evangelize someone.” This was obviously to save time, but that lack of a complement also has a deeper significance.

To proclaim the Good News of the resurrection is not, for Christians, to speak of a doctrine to be learned by heart or a piece of wisdom to meditate on. To evangelize means above all to bear witness to a transformation within a human being: because of the resurrection of Christ, our own resurrection has already begun. By his infinite respect towards those he encountered (visible through the acts of healing we find in the Gospels), by taking the lowest place so that no one would be lower than him (that is the meaning of his baptism), Christ Jesus restored worth and dignity to every person. Still more, Jesus was with us in death, so that we could be close to him in his communion with the Father. By this “admirable exchange” (Easter liturgy), we discover that we are fully accepted by God, fully welcomed by him just as we are. The Christians of the first centuries summed this up by saying, “God became man so that man could become God!”

To evangelize thus does not mean in the first place talking about Jesus to someone but, on a much deeper level, making that person aware of the value he or she has in God’s eyes. Evangelizing means communicating these words of God that rang out five centuries before Christ: “You are precious in my sight, and I love you” (Isaiah 43:4). Since Easter morning, we know that God did not hesitate to give everything so that we would never forget what we are worth.

Can we “evangelize” someone while respecting his or her freedom?

Causing people to realize their worth in God’s eyes is not something optional. Paul even goes as far as saying, “Woe to me if I do not evangelize!” (1 Corinthians 9:16). For him, evangelization is the direct consequence of his attachment to Christ. Through his resurrection, Christ unites us inseparably to God. No one can ever again feel they are excluded from that union. And at the same time, humanity is no longer fragmented: since the resurrection, we belong to one another.

Still, the question remains: how can we communicate that news to people who know nothing of God and seem to expect nothing from God? First of all, by our personal attachment to Christ. Paul said, “You have clothed yourselves in Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Evangelization calls us to start with ourselves. It is first of all by our life, and not by words, that we witness to the reality of the resurrection: “To know Christ and the power of his resurrection and a sharing in his sufferings, coming to be like him in his death, so that [we] might finally attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). It is by our assurance, by our serene joy in knowing that we have been loved from all eternity, that Christ becomes credible in the eyes of those who do not know him.

There are situations, however, when words are necessary. Peter puts it well: “Always be ready to reply to whoever asks you the reason for the hope which is in you” (1 Peter 3:16). Of course, speaking of an intimate love requires much sensitivity. And sometimes it is hard to find words, especially in situations where faith is brutally called into question. Jesus knew this well, and he said to his disciples, “When you are brought before (...) the authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you need to say” (Luke 12:11-12).

Because Christ clothed himself in our humanity and we have clothed ourselves in Christ, we should never be afraid of not knowing how to speak. In the Christian vocation of not choosing those they love, but of receiving everyone without discrimination, there is a generosity that is touching, and even more, that encloses someone in the life of Christ. In our capacity as servants, we share our garment with those we serve, a bit like Jesus who, when he washed his disciples’ feet, “took off his garments” (John 13:4). It is above all the disinterestedness of our acts that will speak for us; it will authenticate the words we speak.

Resources

Taizé Community website, <https://www.taize.fr/en>

Songs written by J. Berthier (https://www.taize.fr/en_article10308.html)

Meditative Prayer in the Taizé style

Song of Praise – “Laudate omnes gentes”

The musical score is written for two staves, Treble and Bass clef, in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is simple and repetitive, using mostly quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first system starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The lyrics are: "Lau - da - te om-nes gen-tes, lau-da - te Do-mi-num. Lau-". The second system continues the melody and lyrics: "da - te om-nes gen-tes, lau-da - te Do-mi-num. Lau -". The score ends with a double bar line.

Sing praises, all you peoples, sing praises to the Lord.

Psalm – from Psalm 90

O Lord, you have been our refuge
from one generation to the next.

Before the mountains were born
or the earth or the world brought forth,
you are God, without beginning or end.

You turn us back into dust.
To your eyes a thousand years
are like yesterday, come and gone,
no more than a watch in the night.

Make us know the shortness of our life
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
In the morning, fill us with your love;
we shall exult and rejoice all our days.

Show forth your work to your servants;
let your glory shine on their children.
Let the favor of the Lord be upon us.

Reading – Jeremiah 31:31-34

A Reading from Book of Jeremiah

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Here ends the reading.

Song – “Nunc dimittis”

The musical score is written for two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are in Latin. The first system contains the first line of the song, and the second system contains the second line. The lyrics are: "Nunc di - mit - tis ser-vum tu - um Do-mi - ne, Do-mi - ne se - cun - dum ver-bum tu - um in pa - ce. Do-mi - ne Nunc di -".

Nunc di - mit - tis ser-vum tu - um Do-mi - ne, Do-mi - ne se -

cun - dum ver-bum tu - um in pa - ce. Do-mi - ne Nunc di -

**Let your sêrvant nôw go in peace, Ö Lord; nôw go in peace,
äccôrding to thÿ word.**

SILENCE – 5 minutes

Intercessions

O Christ, by remaining faithful till death, you show us the road to greater love.

O Christ, by taking the burden of sin upon yourself, you reveal to us the way of generosity.

O Christ, by praying for those who crucified you, you lead us to forgive without counting the cost.

O Christ, by opening paradise to the repentant thief, you awaken hope in us.

O Christ, come and help our weak faith.

O Christ, create a pure heart in us; renew and strengthen our spirit.

O Christ, your Word is near, may it live within us and protect us always.

Song – “Nada te turbe”

Na-da te tur-be na-da te_es-pan-te; quien a Dios tie-ne na-da le fal-ta.

Na-da te tur-be, na-da te_es-pan-te: só-lo Dios ba-sta.

**Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten, those who seek God shall never go wanting.
Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten. God alone fills us.**

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayers

Christ Jesus, even when we can feel nothing of your presence, you are always there. Your Holy Spirit remains continually active in us, opening little ways forward to escape from our dead ends and to move towards the essential of faith, of trust.

Bless us, Christ Jesus; though we have never seen you, we love you.

U-bi ca-ri-tas et a-mor, u-bi ca-ri-tas De-us i-bi est.