

Homily on the occasion of DOM GODEFROY RAGUENET's funeral.
ABBAY N.D. D'ACEY (Dt. 4:32-40; Mt. 16:24-28)
(readings of the day)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The words of Jesus that we hear today in the Gospel are hard and difficult. They remind us of the "hard and contrary things" that Saint Benedict evokes in the fourth degree of humility (RB 7, 35), and by which we gain access to God (RB 58, 8). Dom Godefroy's unexpected death was both hard and contrary. We all try to understand, after this unfortunate fall and its fatal outcome, asking ourselves: what is the meaning of this? Why all this? What does God have to say to us through such a hard and disturbing death?

For Dom Godefroy, the hard and contrary fate of the Tibhirine brothers was "the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire" (Dt. 4:33), where God had spoken to him in person to give the breath of his life as an offering. He heard and responded to this call in his desire to "be a man of prayer among men of prayer". But God had other plans. He was called here, in this place, to serve his brothers, to be their father and build a community. "I seek my brothers" (Gen. 37:16) was the motto of his abbatial service, as a concrete sign of the offering of his breath of life.

On the morning of his departure for Switzerland - to enjoy a well-deserved rest - Dom Godefroy had sent a long article to Madame Marie-Dominique Minassian. In it, he spoke of the process of discernment in the Tibhirine community and its significance for today.

(https://projects.unifr.ch/tibhirine/fr/assets/public/files/AcademicPress_T3_SeminaireUNIFR-2023_FrGodefroy.pdf)

Unwittingly, Dom Godefroy turned it into a kind of spiritual testament. The previous week, he, and Mother Martha d'Acque Salvie had completed an extremely complex Regular Visitation of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey in England. There, he had put into practice precisely that concept of discernment he mentioned in his article. Not consciously, but because this way of thinking - in other words, this "grace of our Tibhirine brothers" - had taken root in him. This may help us today to discern the essence of this hard and contrary death, so that we can hear what the Lord has to say to us through Dom Godefroy's passing. The Tibhirine community had taught him that good discernment is characterized by threefold listening: listening to the Word, listening to the brothers, listening to the circumstances. Let's try to do the same today, to discover that this death too "is included in the gift", as Father Christian de Chergé put it.

Listening to this Word, today we learn the mysterious words of Jesus: "*Amen, I say to you, some of those who are here will not know death until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.* (Mt. 16:28)". Is He talking about the coming of Christ and His imminent expectation, as experienced by the first Christians? Is He talking about His Transfiguration, as described by the evangelist in the following chapter? Or is it the third coming, the intermediate coming, as evoked by Saint Bernard, when the Lord deigns to visit us in our "interim" at unexpected moments? (Adv. V, 1-3)

Listening to this Word, as illuminated by the light of the Cistercian charism, we can feel an immense sense of consolation. We are allowed to believe that, even before his death, Dom Godefroy saw and experienced the Glory of the Son of Man. Taking up his cross, denying himself, prepares us to experience, here and now, *"the royal power of the Son of Man"*. And this royal power is none other than that of the Servant. For Jesus *"did not come to be served, but to serve"* (Mt 20:28). We dare to believe that the benevolent hands of the Good Samaritan lifted up Godefroy to care for him and give him a taste of heavenly hospitality. Listening to this Word helps us to soften this hard and unpleasant death; it opens the door to Faith. Faith that assures us that when we fall, we fall into the hands of our sweet Lord.

Let's also listen to the Acey brothers. The abrupt and incongruous death of their father affects this community in its concrete everyday life. It also affects our Order; it affects its friends and family. Dom Godefroy's motto "I seek my brothers" shines through his death. It's hard and incongruous that he should have died without the physical presence of his brothers. But this fraternal bond is always present, as we pray unceasingly for our absent brothers. Despite his solitude, a monk always dies in the midst of his brothers. This attitude of openness towards the brothers helps to soften the hard, unpleasant side of the death. It opens the door to Trust, the Trust that all of us, when we fall, fall into the hands of the Lord.

Now let us listen to the circumstances. Dom Godefroy's monastic life was characterized by the testimony of the Tibhirine brothers. They died in the mountains, according to some, executed by the brothers of the mountain, and according to others, by the brothers of the plain. It is the mountain that links Dom Godefroy's death to that of the Tibhirine brothers. But what unites them even more strongly than the location of this incongruous and painful death, is the gift of their lives in solitude, following in the footsteps of their Master Jesus. *"He who loses his life for My sake will keep it"* (Mt 16:25). Listening to the circumstances, we can be comforted here too by learning Jesus' Word: *"Truly, I say to you, some of those who are here will not die until they see the Son of Man coming as king"* (Matt. 16:28). This is the hope that, when we fall, we fall into God's benevolent hands.

Listening to the Word, listening to the brothers, listening to the circumstances, we try to discern that this death is not only hard and incongruous, but that, through it, springs the fire in which the Lord speaks to us, that, through it, arises the experience of the royal power of the Son of Man. In this way, we will be able to discover the fullness of Faith, Trust and Hope, for Dom Godefroy, but also for ourselves: when we fall, we fall into the hands of God.

Around Christmas 1992, the Tibhirine brothers wrote: *"Trust is the gift of God that we must ask for in these dark times. Trust is the immeasurable name that Love takes in this world when Faith and Hope unite to give it birth"*.

Let us pray that this divine gift of Trust may be fully bestowed on Dom Godefroy, and also here on each and every one of us. My dear brothers of the Acey Community, you have lost your father, in a hard and incongruous way, but I add: don't lose Trust! May Faith and Hope be united in Trust in God and in each of your brothers.

August 11, 2023
Dom Bernardus Peeters
Abbot General OCSO