

Christian Living

The Spirituality of the Foyers of Charity

Donal Anthony Foley

Based on Conferences given by Fr Michel Tierny

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Foreword by Fr Ian Ker

Pope John Paul II called the rediscovery of the charismatic dimension of the Church one of the most significant achievements of the Second Vatican Council. At certain times in history, the Holy Spirit has inspired charismatic movements of the greatest importance for the Church. The most outstanding examples are the rise of monasticism in the third century, of the mendicant friars of the thirteenth century, of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, and all the other active orders and congregations that followed, particularly of women missionaries, in the nineteenth century. The Pope clearly saw the rise of the ecclesial movements and communities in the twentieth century as another great charismatic surge with the same potential both for evangelization and for the renewal of the Church.

Hans Urs von Balthasar has pointed out that in the history of the Church charisms come “like a bolt of lightning from the blue, destined to illuminate a single and original point of God’s will for the Church in a given time.” Given that the ecclesial communities and movements do in fact realize concretely the fundamental ecclesiology of Vatican II, they would indeed seem very pertinently to illustrate Balthasar’s point. The first two seminal chapters of *Lumen Gentium*, the constitution on the Church, describe the Church in scriptural and patristic terms as being essentially an organic communion of the baptized faithful upon whom the Holy Spirit bestows both hierarchical and charismatic gifts. This is

not a Church with the clergy on the one side and the laity on the other, but a Church consisting of Christians with many different and varying gifts and roles, albeit one that is a hierarchical Church, in which the ultimate authentication and discernment of the genuine fruits of the Spirit is entrusted to the successors of Peter and the other Apostles.

In 1999, the Holy See approved the statues of the Foyers of Charity, which were founded in France in 1936 by a remarkable woman called Marthe Robin, whose cause for beatification is well advanced, in collaboration with her spiritual director, Fr Georges Finet. The Foyers, which anticipated the teaching of the Council on the Church as an organic community, consist of a Priest, who is the Father, living in community with consecrated lay men and women who are not canonically religious but who do embrace the evangelical precepts of chastity, poverty, and obedience. In some Foyers there are also families sharing in the community life. And beyond the confines of the Foyers is an extended family of Christians who support the Foyers through whose retreats and spirituality their own lives have been changed and enriched.

This slim book, attractively and simply written, gives us the authentic flavour of a Foyer retreat. It will be of interest to those who, like John Paul II, see the ecclesial communities and movements as God's answer to the dream of John XXIII, the pope responsible for calling the Second Vatican Council, for a new Pentecost. It will be compulsive reading for anyone fascinated by Marthe Robin, whose spiritual influence on the Church in France can still be felt today, as well as for anyone interested in attending a retreat in one of the Foyers—or even contemplating joining one. And finally, it is ideal spiritual reading for the general reader. Perhaps it may even inspire the founding of a Foyer of Charity in one of the British Isles, where the Church is in such need of renewal.

Introduction

This book came about because I attended a series of retreats, during the 1990s, at the Foyer of Charity at Courset near Boulogne in France. A group of English speaking retreatants were welcomed at the Foyer for a number of years and the retreat conferences were simultaneously translated into English. These retreats were given by Fr Michel Tierny and during them I made extensive notes, with the idea in the back of my mind that one day they might make interesting and inspirational reading—this book is the result.

Fr Tierny established the Foyer at Courset in the early 1970s to serve the northeast corner of France. It comprises a beautiful nineteenth-century château surrounded by a park, but there has been much new building, including additional accommodation for retreatants and a recently completed chapel. Before becoming the Father of the Courset Foyer, Fr Tierny was a professor at the Seminary in Lille. The community has now grown much larger, and, apart from retreat work, Courset also has a school with 200 pupils—indeed a good many members of the Foyer are teachers.

I have tried to preserve Fr Tierny's style and give the reader some idea of what it is like to actually attend a Foyer retreat, but rather than reproduce his retreat conferences in the exact order in which they were given, I have rearranged the material thematically, so that particular topics are dealt with in successive sections of the book. There is some repetition of important points, but I feel this is useful by way of emphasis. Despite these changes, this book does follow the general pattern of many Foyer retreats, in that it begins with idea of

discipleship, our call as Christians, before moving on through topics such as prayer, the Trinity, the sacraments, and so on. And just as in a Foyer retreat, the climax of the book is the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, and the consecration to Mary following the method of St Louis de Montfort.

