

# Evocation of the life of Dom Godefroy

## Given by Fr M Bruno at the Wake on Thursday, August 10, 2023

Little Godefroy was born in the royal city of Versailles on September 18, 1970, in the home of Philippe and Christine Raguenet de St Albin. His father was a salesman and his mother (deceased in 2020) a homemaker. He had an older brother Thibaut, who would also die prematurely in 2011, and a younger sister Sybille who would become a Carmelite in Laval. We affectionately greet his father and his sister present tonight.

It was at the age of fifteen that he had his first encounter with monastic life. During the summer of 1985, he was hired to work in hospitality at the Abbey of Lérins on the island of St. Honorat, as were other young people of his age. This was his first contact with contemplative life. He discovered among other things the singing of psalms during liturgical services and above all visibly happy men.

“At 20, he joined the ranks of the French Navy. After two years of preparatory classes at the Naval High School of Brest, he took his first steps as a military sailor at the naval school, then on the helicopter carrier Jeanne d'Arc, aboard which he discovered the open sea, as far as Polynesia. He then joined the Marine Commandos. He first served with the Penfentenyo commando unit, based in Lorient. But being a "simple" marine commando was not enough for him and he decided to become a combat swimmer. After a demanding and selective training program, he joined the Hubert commando unit based in Saint Mandrier.

Nothing seemed to be able to touch him, let alone knock him down. Certainly not that rock that crushed two fingers of his left hand in Corsica on the occasion (already!) of a confrontation with the mountain. This accident occurred shortly before another year of selection and training in Lorient. Although physically diminished and despite the pain, he overcame the trials by the strength of his will and passed the tests to retain his commando qualifications, while pulling up his comrades who did not have the same abilities as him.

He was then assigned to the aircraft carrier Foch, aboard which he was deployed in mission in the Adriatic during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.”

(Testimony of his comrades).

In 2000, he was selected by the Navy to be an exchange officer among the elite commandos of the US Navy, the Navy-seals. It was during this trans-Atlantic experience that Godefroy would find himself, once again, faced with monastic life. In

the United States he frequented the Trappist Abbey of Spencer in Massachusetts. It was there that a brother of the community put in his hands the book of the then Abbot General, Dom Bernardo, entitled "How far to follow?" which presented the martyred brothers of Tibhirine. Deeply marked by their community witness and by the fruitfulness of their lives given over, a long companionship began with those he called "the seven". He was still in the United States when he learned of an attempt to refound the Tibhirine monastery. Five brothers from different monasteries were living in Algiers to prepare for this return of the monks. Godefroy decided to be part of the adventure. But he had first to undergo initial monastic formation. To do this he chose to enter the Abbey of Aiguebelle, motherhouse of Tibhirine, to complete the novitiate there. Six months after its entry, the announcement was made that the Tibhirine refoundation project had been abandoned. He therefore continued his formation to be a monk of Aiguebelle but without ceasing to consider "somewhere else". His monastic journey was thus rendered chaotic and sometimes painful...

On September 8, 2003, the feast of the Nativity of Mary, he made his Temporary Profession. Solemn Profession followed on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 2007. He spent five years of study in Paris, where he stayed with the Benedictines of the Abbey of St. Mary of Paris as a student of theology at the Catholic Institute. In July to August 2009, he boarded with the Dominicans in Cairo, to study literary Arabic and Arab culture at the Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies.

He was ordained a priest on October 1, 2011, by Msgr. Vincent Landel, then Archbishop of Rabat in Morocco. This is a country he went to several times to stay with the community of Midelt, which extends the community of Tibhirine and where the two survivors of the 1996 tragedy still lived: Fr. Amédée and Fr. Jean-Pierre.

In 2013, he stayed from May to July at the Monastery of Kasanza, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to help with the formation of the brothers, by giving courses in philosophy, English, Islam, and through homilies, manual work, and presence to the brothers.

