

The Letter to Anne de Guigné's Friends

Anne and sacrifice : what is the teaching for us ?

In the light of Lent and Easter, it is good to ask ourselves what place the cross has in Anne's life and in ours.

The cross, the sacrifice of Jesus, reveals to us that each person, equally, is loved and that each person has a mission. One can say this in a different way, in more homely terms, which bring us nearer to Anne's vocabulary: to be and to become a child is to recognize that one has an origin; that one belongs to a fraternity, that one must live and transmit a heritage to others from whom one receives or shares life.

Being a son or a daughter, is also becoming a brother or sister. Filiation indicates our origin; fraternity indicates our vocation. The aim of parents, in a sense, is to be able to call their child "brother or sister". The day that my child, my son, my daughter, is my equal, with whom I can converse, with whom I can put myself in question, with whom I advance along the way, my education has reached its goal. I shall, of course, remain for him the person who gave him life and helped him grow up, and he shall be for me the person who will look after me later on. For the aim of filiation, is indeed the fraternity to which we have access, only by recognizing a common origin. There we find abundant opportunities for sacrifice.

What I have just said, does not apply only to families, but is a law for all humanity. The family is the first place in which I discover that I have an origin and that I am called to live in a brotherly way; that all authority has the common good as an aim and that the common good can only exist if there is a loving and wise authority.

Anne lost her father in 1915 in the war. She endured this death painfully, and then thought deeply about it and this meditation is not without consequence in her understanding of sacrifice. The country, the nation, whatever one wants to call it, France, Europe also, are places of filiation and fraternity. The heritage of a language, a territory, a culture is a call to build fraternity at the price of sacrifices. Each human being, even as a child, lives, not only, thanks to his family, but also

to his nation and the whole human race. He learns about sacrifice, which is the way to grow and become son and daughter, brother and sister.

I am trying to reach a definition of sacrifice, inspired by Anne's example. Since we believe that Anne prays for us and teaches us, she must surely teach us what a healthy and holy sacrifice is. Sacrifice is to be able to recognize that personal well-being should open out to a greater common well-being. One does not sacrifice something if not to obtain something better, for to sacrifice is not to destroy but to transfigure. To sacrifice oneself is to be a good alchemist and to make gold out of lead. One cannot omit to teach sacrifice to children, because one must orientate the things they possess towards greater things that they do not yet possess. If we do not do this, when they will be of an age to possess things – money, work, sexuality etc. – and to be autonomous, they will use them for their own private use and not for the common good. A civilization which does not educate its children to the sense of sacrifice, no longer educates at all. This statement merits discussion, but we must think deeply about it before disagreeing!

I believe that we must all venerate what this child wished to carry out in her life. She assumed it, she accomplished it, she lived it, and by going towards her, by moving close to her, by letting her teach us, we are grateful to what this small child was trying to accomplish in response to what enabled her to “grow in age and in grace” like Jesus “in the sight of God and of mankind”.

Antoine Guggenheim