I feel that this book is suitable not only for those who want to know more about the spirituality of Marthe Robin and the Foyers of Charity, but also for those who are looking for general spiritual reading. Similarly, it might be helpful for those wanting to conduct their own “do-it-yourself” retreat. The important point is that this book is meant to be read slowly and meditatively, and that readers should almost try and put themselves in the position of people hearing the Gospel for the first time—and this is indeed one of the aims of a Foyer retreat, to help us to look at Christian teaching in a new light.

The first chapter outlines the life and spirituality of Marthe Robin—including the founding of the Foyers of Charity—as well as Marthe’s vision for the Foyers, and it also has some information about the positive attitude of the Church towards both the Foyers and Marthe. Subsequent chapters are, as explained above, a thematic arrangement of some of Fr Tierny’s retreat conferences on the basic principles of the Christian life.

1

Marthe Robin & the Foyers of Charity

On 10 February 1936, a young Priest in his thirties named Georges Finet drove from the city of Lyon, in south-eastern France, to the village of Châteauneuf-de-Galaure in the Drôme foothills, to visit Marthe Robin. He carried in his car a hand-colored picture of Mary Mediatrix of All Graces, which a mutual friend had asked him to deliver personally to her.

Marthe lived with her parents in a small farmhouse a mile from the village. Born in 1902, the youngest of five children, she had been bedridden since 1928, and from 1929 more or less paralyzed. Already she had a reputation for living in the closest possible mystical union with Christ and His Mother, and in October 1930 she had been marked with the stigmata of His Passion; every Friday she relived His sufferings on the Cross.

This meeting was to prove providential, for it led to a collaboration between Marthe and Père Finet which would only be broken by her death in 1981, by which time there would be some sixty Foyers of Charity in five continents. Since then, even more communities have been founded.

In the course of three hours of conversation, Marthe convinced the Abbé Finet that his vocation lay in helping her. For the first hour they spoke of the Blessed Virgin and her role in the Church. Fr Finet, who gave Marian conferences on the teaching of St Louis de Montfort, was astonished at the depth of her insights. At three o'clock she began to talk of the

great events which were soon to occur in the world, some very painful, presumably a reference to World War II and its aftermath, others rich in graces, usually taken as a reference to the Second Vatican Council. She announced “a New Pentecost of Love,” and a renewal of the Church by means of the laity. This would take many forms, but outstanding in this process would be the Foyers, “Hearths” of Light, Charity and Love.

These were to be made up of consecrated lay persons and directed by a Priest, the Father of the Foyer; their main task would be to provide week-long silent retreats to be given by him. Marthe maintained that the Foyers would have a worldwide influence, and would particularly be “an expression of the Heart of Jesus to the nations after the defeat of materialism and satanic errors.” Amongst these she mentioned communism, and Freemasonry.

After this, Marthe asked the Abbé Finet to come to Châteauneuf to found the first Foyer of Charity, telling him that this was the express wish of God. She also told him that, amongst other things, he would preach retreats, initially for women and girls, and that these would have to be held in silence, with the first one to take place the following September. She reassured him as to publicity about these and the necessary finance, telling him that the Blessed Virgin would take care of everything. He said he was willing but would have to ask permission from his superiors. Abbé Finet’s superior, Msgr. Bornet agreed to let him go. So did the Vicar-general of Lyon. Finally his spiritual director, a professor of theology at the university, was enthusiastic about the idea—he had already met Marthe. Thus seven months later the first retreat was conducted for thirty-three persons, all women, several of whom would become permanent members of the original Foyer at Châteauneuf. (Fr Raymond Peyret, *Marthe Robin: The Cross and the Joy*, Alba House, New York, 1983, pp. 75-78).

