

FIRST MEDITACION: THE LAST PLACE.

1. Charles of Foucauld was a passionate searcher for God after his conversion at 28 years of age. At around 15 years of age he had lost the faith and had a very disorderly youth. He was expelled from the Jesuit school for bad behavior, later was expelled from the Army for not respecting the military rules. He wasted his money on wine, women and parties, studied little and wandered without a goal in life. This lifestyle left him a deep emptiness. He says it in a meditation several years later remembering this stage of his life: *“The bad that I did, I did not approve it, nor wanted it. It was a sadness that I have not experienced more than then. It returned every night when I was in my accommodation. I was dumb and overwhelmed during these so-called parties; I organized them, but, when the moment arrived I spend them in complete silence, loathing and disgust”*.¹
2. Tired of this emptiness he decided to undertake a very challenging and dangerous work: explore Morocco where no European had entered. He did it disguised as a Jew and accompanied by a rabbi. His final work was rewarded by the French Geographic Society. But more important than that was his rediscovery of the transcendence when observing the religious spirit of the Muslims. It is surprising that God availed of the faith of the Muslims to awake in Charles his search for the Christian God.
3. On his return to France and with the help of his cousin Marie of Bondy he explores the ways of the spirit and makes this prayer: *“My God, if you exist, make it known to me”*. With the help of a wise priest, Father Huvelin, he re-discovers the alive presence of God and awakes in him the wish to dedicate his whole life to him: *“As soon as I believed that there was a God, I understood that I could not do anything more than live for Him...”*.²
4. Charles begins to enter into the mystery of God and discovers something unthinkable: this immense God has become small and has a human face in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, his very beloved Son. He discovers the Mystery of the Incarnation that fascinates him and that changes his life forever. He expresses it with these words: *“The incarnation has its root in the goodness of God. But a thing appears firstly, so wonderful, brilliant and amazing that shines like an impressive sign: it is the infinite humility that encloses such a mystery. God, the Being, the Infinite, the Perfection, the Creator, the Omnipotent, Immense, Sovereign Lord of everything, becoming*


¹ Meditation written in Nazareth

² Letter of August of 1901.

man, united to a soul and to a human body and appearing on earth as a man, and the least of men”³.

5. Charles of Foucauld discovers what St. John already said: *“God loved the world so much he gave us his only Son so that all who believe in him do not die, but have eternal Life” (John 3,16)*. Our salvation has its origin in a gesture of love of the Father/Mother God who wants to give new life to all his sons and daughters, wounded by personal and social sin.
6. Now well, the way chosen by Christ to reveal this mystery of free love is the one that could better express it: the stripping of his glory and of his divine power to become one of us, as Saint Paul says it, quoting an ancient Christological hymn (Fil 2,6-11). Meditating on this mystery Brother Charles says: *“He went down with them and came to Nazareth: in all his life he did not do another thing that go down: go down in the incarnation, go down being a creature, go down obeying, go down being poor, abandoned, exiled, persecuted, pursued, executed, placing himself always in the last place”⁴*

Jesus chooses the way of the descent



7. This descent of Christ is the one which marks with fire the spirituality of brother Charles and gives him the key to reinterpret all the gospel and to reinvent permanently his lifestyle as a consecrated, as his way to announce the gospel. He had the grace to discover that the **Incarnation is not only a passing moment in the life of Jesus but the revelation of the way God acts in the world** and, for that reason has to influence the life and service of the Christian and of the Church. *“For me, to look always for the last of the last places, to be also small like my master, to be with him, follow him, step by step, as faithful servant, faithful disciple and – since he, in his infinite goodness, incomprehensible, deigns to speak like this- as faithful brother and faithful husband”⁵. “I cannot travel in first class when my Lord has travelled in third”.*
8. To follow this way of Jesus today has a greater impact than in other times, because it is clearly countercultural and it is therefore for that same reason that we his disciples it cost us so much to assume it, including us, the priests. The dominant neoliberal ideology today in our countries, overestimates and stimulates the social promotion, starting from individual success measured in accumulation of titles, of

3 Spiritual writings, page 49

4 Meditation on Lc. 2,50-51 written on 20 June 1916.

5 Spiritual writings, page 68

money, of material goods, power and prestige. In the current mentality, from of the world of the poor it is necessary to escape, never enter it voluntarily.

