
BIG SIGNS OF LOVE IN OUR LIVES (2)



We have already come to the end of the 2003-2004 pastoral year, as well as to the last chapter of the Second Level of the family- and parish-based religious education programme. It was a great joy for me to review this programme so rich in lessons on friendship with Jesus. However, we should not leave without expressing our gratitude to the parents, catechists, and pastors who are there to help our children along the road of their faith development. Let us welcome together the big signs of love which Jesus gives us, to show his love: baptism and reconciliation which we reflected on last week, and confirmation and Holy Eucharist, which are our subjects of our reflection this week.

THE BREATH OF JESUS

In the beautiful sacrament of baptism, God our Father called each one of us by name and made us his friend and child. He wants to continue to pamper us! He wants to continue to work wonders by giving us the Breath of Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus with his seven gifts which are filled with life and power: it is the great sacrament of confirmation, another big sign of God's love which Jesus gives us. The more we get to know the Spirit of Jesus, the more we shall be grateful for all that is taking place among us, as the Church teaches us so well: "On the morning of the first day, the Spirit hovered above the waters and brought forth life: may he rouse us to praise, for his service! At the dawn of salvation, the Spirit formed the Messiah in Mary's womb: may he form in us a spirit of availability, for the sake of the Kingdom! On the day of Pentecost the Spirit spoke through the apostles: may he give us, too, his saving words! At the beginning of each day the Spirit is still at work in each one of us: may he be in our prayers and make our work fruitful!" And the liturgy addresses a beautiful prayer to the Father, for him to send us the Spirit. "Lord, you give to those who love you the riches of the Holy Spirit, and you develop in them your own life by giving them a share in the body of your Son. Help them be in the world children of God called to freedom, and may they respond with holiness of life to the prophetic mission of the Church," We are not surprised to hear the friends of Jesus pray for the Breath of the Spirit: "Come, Spirit of God, Spirit of life, transform my heart into a joyful flame. Come like the welcome breeze, like a friend, to help me witness to our faith."

SOMEONE TO KNOW

In our diocese most of the young francophones receive this sacrament around the age of twelve or thirteen, and the anglophones usually receive it around grade ten. However, the sacrament should be celebrated before the sacrament of forgiveness, and even before the first Eucharist. It is the second of the three sacraments of Christian initiation, the first being baptism and the third being the Holy Eucharist. There are reasons to explain why confirmation was given either earlier or later. When the bishop visited parishes only every three years, ages could vary. In some dioceses confirmation is given in grade two, while in other dioceses the sacrament is given only to adults. In our region parents, pastors, and catechists have been consulted and they are satisfied with actual psychological, spiritual, and pastoral possibilities. We can say that the friend of Jesus who has received the three sacraments of initiation is henceforth an adult in the faith; however, it is essential for this friend to learn more and more about this Good News that Jesus brings. The Word of God must be part of every sacramental celebration.

A MEAL THAT STARTS IN A FUNNY WAY

One of Jesus' closest friends, who always stood close to his Master, described Jesus' last meal, a meal that must have looked like the meal at the great Passover, but which took on a whole new meaning! This friend of Jesus, John, writes: "Before the feast of Passover, Jesus realized that the hour had come for him to pass from his world to the Father. He had loved his own in this world, and would show his love for them to the end"

(Jn. 13:1). What love! What friendship! And it was in this loving atmosphere that Jesus performed acts which would challenge people everywhere to the end of time. He got up from table and took off his cloak. He poured water into a basin and started to wash his disciples' feet and dry them with a towel he had around him... We can understand why Peter objected and refused to have his feet washed. "You shall never wash my feet!" Peter said. Jesus answered: " If I do not wash you, you will have no share in my heritage." Then Peter hastened to answer: "Lord, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." After he had finished, Jesus asked: "Do you understand what I just did for you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and fittingly enough, for that is what I am. But if I washed your feet – then you must wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13:12-13). Saint John doesn't describe how Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the meal: this is recorded in the Gospels of Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke and by the Apostle Paul. As for Saint John, he writes about the great prayer and the parting words of Jesus.

A TRADITION OF COVENANT AND OF LIFE

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul writes: "The Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said: 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup, saying: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me' Every time, that you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes!" (1 Cor. 11:23-26). It is in all simplicity that Saint Paul has passed on to us this great sign of Jesus' love not only for all his friends, but for all humankind. In this incredible gesture, Jesus tells each and everyone of us that he lays down his life for us so that, through the power of the Spirit, we be united to one another and in this way enter more closely into union with his Father. There is really cause for us to proclaim the great mystery of faith! We could never have imagined how far the friendship of Jesus could lead. Shown to us in different ways through all the wonderful creation he has given us, his friendship becomes ever stronger every day. Just as he did with the Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, through his sacraments Jesus continues to give us these wonderful signs of love and to tell us of God's eternal friendship, because *His love is truly from age to age!*

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