Marthe's influence and spirituality

Marthe Robin would appear to be for the second half of the twentieth century, and beyond, what St Thérèse of Lisieux was for the first half. And indeed the two women are closely linked spiritually, despite the fact that whereas Thérèse died aged twenty-four and became known through her autobiography, and thus famous throughout the Catholic world, Marthe lived to be seventy-nine, and the greater part of her life was spent in seclusion, entirely immobilized in a small room at her parents' house.

Mystically united to Christ and His Mother, she was visited by most of the retreatants who came to Châteauneuf over a period of fifty years. It has been estimated that she may have met one hundred thousand people; each one waited in the little kitchen and was allowed ten minutes with Marthe in her darkened room. She showed a keen interest in the affairs of each visitor, gave sound advice, and always finished by praying with him or her.

She had extraordinary insights into the concerns of those who sought her counsel, and many testified to how much a visit to Marthe had meant to them, in solving a family problem, or obtaining light as to what direction they should take in life. A number of other growing communities originating in France, including the Community of Saint John, owe their foundations partly to her support. Although she was paralyzed and could not actually write herself, she dictated a large collection of prayers, meditations and observations, which are gradually being published, and a large number of books, mostly still in French, have been written about her. She is constantly quoted in the Foyers.

Perhaps her most striking spiritual document was her "Act of Consecration," made in 1925 at the age of twenty-three. In this masterpiece of spiritual thought the word "love" appears twenty-two times, but "justice" not once. From then on she was consecrated through Mary to Jesus to be a living sacrifice

to God. She never attended a public Mass after 1928, yet her whole life was like a Mass, a perfect oblation of thanksgiving, united to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, and inspired by love. As she herself put it, in February 1930: "One can only make people love to the extent that one possesses it, just as one can only radiate light if one carries within oneself the truth which is light."

Marthe Robin and the Foyer Retreats

Foyer retreats are silent and generally last five days. They usually comprise three or four conferences each day, at which the Priest expounds various Christian themes, depending on the particular retreat. Mass is also celebrated daily and there is time for adoration, the Rosary and private prayer. Meals are taken in silence but accompanied by classical music. The main idea is that a peaceful and prayerful atmosphere will enable the teachings to sink in and to deeply influence the retreatant—that is why silence is so important.

Marthe's prayer was that those on retreat, and indeed all believers, should be able to fix their minds and hearts on God with respectful attention, that they should correspond with grace and have a continuous disposition for, and awareness of, the Holy Trinity. Marthe wanted all sorts of people to come on the retreats—believers, unbelievers, everyone; she wanted them to experience that the Word of God is meant for all. The silence of the Foyer retreat helps people to discover God's tenderness; to hear God in their hearts. Marthe felt that the retreats were great moments of grace and opportunities for catechetical teaching, as well as a form of training for contemplation. She saw them as helping people to assimilate Christian doctrine by careful study and meditation, to take it into their hearts and really understand it, before passing it on to others.

Foyer retreats are about God as Father teaching His children to live a Christian life; He corrects them and puts them on the right road. Jesus gives them the joy to live in the

love of the Father. This was the intuition of Marthe; that God carries and supports those who trust in Him. Marthe didn't just want formal catechetics, she also wanted something which would touch people's hearts. There is some repetition during a retreat because it often takes a while for ideas to sink in. Most people, though, should be able to cope with the discipline of a retreat; they receive spiritual help from the prayers and the self-offering of the members of the Foyer.

Marthe wanted the retreatants to be welcomed with love, and for the food to be fresh and well cooked; but she did demand silence and was insistent on that; it is part of the sacrificial attitude required for the retreat, because this is the way we hear what God is saying to us. Marthe understood that austerity isn't absolutely necessary, that it can cause people to give up. But she insisted, too, that without silence they wouldn't realise their vocation, or only realise it superficially. They might do good things but not necessarily what God wants. So there is a requirement to go within, a requirement for recollection, and this is impossible without silence. This also requires a generous and constant sacrifice.

