

LIFE AND WELL-BEING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Daring to sail to the other side



FR CHARLO CAMILLERI, O.CARM.

A year later he became a hermit on the sacred mountain Arunachala, frequenting Hindu ashrams and spiritual masters. Taking on the state of an errant ascetic as Swami Abhishiktananda, he went “to the other side”, immersing himself in mystical union with God, pursuing the Advaita path of non-duality.

In the last days before his final passing “to the other side” he fixed his eyes on an icon representing the fiery ascension to heaven of the Prophet Elijah. Recognised as one of the 20th century’s greatest mystics, Le Saux is a courageous pioneer of the interspiritual dialogue. Daring against all odds – including his temperament of a very pious Breton attached to his birthplace and traditions – to go “to the other side”, he pursued alone the path of fruitfully deepening his faith in Jesus Christ through the Hindu lived experience, as to its philosophical and theological categories.

In today’s gospel, Jesus tells his disciples to “get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side”, in other words, to move out of their comfort zone, and to sail uncharted waters ahead of him. They were still tasting glory of the miraculous feeding of the multitude but, dismissing the crowds, Jesus literally ousts the disciples to move on, all alone. Once in the boat, “buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it”, they fearfully realise with difficulty that Jesus is already on the waters awaiting them. Immediately, they find themselves on “the other side” with him.

Today’s readings: 1 Kings 19: 9a, 11-13a; Psalm 84; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14: 22-33

Vers l’autre rive (1989) is a collection of texts by Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973) aimed at initiating readers to the spiritual appreciation of the Upanishads, which are part of the oldest Hindu Scriptures, the Vedas. The title of this anthology of texts comprises translations and commentaries of the Upanishads, writings on Hindu monasticism, as well as an article on the sannyasa state of life.

Written a few weeks before his death on December 7, 1973, the title recalls Jesus’s instruction to his disciples to go “to the other side”. As a Benedictine monk from Sainte-Anne de Kergonan Monastery in Brittany, Henri Le Saux, once a prisoner-of-war, was compelled by an inner call in 1948 to physically “get into the boat and go on [...] to the other side” in India. Once there, he co-founded with Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) in Shantivanam, the Saccidananda Ashram, a monastery dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity.

Similarly, in the first reading, God instructs Elijah to stop contemplating his navel, “go out, and stand on the mountain” in his presence. There he was thrust in uncharted territory, encountering God afresh in the deafening silence, rather than the traditional theophanic forms he knew so well.

God’s Word today is a wake-up call for the local faith community to move out of its comfort zone and abandon the navel-gazing attitude. The humus we are in has long changed; society and culture have long since moved on, presenting ever new challenges and seemingly leaving the faith community clueless on how to pertinently and sagaciously respond according to the signs of times.

In the reading from the letter to the Romans, the Apostle, with “great sorrow and unceasing anguish”, bewails those who resist moving on to new pastures, losing a God-given opportunity to new life. To the Corinthians he warns that “the old has passed away” (2 Cor 5:17). Echoing similar sentiments, Cardinal Maria Martini once lamented the Church being “200 years behind the times”, “tired”, with “empty places of worship”, hauling around phantoms of worn-out pastoral strategies, enforcing the perception of being an irrelevant institution, guardian of debilitating traditions. In the meantime, Christ is waiting on “the other side” of the shore.

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QUOTES & NEWS

Pope Francis visited Portugal for the World Youth Day celebrations.

The pope’s dream

During a meeting with the authorities on August 2, the pope said:

“An economist was telling me a few days ago that the best investment income comes from the production of arms. We are investing more in arms than in the future of children. I dream of a Europe, the heart of the West, which employs its immense talents to settling conflicts and lighting lamps of hope; a Europe capable of recovering its youthful heart, looking to the greatness of the whole and beyond its immediate needs; a Europe inclusive of peoples and persons, together with their own cultures, without chasing after ideologies and forms of ideological colonisation. This helps bring us back to the dream of the founders of the European Union. They had a great dream!”

Room for everyone

During an address to young people on August 3, he said:

“There is room for everyone in the Church, the young and old, the healthy and the sick, the righteous and sinners: everyone, everyone, everyone, everyone! Everyone, everyone, everyone! This is what I wanted to tell you. Don’t be afraid, have courage, go forward knowing that we are loved...”

‘Do not be afraid’

In his homily during the concluding mass on August 6, he said:

“Dear young people, I would like to look into the eyes of each one of you and say to you: Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid.

What is more, I tell you something very beautiful: It is no longer me, it is Jesus himself who is looking at you, at this moment. He is looking at us. He knows you, he knows the heart of each one of you, he knows the life of each one of you. He knows your joys, he knows your sorrows, your successes, and your failures. He knows your hearts, and he says to you today, here, in Lisbon, at this World Youth Day, “Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Take heart, do not be afraid.”

(Compiled by Fr Joe Borg)

An antidote to spiritual worldliness, clericalism



MGR JOSEPH GALEA CURMI

the Church, as “the greatest danger for the Church – for us, who are the Church – the most perfidious temptation, the one that always resurfaces, insidiously, when the others are vanquished”.

Spiritual worldliness is a way of life that reduces spirituality to an appearance, leading people to exercise a role clothed in sacred form but empty of the true spirit. Francis says it happens when people allow themselves “to be fascinated by the seductions of the ephemeral, by mediocrity and habit, by the temptations of power and social influence... by vainglory and narcissism, by doctrinal intransigence and liturgical aestheticism, forms and ways in which worldliness hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, but in reality consists in seeking not the Lord’s glory but human glory and personal well-being.”

The pope focuses especially on clericalism, a specific form of this spiritual worldliness. Clericalism makes ministers feel superior to others, placed “above” and separated from the rest of God’s people. Francis quotes what a priest once wrote to him:



We are called to be servants of God’s People, washing our sisters’ and brothers’ feet. PHOTO: ARCHDIOCESE OF MALTA

“Clericalism is a symptom of a priestly and lay life tempted to live out the role and not the real bond with God and brethren.”

One assumes a “clerical spirit” by living one’s calling in an elitist way, wrapped up in one’s own group, erecting walls against the outside, developing possessive bonds regarding roles in the community, cultivating arrogant and boastful attitudes towards others. The symptoms are indeed the loss of the spirit of praise and joyful gratuitousness.

Pope Francis explains that the antidote to worldliness and to clericalism is to look at the crucified Jesus, who accepted humiliation to raise us up from our falls and to free us from the power of evil. In this way, looking at Jesus’s

wounds, at his humility, we learn that we are called to offer ourselves, to make ourselves broken bread for the hungry, to share the journey with the weary and oppressed. We are called to be servants of the People of God, and not masters, washing the feet of our sisters and brothers, and not trampling them underfoot.

May God purify us from spiritual worldliness and clericalism, and help us seek pastoral paths inspired by his Spirit, and move forward humbly in our ministry, with enthusiasm and courage.

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“Thank you for your witness and for your service. Thank you for the hidden good you do, and for the forgiveness and consolation that you bestow in God’s name... Thank you for your ministry, which is often carried out with great effort, with little recognition and is not always understood.” These are the words of Pope Francis in his letter to the priests of the diocese of Rome, published on August 5.

It is a striking message for all the People of God, but especially for those called to priestly ministry in the Church. Pope Francis tells priests he is journeying with them and is close to the joys and sorrows, the bitterness and consolations in their ministry.

He emphasises the need for all to strive against “spiritual worldliness”, defined by Henri de Lubac, in his book *Meditation on*