

NORRABY

Eucharist celebrating the 50th anniversary of foundation

March 21, 2017

There is a great silence in Norraby. It is a friendly silence – not hostile; it does not put you on guard, but rather invites you to abandon yourself and to let go of everything superfluous.

If you look around Norraby, there are large empty spaces, far away from any house. In Norraby there is only earth and sky, daylight and night. A sign that is readily seen from the room where I am staying assures me: this is not a paper town. The place is real, a tiny dot on the map of the world.

Someone has lived here for fifty years. I do not know the details of the foundation's history; histories, in general, are complicated and unsettled. But today, I am here for the first time, and a thought comes to mind that a drop of ink with which God writes the history of salvation has fallen on this lost piece of land and has made it fertile, has changed it into a space of life of men, of believers, sons in relation to the Father, brothers in relation to each other.

I know that in today's world it may seem strange, but this silence does not transmit a sensation of isolation. On the contrary: it transmits a feeling of relationship – even more, of a network of relationships that are very precious and delicate, so radical and intense that they require caution, respect, and I dare say, the reverence due to the sacred.

I call to mind the experience of Elijah on Horeb: God is not in blinding, thunderous manifestations. His presence allows itself to be felt in the “voice of subtle silence,” according to the original biblical text. Sensing it, Elijah covers his face with his mantle: a gesture of submission before the living God and of obedience to his will. The famous mantle of Elijah that will be taken up by Elisha, and thereby, by religious life, is, at the same time, that which covers us and hides us from the world and places us in the presence of the living God: “As the Lord lives, the God of Israel, in whose sight I stand.”

The silence of Norraby does not hush: it has a voice that speaks of something that is at once so large and so small that we cannot see it. It is the voice of the mystery in which we live and which lives in us. Staying here means, I think, being faithful witnesses to a dimension which escapes us, a liberty the world does not know.

What I am saying may seem too elevated, too spiritual, too mystical. But the Teresian Carmel is not elitist; it is not a club for the happy few to whom it is given to live in heights that are unreachable for the mass of the faithful. The Carmel of Teresa and John, Thérèse of the Child Jesus and Edith Stein and our other role models, is made up of the poor who have experienced the mercy of God.

Only in that way can we remain before the Living One “in a contrite heart and humble spirit,” as Azariah says in the first reading we just heard (*Dan 3,25.34-43*).

Being here, in Norraby, in the silence and vast solitude of this Carmel, has, in reality, a meaning and a goal, toward which the entire Church and all men tend: learning to love. Today’s Gospel tells us how to love (*Mt 18,21-35*). It is the love of one who forgives – not once, not seven times – but forgives countless times. When one loses count, it is a sign that we have forgotten ourselves and only remember him who loved us first and continues loving us without measure, without reserve, without asking for anything in return. Original sin is learning how to count: salvation is forgetting to count.

Dear brothers of Norraby. This is my wish on celebrating the fiftieth year of your community: that you forget to count your acts of love and reconciliation. I wish that you also would lose count of the years of life of this foundation, because they are too many to remember, but also, above all, because you would be too innovative and filled with love that you will not make us look to the past, but rather to tend to the future with hope.