

**Fraternal Retreat**  
**PARAY-LE-MONIAL, 22-27 October 2019**

**Lecture by Michel-Bernard de Vregille**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today for the first time as the General Moderator, I have the opportunity to address you as part of the Fraternity of Jesus' retreat.

Laurent concluded the last retreat, I introduce this one, the handover is now complete!

We now use the term "source" retreat (which most of you discovered in the invitation) rather than International retreat because more than internationality it is the interculturality of the charism that is now developing throughout the world, and not all members of the Fraternity have the possibility to come here to Paray-le-Monial, so these retreats held here every two years are sources for those organized throughout the world.

First of all, I would like to share with you my joy, together with Catherine, in being at your service, at the service of the Emmanuel Community, at the service of my brothers, at the service of the Church. We have been in the Community for 35 years.

How many graces have we received? How much help have we received from the brothers at each moment of our lives, at each turn? How many accompaniments through which the Lord has enlightened us, and still enlightens us, through the brothers, how many households, including the festive ones! Through which the Lord gives us to live the "sacrament of the brothers"! Today the Lord has entrusted me with this mission, may he always give me the opportunity to be attentive to the Holy Spirit in order to accompany the Community where the Lord wants it!

We constantly refer, with Catherine, to this text of Pope Francis who touched us 5 years ago when we were appointed delegates of the Moderator for France, it is in "The Joy of the Gospel", number 31, and if it concerns the Bishops, I take it for our missions as leaders, it is true for each of us when we are in responsibility, two passages have nourished us:

The first: "To always foster missionary communion in the Church... By pursuing the ideal of the first Christian communities, in which believers had one heart and one soul", and this is the Brotherhood of Jesus.

And the second at the end of the text about the pastors: "Under certain circumstances the pastor will have to walk behind the people, to help those who have remained behind and - above all - because the flock itself has a sense of smell to find new ways..."

These statements by Pope Francis remain more relevant than ever in my new mission. No one in the Emmanuel Community has the infused science, neither does the Moderator! The discernments I have to make every day are not "self-discernments", the grace given to the Moderator is based first and foremost on this treasure given to us from community discernment.

Some of you have already heard me mention this treasure many times, and today I repeat it again as a moderator: community discernment is a treasure that is at the heart of our charism, at the heart of the Church, and which asks us to move forward in communion!

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In this regard, I would like to testify before all of you who are the Fraternity of Jesus what I was able to say this summer at the seminar that brought together our 4 governing bodies: the International Council, the Council of the Fraternity of Jesus, the International Office, and finally, the Council of the Clerical Association of the Emmanuel Community.

Well, brothers and sisters, I want to tell you that if we have under the responsibility of my predecessor Laurent, worked during all these years of Council, our renewed statutes of the association of the faithful and the statutes of ACCE, well, I can tell you to live it every day, that these statutes we have received them from the Lord! Received from the Holy Spirit! There is not a meeting of these bodies where I am not happy to see how much each of them has its state of grace! We often talk about the state grace for people, but I have never seen, as I see it today, how much state of grace is given for a body as such and I wanted to bear witness to this for you, brothers and sisters. When the International Council is convened, and well it has a state of grace of sharing and discernment, it is identical for the Council of the Fraternity of Jesus, for the Council of ACCE, and for the International Office. And I can tell you that it is an incredible grace for the Moderator to be able to move forward with these brothers, supported by these brothers, it is a state of grace for the future and the following ones.

The mandate of Moderator is not a political mandate any more than it is for the Councils! Some time ago a bishop asked me how I saw my mandate, if there were things I thought needed to change...? I replied that my mandate would be in line with my predecessors, in the heart of the Church and that I only had to implement the statutes that the Church had confirmed to us in order to advance in the Spirit.

Responsibility in the Emmanuel Community is part of the great tradition of the Church as a responsibility of service, in a hermeneutics of continuity. The Moderators change, but the Holy Spirit is still the same! It is he and he alone that we must follow with unfailing fidelity, brothers and sisters!

So I want to tell you today that if we have not been spared suffering during our community history (and we will carry others...), if our poverty and sins are present at the heart of our lives, I am moving forward in the mission entrusted to me by assuming and following in the footsteps of my predecessors, of all my predecessors, of whom I have received much from each one!

Yes, the Cross is planted in our lives and our Community, but our sufferings offered will be as many seeds for the mission! Do we believe that? So let us entrust all the crosses of our history and our lives to the Lord, as true Disciples of Christ should do and let us move forward! Let's move forward with confidence!