9. Charles of Foucauld understands that the search of God occurs in an increasingly faithful imitation of Jesus of Nazareth, whom he calls "Only Model". And Charles descends more and more. First he becomes a Trappist in France and afterwards in Syria (1890-1897), but does not feel happy and goes to Nazareth *"To become more like Jesus"*. There he becomes a servant and messenger of the poor Clares and lives in a cabin near his cloister, he remains there for four years and feels that the Lord asks him to carry the Gospel to those who do not know it and goes to Algeria, first in Beni-Abbés and afterwards in Tamanrasset, in the country of the tuaregs until his martyrdom on 1 December 1916.

10. These changes are not fruit of a wayward will, but of his sincere wish to follow Jesus radically and of his gradual discovery that the treasure of the faith is not only for him but to share it with those who do not have it. A strong missionary impulse awakes in him a desire to share Jesus among the most abandoned. Therefore, he accepts the priestly ordination and goes to the north of Africa as a diocesan missionary priest of the French diocese of Viviers. He is 43-year-old. It says in a letter: *"Now I do not have to carry this life of Nazareth in this Holy Land so loved. I have to go to the needed souls, to the most abandoned sheep. That divine banquet, of which I am now minister, is not to be present to the brothers, to the families, to the rich neighbors, but to the lame , to the blind , to the poorest, to the most abandoned souls, to those who do not have priests"*⁶.

11. Charles of Foucauld initiates the way to the geographic and existential peripheries as Pope Francis would say. He knows the Muslim world and knows that to speak openly of Jesus would not have any effect. On the contrary, it would be counterproductive. His way of evangelizing will be with his testimony of life and puts in mouth of Jesus these words: *"Your charge is to cry the gospel from the rooftops, not by your word, but by your life"*.

12. Among the Tuaregs he believes and practices the "Apostolate of goodness". He writes in his diary in 1909: *"My apostolate has to be the apostolate of goodness. Seeing me they have to say: 'Since this man is so good, his religion has to be good'. And if they ask me why I am so good and meek, I have to say: 'because I am the server of somebody who is better than I. If they only knew how good my Master Jesus is.... I would want to be so good so that it can be said: 'if the servant is like this what is his Master like?'"*

13. Our Fraternity tries to follow Jesus in Brother Charles' style. Therefore, there are so many brothers that in their parishes and dioceses they seek to serve the poorest, the most vulnerable, whether in the hospitals, in the prisons, in the

⁶ Letter to Fr. Caron

homes of elderly, in the most dilapidated neighborhoods and the most violent, in the places where the immigrants live, etc. I am a parish priest working in an old neighborhood of Santiago and listening to Pope Francis, I asked myself which are the peripheries of my parish? And I realized that in my parish sector there was a center of rehabilitation of drug addicts to whom I had not given importance. I approached it and for some years I go once week to converse with them and to confess those who wish to do so. I have to say that this apostolate feeds my faith and my priestly vocation like no other. I can see in these young men and no so young the transformative grace of God. The Paschal Mystery in action.

14. The renewal of our Church by Pope Francis goes in this line: be an outgoing church to the peripheries of this world, with the balm of mercy, to heal the wounds of so many that have remained at the side of the way. He says in the “*Evangelii Gaudium*”: *“An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in the people. Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. (EG 24).*

15. The Pope evangelizes everyone and gives us lessons of evangelization with his audacious gestures of closeness and tenderness towards patients, the poor, the imprisoned, the migrants, the fugitives, the refugees, the elderly, the divorced and, in general, all that suffer in any way. There is a great harmony between the intuitions of Charles of Foucauld and the theoretical and practical approaches of the Pope Francis⁷. As a Priestly Fraternity we feel very supported by him and with a call of God to collaborate actively in the missionary transformation of the Church that Francis promotes. I believe, therefore, that the apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” should be a key text for our renewal both at personal and pastoral level.

FOR PERSONAL PRAYER.

⁷ See, Javier Pinto, “Passionate for God and humanity: Pope Francis and the great intuitions of Charles of Foucauld”, to Presentation for the First Pan-American Assembly, Feb 2016.

Choose some of these exercises.

- Meditate The Christological hymn Phil 2,6-11
- Meditate The Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10, 29-37
- Ask myself: For Jesus and the Gospel, have I taken deprivation, to reach the poorest people, the more distant, more excluded?
- Do the testimonies of Brother Charles and Pope Francis, question my manner of being and evangelizing? What inspiration for my priestly ministry do both testimonies give me?
- How can I help my local fraternity JESUS CARITAS to enter into the dynamic of a Church reaching out to the geographic and existential peripheries?

"We may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards". (EG n. 195).

Pope Francis