

CROSS OR JOY ?

March 1948 editorial

(3 months after the promulgation of the Charter)

Your generation has rediscovered some essential values. Words that constantly occur in conversation and writings bear witness to this: human qualities, joy, love, harmony, 'being down to earth', blooming, etc... You care about these values, for yourselves first of all, and also for the non-believers around you. You hope that they will be won over by them and that, as a consequence, you will obtain – if not their conversion – at least their appreciation of Christianity. I don't doubt that these values that we are talking about are authentically Christian; but our contemporaries' jealous, touchy and exclusive attachment to them seems suspect to me. Do they not hide a rejection of other, no less authentic, Christian values: renunciation, mortification, penance, the cross?

In a report of an enquiry on Christians' aspirations today, I read: *"In what God-made-man has done, modern saints will see - less his poverty and self-abasement - than the human values of this God-incarnated man blessed with an admirable mother, very loving friends, and gifted with intelligence, power, physical beauty and moral high standards placed at the service of God. Tomorrow's saints will be less like penitents and more like kings of creation"*. You will agree that these words seem to reveal a certain ignorance of the cross. Perhaps you will say that they represent only their author's views and that I should not generalise. But is this so? Would not many people subscribe to them?

Surely, we must not forget Christ's words: *"If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me"* (Lk 9: 23), nor these words of St Paul: *"While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, here are we preaching a crucified Christ: to the Jews an obstacle that they cannot get over, to the pagans madness..."* (1 Cor 1: 22-23).

Christian harmony is expressed by St Paul's twin terms: Death-Resurrection. As soon as we eliminate or underestimate one of these two terms, we distort Christian spirituality.

You are absolutely right in wanting to present to non-believers the joyful and strong image of love and faith. But then, do not forget that the Passion precedes the Resurrection, that joy is the fruit of the Cross. *"Anyone who does not take up his cross every day"* means anyone who does not mortify unrelentingly his ever-recurring selfishness, who does not welcome big or small sufferings as agents of purification, will never present the image of a radiant love, of an attractive religion.

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