



From A Bishop's Journal (720)

“He shall wipe every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 21:4)

As we near the month of November and our trees have shed their leaves and our gardens have all been stripped of their multi-coloured hues, we are left with a certain feeling of nostalgia: people who were very close to us have left for other places, some with the speed of a tornado, and others as slowly as the leaves that resist falling to the very last.

The Festival of Leaves

Father Benoît Lacroix, a Dominican “nonagenarian,” co-authored a book with Marguerite Lescop, on “The Old Ones,” “troubadour[s] of the word, poet[s] of the old words from back home... of our seasons, our wisdom, and our most beautiful childhood dreams,” as he had already written in *Célébration des saisons* [Celebration of the Seasons]. “Today, for you and with you, the feast of autumn is announced to every branch and every leaf, to all the birds and all the countries north and south, east and west. Why this festival of leaves? They were red and vibrant, and now they are dead and soiled... It seems like autumn finds pleasure in multiplying contradictions. In the first place, a soft and pacifying light, softly wonderful days, warm colours. There is no end to the leaves dressing in their finest attire. A forest of fairies and dreams! As if it were important that the light and the wooded spaces, that the clouds and the sun vie with one another for the most beautiful sight, before leading us elsewhere. And then, a gust of wind, a crazy shower, and all the leaves fall off. The trees are empty, the days grow shorter, the clouds drag themselves through the fog. And empty nests appear.”

Autumn! Autumn!

Father Benoît continues: “Autumn! A pilgrimage of leaves moving through the air, moving through space. Gifts and offerings for the purification of further landscapes. Among the leaves, the most beautiful are often the first to go. Autumn! A season we would like to halt and relish to the very last drop of sun on the last leaf of the maple tree... Like a garden we would like to dwell in forever, but that will nonetheless quickly shed its colours... Like someone we would like to hold back, but who must go... Autumn itself symbolises life, true life with its overwhelming emotions and its sudden stripping off. The full house that all of a sudden turns empty: the company is gone. Absence after presence. Silence, after speech. It takes so little for everything to lose its freshness and turn into sadness and abandonment. It seems that every life, every happiness must, like autumn, go through periods of contrasts. It is already a way of living and loving, to accept that this be so: whoever

accepts to be periodically fulfilled and purified, exalted and anxious, can become wise, a realist, and peaceful. Autumn speaks of the ambiguousness of beings and things. It mixes the morning's brightness with the evening's gloom, the red and the black, abundance and emptiness. Autumn is like us. We learn the humility of difficult passages and of painful breakups. The autumn that strips trees bare and devastates gardens attacks man in his instinct of ownership. One day I possess, but then another day dispossesses me. You are not owners, autumn says. And without this beneficial reminder, winter would drag us down. Our houses, our trees, our ego, our children, our friends, none of these would be ours. Wanting to hold them back is to impoverish the universe. Learning to love them on their way through is to live and let them live."

Personalised Leaves

Thank you, Father Benoît, for showing us autumn in this light. I do not think that I shall ever again see the fall only in its aspect of nostalgia and stripping off. As poet-songwriter Félix Leclerc puts it, "Death is full of life." And each leaf that falls or flies away carries with it the name of someone or of an event that has fulfilled me, and who now will lead me to the heights or the depths. "If the grain of wheat does not fall and die, it cannot bear any fruit..." The same can be said of all those we hear about on the radio "death notices" or whose death we read about in the newspaper. At every eucharistic celebration I can remember them and those who were close to them, but I want to remember what they have become since leaving for the Lord: they have stepped over the limits of time and space; however, they are now more present to me than before. I meditate the liturgical prayer that reminds me that in the mystery of the risen Christ, each and everyone of us is already risen from the dead. We hold from the Father of life our growth and our being. Eternal life is already there, in the day-to-day existence we receive from his goodness. "We have received the first gifts of the Spirit through whom you raised Jesus from the dead, and we live in hope that the mystery of faith be accomplished in us."

The Day Will Soon Rise

Father Lucien Deiss, who passed away October 10 of this year, left us a song which is always good to hear, in times of trial: "The Day will soon rise, and light will shine in your night; the Day will soon rise, and love shall sing in your heart. It is the Day of the Lord, it is the Day of his joy, and on earth, the peace of heaven. Sorrow will soon end, and the wound in your heart will heal; the Lord will take you in his arms: no more death, no more sobbing, no more pain or cries; the old world has passed away. Your reign will soon come; your love will appear in our lives, soon your reign will come, the sun of your Christ shall shine; on this eternal Day, gathered together in your heaven, we shall see you face to face. Soon, O Lord, your Day shall come. Soon, Lord Jesus!"

New Heaven, New Earth

Along with Father Benoît, poet Félix Leclerc sings: "The wheat is ripe and the soil is damp, the plowed earth sleeps under the frost; yesterday's beautiful bird has flown away, and the gate is shut on the wilted garden... The wind sobs in the chimney, but in my heart I shall write a hymn to springtime..." And Saint John tells us: "I then saw a new heaven and a new earth. I saw the Holy

City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, beautiful as a bride prepared to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne cry out: 'This is God's dwelling among men. He shall dwell with them and they shall be his people and he shall be their God who is always with them'." Enjoy the fall!

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