

Prayer is a commitment. If we are « practicing » but are unwilling to change our way of life, or if we prefer to be isolated « believers » who don't « practice » our faith, are we not ultimately making fun of religion?

Jesus risked his life, indeed gave his life for the multitude. Lent invites us to follow him, and if our path becomes often a way of the Cross, it remains an ascent towards Easter, towards full reconciliation with God, greater openness to our brothers and sisters and a deeper awareness of our human dignity and freedom. In our wasteful consumer society, aren't we sometimes « like dogs », oblivious to the immense suffering of the world's poor and, closer to home, so much injustice.

A HIDDEN CARING PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES

« **Have you seen wheat gone bad, my children?** » (They answered, « **No, Madame.** »)

« **But you (Maximin), my child, surely you must have seen some once, at Colin, with your father. The owner of the field told your father to go and see his spoiled wheat. And then you went, and you took two or three ears of wheat in your hands, you rubbed them together, and it all crumbled into dust. While you were on your way back and you were no more than a half hour away from Corps, your father gave you a piece of bread and said to you : « Here, my child, eat some bread while we still have it this year ; because I don't know who will eat any next year if the wheat keeps up like that. »**

(Maximin replied: « Oh, yes; now I remember. Just then I didn't remember it. »)

Mr Giraud, Maximin's father, was a wheelwright by trade, and had long felt no need of God. At the beginning, he did not wish to know anything about the boy's story of a Beautiful Lady. Then one day Maximin told him, « But papa, she spoke to me about you! » Mr. Giraud was overwhelmed. Through Mary's words, he discovered that God was watching over him as, in his fatherly dismay and concern, he had grieved at having no more bread to give his child. « Your heavenly Father knows all that you need » (Matt. 6:32).

What Mr. Giraud didn't realize was that his simple gesture echoed the words of Jesus himself: « Would one of you hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf...? » (Matt. 7:9).

If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children good things, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him » (Luke 11:13). Should we not respond, like Maximin, « That's true, Madame; I didn't remember »?

So this is what Mary came to tell us. Will we really take this « great news » to heart?

TO ALL HER PEOPLE

« **Well, my children, you will make this known to all my people.** »

The Beautiful Lady ends her message with a sending forth. Maximin and Mélanie fulfilled their role; today the « great news » is our responsibility. As Mary climbed a winding path up the mountain slope — a way of the Cross, a Path of Life — and just before she vanished in light, she repeated:

« **Very well, my children make this known to all my people.** »

☆☆☆☆☆☆

When the Beautiful Lady first appeared to the children, she was seated on a rock with her hands covering her face, crying. After the Last Supper her Son went to the garden of Gethsemane. When He arrived He withdrew from the Apostles, knelt near a rock and prayed. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground (Luke 22:39-46).

The beautiful Lady stood up and spoke to the children, giving them a message of warning and hope. Her Son hung from the cross and spoke seven times a message of forgiveness and reconciliation. The cross became a pulpit.

« Forgive them, Father... » (Luke 23:32-34).

« You will be with me in paradise... » (Luke 23:40).

« There is your Mother... » (John 19:25-27).

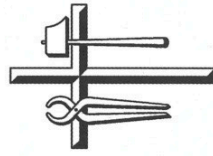
« My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? » (Matt. 27:45-46).

« I thirst » (John 19:28).

« Now it is finished » (John 19:30).

« Father, into your hands... » (Luke 23:44-46).

Finally the Beautiful Lady went up the hillside and rose a few feet from the ground, disappearing from them. As the Apostles looked on, Jesus was lifted up, and clouds took him from their sight (Acts 1:9).

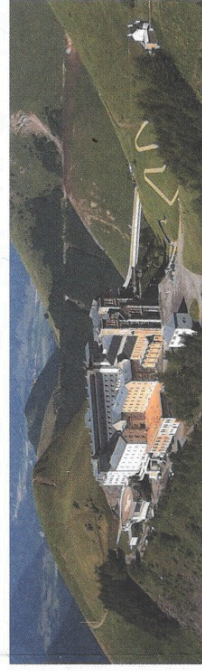


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La Salette



MESSAGE OF OUR LADY OF LA SALETTE



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EVENT

SEPTEMBER 19, 1846, a « **Beautiful Lady** » appeared to two children of Corps in the French Alps: Maxime Giraud, 11, and Mélanie Calvat, 14, who were watching their few cows on the slopes above the village of Salette, about 5,800 feet above sea level. She was a young girl, about 12 years old, and she rose and spoke to the children at some length, in French and in their dialect, repeating all the time. Then she climbed up a path and disappeared into light. The brightness of which she was surrounded emanated from a crucifix on her breast, surrounded by a hammer and pincers, chains, and roses.

September 19, 1851, after a thorough investigation of the event, the children, and the content of the message, Excellency Philibert de Bruillard, bishop of Grenoble, affirmed in a pastoral letter that « The apparition of Blessed Virgin to two shepherds on the mountain of Salette... bears within itself all the characteristics of a true apparition and that the faithful have grounds for believing it to be certain and beyond doubt. »

MESSAGE

EAT NEWS

Come closer, my children; don't be afraid. I am here to tell you great news. »

Let us come closer, without fear. Who speaks to us in God's name is a mother, a mother in tears. Let us listen to what she has to say, never troubling it may be. The great news is no more less than this: the Good News, the Gospel we have often.