Marthe contended that all those on retreat have a direct relationship with Mary, since she is the mother of the Foyer. Mary offers her spiritual children to God. Retreatants were called not to fix their ideas exclusively on exterior things: rather, like Mary, they were to aim at interior meditation. Mary would help them, and so the aim was to try to discover one's real aims and aspirations during a retreat, to become aware of the importance of trying harder after being on retreat.

For Marthe, Mary was a mother who was discrete and yet eminently present to her children, and she insisted on the need to be thankful to Mary for introducing retreatants to the spirituality of the Foyers of Charity, which is nothing less than the spirituality of genuine Christian living.

Clearly, the above observations also apply to those who read a book such as this one, which contains the essentials of the spirituality of the Foyers.

The Church and the Foyers of Charity

We can get some idea of how Pope Paul VI understood Marthe's vocation, and that of the Foyers, by considering these words of his: "The Foyers give an authentic doctrinal and spiritual teaching in a climate of silence, charity, and devotion to Mary, which opens souls to conversion, deepens their life with God and leads them to the apostolate."

This papal approval has been reflected in the general attitude of the Church towards Marthe. The Bishop of Valence established a Commission of Enquiry regarding her in February 1988, and in March 1991 the Holy See gave its "nihil obstat" to the official opening of a Diocesan Cause; the Commission completed its work in 1996 and submitted a text of 17,000 pages to Rome. Since then it has been in the hands of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Thus Marthe's Cause is advancing in Rome. In a letter to Père Michon, who currently heads the Foyer movement worldwide, dated 26 February 2002, Mgrs Rylko, the Secretary of the Pontifical Congregation for the Laity, wrote approvingly of both Marthe and the Foyers.

But even before the above developments, the Pontifical Council for the Laity had, in 1986, issued the following statement about the Foyers, fifty years after the foundation of the first community:

The purpose of the Work of the Foyers of Charity, which started in France in 1936 at the initiative of Marthe Robin and her spiritual director Fr Finet, is to form lay people in appropriate centers—the Foyers—thus preparing them to contribute to the renewal of the Church in view of the evangelization of the world. This formation is principally given through the retreats where the participants receive the teaching of the Word of God and celebrate the Eucharist, while also taking part in adoration,

and Marian prayer. The Foyers of Charity welcome all those who come, believers and unbelievers alike, to seek the light of Christ and to receive the teaching of the Church. They do this without distinction of nationality, race, or social situation. Foyers of Charity can also have other branches of activity and apostolate according to the needs of the local Churches and the talents of the members.

Although each Foyer is found in a diocese and is integrated into the life of a local Church, all the Foyers of Charity form a single, large, spiritual family, living the same mission according to the same Spirit. The tangible sign and the guarantee of this unity are the manifest attachment of each Foyer to the Foyer Centre of Châteauneuf de Galaure, in which the original grace took shape, and which remains the visible symbol of the charism of the Work.

In celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation, the Work of the Foyers of Charity, rich in graces received throughout its history, and desirous of rooting itself more deeply in the Church in order to accomplish its mission for the world, asked the Pontifical Council of the Laity to recognize it officially and to approve its statutes.

After careful study of the documentation presented by those responsible for the Work of the Foyers of Charity, with a positive evaluation from many bishops with a Foyer in their diocese, and after submitting the request for recognition to His Holiness Pope John Paul II, the Pontifical Council for the laity recognizes the Work of the “Foyers of Charity” as a private association of the faithful of international character according to the norms established by canons 321-326, and approves their canonical structure *ad experimentum* for a period of three years.

Eduardo Card. Pironio, President Paul J. Cordes, Vice-President;
Given at the Vatican, on the Solemnity of All Saints,
November 1, 1986

As is common, this period was extended, and since then, on December 8th 1999, Cardinal Stafford approved the Canonical Structures of the Foyers of Charity, for the

Pontifical Council for the Laity, as the following document indicates:

Taking in consideration the request of the Father in Charge of the Work of the Foyers de Charité to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, by letter, on the 15th August 1999, in view of the permanent approval of the Statutes of the Work of the 'Foyers de Charité'; In view of the numerous letters supporting this request from Ordinaries of the dioceses where 'Foyers de Charité' have been established, giving witness to the quality of their evangelical life, their firm rooting in the Church and the spiritual radiation of their service; Taking into account that, in recent years, new 'Foyers de Charité' have been opened, and often at the invitation of the Bishops themselves, and that the life of the 'Foyers de Charité' on the different continents has been enriched with new vocations;

