
MAY JESUS BE THE CENTRE OF YOUR LIFE!



Among all the wishes I extend to each one of you, the one dearest to my heart, as we reach the end of the year 2000 Jubilee is: « May Jesus truly be the centre of your life! » This will make all the difference. May he be at the centre of your holiday joy, may he also be there at the centre of your difficult times, even in your distress and anxiety. And may he be there throughout the coming year!

YOU ARE THERE AT THE CENTRE OF OUR LIVES

A few years ago, a Jesuit friend of mine, Father Guy Paiement, a popular communicator at the Centre Saint-Pierre in Montreal, recorded a video tape on Jesus, called "The Escape of Mr. Jesus Christ". With three popular [French] religious songs, Fr. Paiement summarises the three periods of our religious history in broad brush strokes. With the crowds processing through the city streets singing aloud the hymn "Parle, commande, règne", we recognise the particular style of a popular and triumphalist Church. A seemingly unanimous faith, a high rate of religious practice, a Christian world. But then there come the Quiet Revolution and the Second Vatican Council: a period of searching ensued. Even Christ the King who seems uncomfortable with these huge popular demonstrations has disappeared from the daily scene; the faithful are searching for Jesus. Very timidly they sing "I am searching for the face, the face of the Lord; I am looking for it in the depths of your hearts." Yesterday's liturgies no longer seem to respond to this desire of encountering Jesus; the faithful are looking for news of him. They attest to meeting and recognising him in mutual help committees, in popular and cooperative committees, and ever so slowly, the people are beginning to proclaim, "You are there at the heart of our lives, you are the one who makes us live; you are there at the heart of our lives, alive and well, Jesus Christ!"

REQUIRED STEPS

Father Paiement's teaching method is very interesting, and it responds to the experience of many who have been along the same path, a path where it was relatively easy to recognise Jesus even at times of the darkest and most painful obscurity, only to finally come out into the light. This path seems to be a natural one. One cannot leave one's childhood for adulthood without necessarily going through a period of discernment and often painful questioning. This is often the usual path of everyone but it can happen – and this is the situation presented by Fr. Paiement – that an entire community must experience the growth process. This is what happened many times to the apostles and the first disciples. The first pages of St. John's Gospel tell of many crowds following Jesus, to the extent that he had to multiply the loaves and fishes with which to feed all these people who had come to see him. But when he started to talk about the Eucharist, about the "Bread from heaven" being his "flesh to eat" and his "blood to drink", the crowds melted like snow on a spring day, to the point where Jesus asked his disciples, "Do you also want to leave me?" To which Peter answered for them all, "Lord, how could we? To whom would we go? You have the words of everlasting life. We believe and we know that you are the Holy One of God." It was also the same at the time of the Passion: betrayals, defections, denials, desertions. The day after Easter, after their doubts and questioning, the Holy Spirit came to them to make them courageous, daring, generous and enthusiastic witnesses of the Risen Christ.

AT THE HEART OF OUR FAITH

The Jubilee of the Year 2000 and the Christmas season are high points of reflection and prayer, of celebration and fellowship, to help us recognise the presence of Jesus true God and true man, at the heart of our lives. At least this is my heartfelt wish for you, the main wish in this year's season. To truly recognise him at the heart of our lives would be akin to the merchant looking for fine pearls; whenever he finds one he sells everything he has and buys it. Or it would be like a treasure hidden in a field which a man has found. He buries the treasure and goes and sell all he owns to buy the field. These magnificent parables which are found in the Holy Gospels, especially in chapter 13 of St. Matthew, are always very timely. The Kingdom of God is ever growing, nothing can stop its coming since Jesus has inaugurated in his coming among us, through his preaching, his passion, his death and resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Still, we must learn to recognise the Kingdom amidst the tangle of all kinds of "shoots" sprouting everywhere around us.

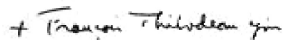
AT THE HEART OF OUR CHURCH

To all the baptised and confirmed, to all who are living in Christian marriage, to all the ordained and the consecrated in religious life, I repeat: May Jesus be the heart of your lives, may he be your life and joy, your peace and happiness. And with you I ardently make this prayer suggested to us in the Eucharistic liturgy: "O God, Father of goodness, give us the Spirit of love, the Spirit of your Son; strengthen us and make us one in faith and love. Open our hearts to every affliction, inspire us always with the right word when we meet brothers and sisters who are lonely and defenceless. Give us the courage of the loving deed when our brothers and sisters are in need or oppressed. Make your Church a place of truth and freedom, of justice and peace, so that all may find a reason for continuing to hope."

AT THE HEART OF OUR WORLD

May Christmas 2000 be unforgettable! May it bring always back to you the central message of the great mystery we call Emmanuel, God-with-Us. Let us take time to consider all that this implies. Let us also take the time to give thanks for this unspeakable gift which we could never have imagined on our own. "O most loving Heart and all love of my Saviour, be the heart of my heart, the soul of my soul, the spirit of my spirit, the life of my life and the exclusive principle of my thoughts, words, and action, of all the faculties of my soul, and of all my inner and outer feelings." "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people of goodwill!"

A Happy Christmas to you all!



+ François Thibodeau
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