SON, MY PEOPLE

My people refuse to submit, I will be forced to let go the Son. It is so strong and so heavy; I can no longer let it go. How long a time I have suffered for you! If I want to let you go, I am obliged to plead with him not to abandon you, I am obliged to plead with him not to abandon you, you pay no heed! However much I pray, however much you do, you will never be able to compensate the pains I have taken for you. »

Reconciler of sinners weeps over her people, because they refuse to submit to her Son, Jesus Christ, to whom God « has made all things subject » (1Cor. 15:28). « He has shown might with his arm; he has conquered the proud in their inmost thoughts » (Luke 1: 51). « Mary her maternal charity, Mary cares for the brethren of her Son who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties... » (Vatican II, Lumen Gentium 62). « The face of our rejection, all of Mary's efforts are in vain. »

But she invites those who are open to her complaints to join her and « fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the church » (Col. 1:24).

REBELLION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

« I gave you six days to work; I kept the seventh for myself, and no one will give it to me. This is what makes the arm of my Son so heavy. »

The seventh day is the day God rested after the creation (Gen. 2:1), the day for us to be refreshed (Ex. 23:12), the day when God liberates his people (Deut. 5:12). Surely we are not created just for the six days of production and consumption, never lifting our heads high? It is God who guarantees our freedom, calling us with the Risen Christ to a new Seventh Day, to become « children and heirs » (Rom. 8:16-17).

And then, those who drive the carts cannot swear without throwing in my Son's name. These are the two things that make the arm of my Son so heavy. »

Her Son's name is Jesus, which means « God saves » (Matt. 1:21). His name expresses the reality of his person and his role in the world; it is the only name « by which we are to be saved » (Acts 4:12). Still, we have to be willing to be saved. This is why Mary came. « We implore you in Christ's name: be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20). Does not our superficial piety make a mockery of that name? » « When they came among the nations, they served to profane my holy name » (Ez. 36:20). And let us never forget that to insult any human being is to insult Jesus Christ himself. « As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me » (Matt. 25:40).

YOU PAY NO HEED

If the harvest is ruined, it is only on account of yourselves I warned you last year with the potatoes. You paid no heed. Instead, when you found the potatoes spoiled, you swore, and threw in my Son's name. They are going to continue to spoil, and by Christmas this year there will be none left. »

(To this point the Beautiful Lady was speaking French. Seeing Mélanie about to ask Maximin what she meant, she used the local dialect for the rest of her discourse)

Don't you understand, my children? Let me find another way to say it. »

« If you have wheat, you must not sow it. Anything you sow the vermin will eat, and whatever does grow will fall into dust when you thresh it. »

A great famine is coming. »

« Before the famine comes, children under seven will be seized with trembling and die in the arms of the persons who hold them. »

« The rest will do penance through the famine. The walnuts will become worm-eaten; the grapes will rot. »

there was a severe shortage of potatoes in Corps by Christmas of 1846. In the following years, all of Europe was ravaged by an economic crisis, affecting food first and then finances and industry.

Blight struck wheat, grapes, and walnuts; infant mortality soared. In all this some contemporaries, notably those of this region, could read the « signs of the time » (see Luke 12:54-56). Today as yesterday, we see war, famine, the death of children — « and you take no heed ». Today as yesterday, the same challenge: nothing is more important than our coming back to Jesus Christ (see Luke 13:1-9). The « death of God » is, after all, the death of humanity. « Unless your faith is firm, you shall not be firm » (Is. 7:9). If there is no wheat, then there is no bread. If there are no grapes, there is no wine. Therefore there will be no host nor wine for the Eucharist.

(The Beautiful Lady here spoke privately to Maximin and then to Mélanie before pursuing her discourse).

IF THEY ARE CONVERTED

If they are converted, rocks and stones will turn into heaps of wheat, and potatoes will be self-sown in the fields. »

« This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Reform your lives and believe in the gospel » (Mark 1:15). The Old Testament had foretold his new-found harmony (see Is. 11), this abundance granted to those who « seek first God's Kingdom » (Matt. 6:33).

Do you say your prayers well, my children? »

(« Hardly ever, Madame », they answered candidly.)

Ah, my children, you should say them well, at night and in the morning, even if you say only an Our Father and a Hail Mary when you can't do better. When you can do better, say more. »

In the summer, only a few elderly women go to Mass. The rest work on Sundays all summer long. In the winter, when they don't know what to do, they go to Mass just to make fun of religion. »

In Lent, they go to the butcher shops like dogs. »

Daily prayer, weekly prayer, yearly prayer. The same question is asked of us today that Mary asked the children. Is our prayer really an open, constant dialogue with God? Do we really want to know and carry out God's will? Can the world see in us the face of a celebrating, praying Church, especially in our participation in the mystery of the Eucharist?