Finally, having appreciated the effort of deep reflection which has been made by the 'Foyers de Charité' these last few years concerning the charisma of their origins, as well as several key questions indicated by the Dicaster, The Pontifical Council for the Laity confirms the recognition of the Work of the Foyers de Charité as an international private Association of the faithful of Pontifical law, endowed with a juridical personality, according to Canon norms 298-311 and 321-329 of CIC and the permanent approval of its Statutes, whose original text has been authenticated and placed in the archives of this Dicaster.

Given at the Vatican, on the 8th December 1999 at the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

3

Holiness: Our Call to Perfection

“All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.” All are called to holiness: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” ... The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes. (CCC 2013, 2015)

Jesus’ life at Nazareth is important both for the Foyers and the Church. It implies for us an ordinary life but one which involves close union with God. Common sanctity means that we are all called to holiness. We must “feed” our souls with religious practices and have a desire for perfection before God.

It is necessary for us to become like God—this means being obedient and crucified. The “simplicity” of holiness is for all. Holiness is not the same as the graces of healing, prophecy, visions, and so on, as found in the lives of the saints. Holiness involves being simple, pure and harmonious, and is possible even in the most ordinary life, as long as we aim for a closer union with God. All are called to discover the message of Jesus, and for this we need a spiritual hunger. “Ordinary” people tend to see holiness as too difficult for them; but each person can reach “ordinary” holiness without miracles, or exceptional events, as, for example, in the hidden

life of St Thérèse of Lisieux. She became a saint through a simple life, but one full of love: what is certain is that we won't get straight to heaven by being mediocre.

The life of the Holy Family in Nazareth was very ordinary. Even though Jesus was God, the second person of the Trinity, whose actions are divine and thus to be adored, He lived a very simple, humble, hidden life for thirty years. We need to meditate on why He chose this sort of life. This secret, silent, life with Mary and Joseph was a life of love. This is also the sort of life that is lived in the Foyers, one of prayer, work, meals, an ordinary life. We must put an effort into our lives to reproduce the life lived in Nazareth.

We are required to sanctify ourselves in order to become true “missionaries.” The important thing is the intention with which we do things—remove whatever is not worthy of a Christian. In the Incarnation, Christ veiled the glory of His divinity and became like us. Christ is at the heart of the Trinity and we are members of Christ; He is sitting at the right hand of the Father; this is the logic of the Incarnation:

The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. (CCC 464)

Why does He give us His tenderness when He knows we won't appreciate it? The tenderness and mercy of God are infinite; we see this in the Mass where the Lamb of God takes away the sins of the world. We are all repentant sinners and should pray that God will have pity on us.

The Samaritan Woman

Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples),

he left Judea and departed again to Galilee. He had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. (John 4:1-6)

How does this story speak of sanctification to us? Our greatest treasure is our spiritual life; we have to try and avoid sin. But we set so little store by this spiritual life, not taking it seriously enough or putting enough effort into it. This happens because we don't aim high enough.

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" (John 4:7-12)

Jesus had reached the well and sat down because He was tired: He asked for a drink. The Samaritan woman was suspicious and surprised. Jesus deepened the dialogue with her—if only she knew what God was offering. We don't realise how great is the gift which God is offering us, that is, eternal life. Nor do we realise the greatness of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity made man, God in person. He is saying He is the source of life and we too can have life in abundance. Jesus was talking about living water; the Word made flesh is life itself. God is the true reality, but we limit reality to what we can see: we need to be open to all levels of reality, including the angels and saints, and, of course, God.

We have a great desire for love: we must realise that only God can fulfil this. This means the real life of the Trinity, the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity. Life is transmitted to us by Christ our head, just as sin was transmitted originally to us through Adam's fault. Christ, the new Adam, transcends this—He is the head of the whole of humanity, the head of the mystical body, with His divinity and humanity in the person of the Word.

