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FERIA V IN OCTAVA PASCHÆ

THURSDAY IN THE EASTER OCTAVE

SOLEMN PROFESSION

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, April 24th, 2025)

Si credis ex toto corde.

If thou believest with all thy heart.

(Acts 8:37)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,
and most especially you, who are going
to take your solemn vows of religion,

GOD NEVER RENOUNCES anything when what is at stake is the salvation of souls. The Paschal mystery, which we commemorate more especially during this octave, but also every Sunday, bears witness to that fact. As to man, he can renounce everything and answer the Lord's calling:

Go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me.^a

a. Mt 19:21.

For centuries, monastic life has offered to the world the witness of a radical gift, through the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

But every man, each one according to his own vocation, is called to follow this path, to renounce himself to make the choice of God, and perform heroic actions, such as this Ethiopian eunuch, a high officer of the queen of Ethiopia

in charge of all her treasures. He had undertaken a long journey, at a time when aircraft didn't exist, and had come to Jerusalem merely to worship. This man performed conscientiously his stewardship, and yet, he wasn't enslaved by this earth's ephemeral goods, by its treasures which are valuable only insofar as they can be given. He was convinced that beyond all treasures, there was one fairer treasure, the one and single true treasure, God.

Here is this man, sitting on his chariot as he goes back to his country with a rejoicing heart. This stay in Jerusalem near the Temple of God has kindled in his heart a desire to deepen his knowledge of God, especially by reading the Scriptures. What a remarkable testimony of faith this man gives, who takes his faith seriously and is consistent with himself by nourishing his desire of adoration. As a good monk, our Ethiopian carries out his *lectio divina* by reading a scroll of the Prophet Isaiah.

These lines had been written five centuries before. They concern Jesus, His death and resurrection, but remain obscure for him. There were such for Jesus' contemporaries, too, and remain obscure today for those who are still expecting the coming of the Messiah.

He was led as a sheep to the slaughter: and like a lamb without voice before his shearer, so openeth he not his mouth. In humility his judgment was taken away. His generation who shall declare? For his life shall be taken from the earth.^b

b. Acts 8:32-33.

God, Who knows men's intimate intentions, had mercy on this Ethiopian man, and invited Philip to join him:

Arise, go towards the south, to the way that goeth down from Jerusalem into Gaza: this is desert.^c

c. v. 26.

What is the point of sending Philip on a road, while specifying that it is desert... The request is strange. Philip is obedient. From now on, it is no longer an angel who addresses him, but the Spirit. He who is faithful in little things, will be entrusted with great ones. As he hears Isaiah's words, Philip risks a question: "Do you understand what you are reading?"^d The humility and simplicity of the answer are admirable. They reveal a disciple's heart, a heart that listens,

d. v. 30.

dear to St. Benedict: “How can I, unless some one guides me?”^e After inviting Philip to come up and sit with him, the Ethiopian puts his scroll down and receives the Good News of Jesus.

e. v. 31.

After their talk, as he sees some water, he dare ask: “See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?”^f He who had come to Jerusalem to worship, pursues his journey as a disciple of Christ, adoring in his heart in spirit and in truth.

f. v. 36.

Like this high officer, you have years ago undertaken a long journey to come and stay near Our Lady, in this Fontgombault monastery. Unlike the Ethiopian, as you pronounce your vow of stability, you make manifest your desire to remain here during your whole life, so as to pursue here your search of God, in the school of St. Benedict.

In a few moments, you are going to tell the Lord: *Suscipe me, Domine...* “Receive me, O Lord.” Allow me a question: will these words be a final point, or a starting point?

If you consider God’s call in your native soil of Poland, where you were raised in a Christian family, surrounded by friends with a strong faith, if you remember the first years of your monastic life, you will answer me that the words you pronounce today are the culmination of a path, of a discerning you made freely before God. This is true. It was true of our Ethiopian setting out on the road to Jerusalem.

Yet, this path is not completed, and you are well aware that a monk doesn’t enter the monastery because he is a saint, but because he is keenly aware that this place provides, and will keep providing, him with means to become a saint. The path you have made belongs to you. The path you still have to tread doesn’t belong to you, at least not yet. It is still hidden in the secret of God, and it will behove you to make it yours, day after day, following God’s steps.

In chapter 4 of his Rule, St. Benedict gives you instruments to walk on this road. Assuredly, the most essential, as well as the most unexpected, of them is the last one: “Never despair of God’s mercy.”

If a monk should never despair of God’s mercy, it’s because it behoves him ceaselessly to beg for mercy, both for himself and for the world. This path invites him, more than

any other, to be a pilgrim of hope, for, as Fr. Labourdette said in a paradoxical way:

In the regimen of faith under which we are living, isn't the most appealing "certainty" to entrust oneself into the hands of God?¹

Such is the meaning of your *Suscipe*. Receive me, O, Lord, and I shall live, entrusted to your mercy, and always proclaiming it to my brothers. The collect of today's Mass, for that matter, seems to be providential, since monastic profession has always been equated with a new baptism:

O God, Who hast united divers nations in confessing to Thy name: grant that all who are born again in the font of baptism may be one by faith in their minds and by love in their good deeds.

Like the eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia, go forward on the roads of monastic life, sitting on your chariot and pondering God's mysteries. But remember the lesson. May there always be on your chariot a seat to receive the word of your brothers, a seat to live fraternal charity, a seat for God.

Amen.



1. M. LABOURDETTE, « Problèmes d'eschatologie », in *Revue Thomiste*, 1954, p. 664.