When we signed our new statutes and especially the implementation of the statutes of ACCE, I said that this stage had a historical character (there will be others of course...), because in a way it indicated that the Emmanuel Community, wanted by God and by his mother, was thus reaching a form of maturity!

For 50 years the Community has grown as a person grows, through these stages of youth, then adolescence, then as a young adult, to become what it is today, at the heart of the Church, at the service of evangelization and all the missions that the Lord will want to entrust to us, as a second call. If the Community has grown and borne fruit during these 50 years, more than ever it is for today, it is for the times we live in!

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In this "upside down" world to use Pierre's expression, where we are confronted with deviant ideologies that think they can exclude God from our lives, and much more than ever the Emmanuel Community is called to burn with love and charity, to serve wherever it is called, and for that, brothers and sisters, the heart must burn! And the heart is the Brotherhood of Jesus! If the heart does not burn, the whole Community will die out!

So brothers and sisters during this "source" retreat, let us ask the Lord, each of us personally and in community, to burn with love of charity and let the members of the Brotherhood of Jesus throughout the world burn with this love of charity for their brothers and sisters, for the Church and for the world.

May this retreat be for each of us and together an opportunity for conversion and renewal so that we may all be ready with our service aprons, like the apostles of recent times so dear to Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort!

I mentioned above, Mary is the mother of Emmanuel, two years ago we had the grace to make a Marian year, during which we were able to better understand the consecration to Mary that we say every day. During this time we all together made a great step of Consecration to the Bouchard Island, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are the source of our charism and communion. And you have to work on it. This communion without which we cannot bear the fruit that God wants, we have been given to meditate on and deepen it during our last Fraternity retreats. In particular, I encourage you to reread or listen again to the teaching we received from François Gonon.

Communion, as you know, cannot be the fruit only of our work or of our human organizations, true communion is the fruit of attentive listening to the Holy Spirit! It is receiving all together the Holy Spirit, which builds our communion.

We live this grace particularly in the Community as a fruit of the outpouring of the Spirit, listening to the Holy Spirit, living in the Holy Spirit, witnessing with the Holy Spirit.

This is the reason why we discerned in the Fraternity Council of Jesus, to live our retreats this year with a focus on the Holy Spirit, and in this grace of attentive listening to the Holy Spirit.

I said earlier that more than ever the Community is for today's world.

More than ever, the charism of the Emmanuel must spread everywhere the Lord wants it and we must transmit it and be faithful to it. But what does it mean to be "faithful to the charism"?

During my last trip to Africa where I had the joy of discovering The Ivory Coast and Benin, I was asked the question: what does the Church expect from Emmanuel? Well, the answer is simple: it expects us to be faithful to our charism! This is what all the pastors we meet tell us: be faithful to your charism, and to be faithful to the charism you must be faithful to the Spirit! In the epistle to the

Galatians, Saint Paul vigorously warns the galatians (Galatians 3:1-5) and us with, on fidelity to the Spirit: I quote:

"... I want to know only one thing from you: did you receive the Spirit because you practiced the law, or because you believed in preaching? Are you so devoid of intelligence as to start with the spirit and end now in the flesh? Is it in vain that you have felt so much favor? And it would be in vain. Does the one who gives you the Spirit and works miracles among you do so because you practice the Law or because you believe in preaching? »

So brothers and sisters we must remain faithful to receive the Spirit.

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We have not "received our charism" once and for all and at some point in our history in 1972 no, it is a spring that has sprung and continues to sprout, as Father Minvielle reminded us in Lisieux when he met our brother priests and deacons. And there brothers and sisters we must be attentive.

For the charism we have received, which was born by pure grace in 1972 at Troussures, is not a reserve of water from which we draw to the last drop... No, it is a source, a source that comes from the Spirit, a source from which we must draw unceasingly to serve and give ourselves, a source that is inexhaustible and that requires to draw from it the fertility that God wants us to draw from it without ceasing. Thus the charism is given permanently and it is our fidelity in listening to the Holy Spirit that will allow us to remain faithful to our charism and to bear fruit.

Be faithful to the listening of the Holy Spirit!

This may seem obvious in terms of thinking, but are we really living it in practice, and I speak for myself, are we really ready to let go? I remember this humorous statement from Father Cantalamessa who had struck me a lot about prayer and renewal, he said: "Before in renewal we prayed..., now we make topos about prayer! ». Let me paraphrase him by asking us each other personally and in community during this retreat, it is good to be able to give a good overview of the Holy Spirit, but are we really listening to him?