In 2014, he met a former novice from the monastery of Mar Moussa, north of Damascus in Syria, refounded by the Jesuit Fr. Dall'Oglio who had been missing since 2013. Twice he asked to be able to join this ecumenical community in dialogue with Islam. Both times his community refused. At the end of the same year, he was asked to be chaplain of the small community of our Trappistine sisters of Azeir in Syria, on the border with Lebanon. He accepted and this time his community let him go. He arrived there on February 2, 2015, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. At his arrival, the area where the monastery is located was relatively peaceful, even though

the war remained close and the insecurity palpable. He would remain three and a half years in the service of our sisters, thus realizing what he had desired: to be, as he put it, "a little grain of prayer in a tide of suffering" and to live in dialogue with Islam. He left Syria on May 10, 2018, Ascension Day.

Before returning to Aiguebelle, he asked to take time in another community: that of our brothers of Hauterive of the Order of Cîteaux, in Switzerland. He would use the months he spent there for personal reconstruction work. But above all he would taste in that community a way of living the Cistercian life closer to his aspirations, where fraternal life is the condition for an authentic quest for God that brings us into the dynamism of relationships among the three Persons of the Trinity. He remained very attached to this community, which happens to be the blood sister of Acey, daughter of the same motherhouse, Cherlieu.

In 2019, our community of Acey was at a turning point in its life with the resignation of its abbot, Dom Jean-Marc, on account of age. Charged with finding us a superior, Dom Georges, superior of our motherhouse of Aiguebelle, thought of Fr. Godefroy, who had just returned to his community. The latter accepted and was installed as *superior ad nutum* on January 24, 2020. He would be elected abbot a little over a year later, on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 2021, and receive the Abbatial Blessing from the hands of Msgr. Jean-Luc Garin, our bishop, on September 17 of the same year, the solemnity of the Dedication of our church.

His youth, his temperament, and his many human and spiritual assets brought new life to our community. Right away, he would make his pastoral mark, summed up in Psalm 133: "How good it is, how beautiful it is for brothers to live together!" Among other initiatives, he would put in place Bible sharing groups, a chapter for asking pardon, and a collegial exercise of the function of cellarer.

A go-getter, he had the makings of a leader, sometimes at the cost of a certain strictness and at the risk of not realizing that the troop is struggling to keep up. However, he knew how to be very attentive and considerate with brothers in difficulty, with the sick, and with our elders. A man of ardent faith and strong fervor, familiar with the Scriptures, ready with the word and with the pen, he took his role as teacher to heart: the daily chapter where he excelled in making connections between the Rule and the Mass readings of the day, homilies whose consistent length (15 minutes!) became legendary!

On his arrival, he found our electrolysis workshop in a situation of great tension internally and with the community. Patiently, emphasizing the unity of all the staff, he

contributed to restoring a climate of trust and to re-establish links between the monks and the workshop.

He conscientiously fulfilled his role as Father Immediate. It is under his abbacy that our offspring grew from two to four daughter houses of nuns. He had a predilection for the most fragile of them, the monastery of Géronde in Switzerland. He also fulfilled missions entrusted to him by the Order (recently a regular visitation to one of our English monasteries).

Last Thursday's accident during a mountain hike in Switzerland, while he was taking a well-deserved rest period, put a premature end to his abbacy, leaving us orphans and in great disarray. But we are sure, through faith in the Risen One, that where he is, he will not abandon us. And as Mother Catherine of Géronde expressed it to us: "Thanksgiving for the gift that God gave us in Dom Godefroy exceeds the pain".

Dom Godefroy had a bone to pick with the mountain. Let us not hold a grudge against her. I will end with these two verses of an Italian song sent by Mother Maria Francesca of Valserena:

God of the sky, Lord of the peaks,  
you asked for our friend in the mountains,  
but we pray to you  
up to Heaven, up to Heaven,  
let him come to your mountains.

Saint Mary, Lady of the snow,  
cover with your soft white mantle  
Our friend, our brother,  
Up to Heaven, up to Heaven,  
Let him depart for your mountains.