Just having the divine life in us tends to make us contemplatives. If we have an open heart we receive the divine life from Jesus; this is something that can only be experienced personally and is the path to true contemplation. We need to pursue this type of contemplation all the time and develop a continuous awareness of God's presence. This means living on the interior level where God is.

Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." (John 4:13-15)

At this point, the woman didn't recognise Jesus as the Messiah; she was still doubting and lacking in confidence. Ordinary water doesn't give true life—we still remain thirsty. The living water promised by Jesus satisfies our eternal thirst. We need to be open and receptive to this new life. We can recognise this other life; it shows through from time to time in, for example, the beauty of a child's innocence. This idea of "living water" involves and implies a continuous and vital contact between the believer and Jesus. So this eternal life in us is a wonder which turns us to God and takes others with us too. We need, though, to have the right disposition to receive this living water.

The spiritual life isn't just automatic—we have to correspond, to desire it. We have to be purified to really

appreciate it. Jesus led the woman to see the truth. Faith tells us about the things we will possess in eternity—but it also allows us to love our brothers and sisters in a much better way than we might think.

Jesus was telling the woman that she had to decide how to live. The divine life in us should involve our being converted, and often, indeed, our failures in life can actually lead to our conversion. We discover the depth of sin, our wounds, and the greatness of eternal life. We realise that we must give our hearts to God.

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.” The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.” (John 4:16-26)

Our Call to Holiness

We should note the words here which imply adoration, that is, a movement of the soul. We are meant to worship God in spirit and in truth, not in sentimentality—this is the sort of worshipper which the Father wants. It is really an attitude of heart, like that of Martha and Mary. We must ask pardon, but

must also expiate our sins. Jesus acts like an elder brother amongst us; the Father invites us to grow towards Him—but it isn't magic—work is involved on our part. We have to merit the salvation Jesus has won for us. The one who, like Marthe, suffers, offers and prays is terribly human. Marthe was a victim of love, someone who was given a tremendous mission.

We aren't fully human unless we make efforts to expiate our sins. We have to "earn" our salvation by working for it—otherwise it's not a salvation worthy of man. Jesus worked for our salvation, to encourage us to imitate His love. He loved His own in the world right to the end with great respect and wants us to be drawn to Him through love. He wants us to be transformed by love. He went to the limits of love for His own—death on the Cross.

We have to be aware of our responsibilities in the world; many insults are given to God through war, poverty, and other evils, and we mustn't wash our hands of all this. We pretend it isn't any of our business, and can even contribute to these evils and so are responsible and sinful. We have to reflect on all this and so be able to discover our vocation, which is deeper than just whether to get married or not: it involves God's inner plan for us all. We have been given the grace to understand the mysteries of God, but we must be open to this gift.

Our Responsibility in the Church

We just can't look at the Church with human eyes; the early history of the Church is only understandable through the mystery of the Cross. One holy person, a soul of goodness, can save many others: Christians aren't aware enough of this. We have the honour of carrying out God's work and this means identifying ourselves with Christ. This involves all the ordinary things of life; through our Baptism we can offer up everything. So through Baptism we have responsibility for the salvation of our brothers. We have come from God and we are

called to return to God with our hearts full. We must pray for the grace to understand the Heart of Jesus.

The summit of joy for Jesus was the Cross, and we too have to go through this experience of the Cross in an interior sense. This means coping with what is possible for us and not looking for extraordinary burdens. We will see our vocation afterwards; Paul was accused of being mad and even Peter couldn't accept the shame of the Cross. Don't commit yourself to a particular direction without this inner life and understanding, so that you are really in contact with God.

Jesus started His life for God, His mission, at the time of His Baptism. God gives us His gifts in due proportion. Have we really understood how much Jesus loved us? Most of us reply to this love quite badly. Our wisdom doesn't always correspond to our age—true wisdom comes from God. We are all consecrated by Baptism and have a vocation. Our responsibility is to the whole world, to redeem our brothers. It means accepting things which go against us. St Louis de Montfort said that if he didn't have a cross on a particular day, he felt it was because God didn't think he was strong enough.