For this reason, at the beginning of this retreat we must ask the Lord together for the grace of humility. We must ask for the grace to live this retreat as little children who will discover everything! And for that we must be "very small" as Peter said. It is to him that we must entrust this retreat in particular. This is another grace for us to be able to rely on the intercession of our founder. As Father Mercier reminded us in Rome, the further away we get from the departure of our founder to heaven, the more we must receive and meditate on what his life was like and what he left us.

We have to be very careful about transmitting all this, because a founder can quickly reduce it to a few sentences or slogans, but Pierre was not a man of slogans, he was annoyed himself when we reduced what we are to a slogan, for example, during a community weekend in June 1981, I quote:

"So we always say: "Adoration, compassion, evangelization". It's becoming a slogan! It gets annoying, in the end, there's no need to repeat it! »

Of course we must work and receive "who we are" we have done it and we will continue to do it, but what we need above all is to live it! It is to be what we are in the heart of God! And from this point of view, when we work on what we have received and what we still receive from Pierre, it is not by repeating sentences that "Pierre said" as we would remember the good words of a grandfather with a certain nostalgia... but especially how he lived them! How he gave himself, consumed, for his Lord ! So that, members of the Fraternity of Jesus, we may take the same path! And for that we must ask for humility! I quote Pierre:

"And what is amazing is that they are upright hearts, and the humble (...) they are the ones who understand the Kingdom of God. The others they are so big, so powerful, and so strong that they don't understand. »

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He also said:

"And truly the way of the Lord, is Jesus, gentle and humble of heart. If we become like that, we are saved and we will save all those we have to save. And moreover, if we are gentle and humble of heart, it will pierce our hearts quietly. It is an extraordinary journey. »

So, like Peter, let us ask the Holy Spirit for humility in order to be fully close to the Lord so that we can save through Him the souls entrusted to us. That during this retreat the elders of the Fraternity of Jesus may say to themselves: what more can I give? For my brothers, for the mission, for the poor... What else can I offer to the Lord for communion in the Community, for its deployment in the world, for the inculturation of his charism...? We will receive from the Lord according to our expectations! And let the newcomers say: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening! ». The availability for the mission is nothing more than the availability to the Holy Spirit! In this way we will be able to see the signs of the times in the Community and receive the answer to give them that the Spirit will teach us. The world in which we live is the world in which God gives us to live, we love it as it is. But we see it every day, this world needs God, men need to turn to Christ and we must be his witnesses.

This world we must be in dialogue with him, we are not in the Fraternity and in the Community to "protect ourselves from the world" but to be the instruments, to save him, through Jesus, and for that we must be his witnesses and witnesses up to the Cross.

As members of the Fraternity of Jesus we must accept to follow the Lord to the Cross. Of course we do not seek suffering for its own sake, we are not masochists, but as brothers and sisters of Jesus we must accept to accompany it to the Cross, like Mary, like Saint John, because it is only at the foot of the Cross that we can contemplate its open heart and the rivers of living water that save the world. Here in Paray-le-Monial, which is the spiritual heart of the Community, Saint Margaret Mary teaches us and testifies to the infinite love, we are loved and so much needed by the world! In this Jubilee Year, let us ask Saint Margaret Mary to intercede for this so that we may be faithful to our call. This infinite love of God is revealed on the Cross, which is essential and is the antidote to all possible blindness of any mission and pastoral success. I do not want that to be misunderstood. We must continue to be formed, we must tirelessly seek new pastoral paths, and I welcome all the initiatives that I see in the Community everywhere, I think of our missions in the parishes and outside our

parishes! But we must never forget that the true fruitfulness of all these pastorals comes from Jesus alone and from Jesus crucified.

As a member of the Fraternity of Jesus we must be ready to offer our life, our whole life, in the following of Christ. The Cross of Christ is the glorious cross. Let us give thanks for Pierre's intuition to find the Glorious Cross within the Community so that our brothers and sisters who are members may offer their suffering for the fruitfulness of the Community's missions and for its intentions, for the Church and for the world. In a way, all the members of the Fraternity of Jesus must, like their brothers of the Glorious Cross, offer their sufferings for the mission.

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To conclude, let us entrust ourselves unreservedly to the Virgin Mary.

You who are Mother of the Word, Mother of the Church, Mother of Emmanuel, we entrust ourselves to you.

We present to you all the members of the Fraternity of Jesus, all the members of the Glorious Cross, all the members of the Emmanuel Community.

We entrust you with our retreat, we ask you to have a heart totally open to the Holy Spirit so that at the end of it we can say like you did to God: "May it be done to me according to your word".

May we live this great apostrophe of Saint John Paul II that we celebrated yesterday and which was reminded to us by Herman at the beginning of the Mass: "Let us not be afraid! Let us open wide the doors to Christ! ».