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**4<sup>th</sup> August 2007**  
**Salvation - being freed from sin**

**Welcome and Presentation**

We will have four parts this afternoon:

- 1) What is sin?
- 2) Redemption: God's offer of infinite love
- 3) Salvation: how do we respond to God's offer?
- 4) Confession: in the contradiction between sin and salvation

**Prayer:**

*Lord, holy Father  
creator of the world and source of all life.  
You never abandon the creatures formed by your wisdom  
but remain with us and work for our good even now.  
With mighty hand and outstretched arm  
you led your people, Israel, through the desert.  
By the Power of the Holy Spirit  
you guide your pilgrim children today  
as we journey along the paths of time  
to the eternal joy of your kingdom  
through Christ our Lord, Amen.*

We would like each of you to write on a piece of paper what sin and what salvation are for you. In one simple sentence each. Then we will collect all these papers and each of you will get one of them to read aloud. You just write the first idea which comes spontaneously to your mind / to your heart. It is not a competition for cleverness. Let the spirit work in you. Is 5 min. enough? We will read these contributions during the part 2, the one about redemption.

**1) What is sin?**

**Reading: Gn 3:1-19**

*1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?"*

*2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;*

3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'

4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die.

5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

9 But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate."

14 The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

17 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Sin means etymologically in Greek and Hebrew *a shot which misses the target*. It is a deviation, an attempt which does not reach the truth. It comes in Greek from a root which means *participate* to which a negation has been added: sin is therefore an absence of participation. It is a move which gets side-tracked, which does not reach the essential and does not create the relationship it is intended to. It is a way not to answer our vocation and to develop a twisted relationship with our source or origin, our relationship with God. The absence of living relationship creates distance, loneliness and suffering, with the feeling of being rejected, with a feeling of guilt. Suffering arises from this distance to our nourishing source.

Another meaning is proposed by a French woman who studied the symbolic aspects of the Hebraic tradition in the bible. According to her, the Genesis story does not speak about Good and Evil as two opposed aspects of same values. She says that the story of the original sin does not describe a man and a woman but more our own feminine and masculine aspects which remain independent of our gender. The feminine aspect, the yin, is the unaccomplished aspect of life in us, because it is the origin, the womb, the intuition, the substance, the meaning, before it takes shape; it is not the Evil but it is the darkness in the sense of what has not still become light. The masculine, the yang, is the dynamic of accomplishment which gives a shape, a form of expression. It is the Good in the sense of light, in the sense of what tends to find its own expression. This expression (the masculine) has a meaning only with a content (the

feminine). Our vocation is to transform ourselves to become accomplished. Feminine and masculine have to marry to form a whole. In the Genesis story, Adam and Eve have to grow in order to become mature. But instead of following the normal path of this interior growth, they try to possess the fruit of knowledge without having to undergo the difficult path of an interior introspection which cannot avoid suffering. According to this interpretation, the serpent represents our primitive energy, our kundalini, our vital energy which we have to learn to master and to channel. The temptation for this energy is to take the short cut of getting the fruits of knowledge externally without letting this fruit grow in us. The fruit of the tree of knowledge should not be picked outside but it has to grow in ourselves. If it does, the tree of life remains the source in the garden, it is the essence of life we can live nearby, when we accept to undergo the process of our personal growth. In this case, we are transformed by this growth and the form of our own accomplishment is given to us, as being rooted in God. God communicates part of his essence to us. We are no longer in competition with him. Life becomes a growth process and an intimate relationship with God who reveals to ourselves our true nature which is his nature.

About Satan: let's hear this **quotation from Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP, extracts from a lecture entitled "The crisis of Truth Telling in our Society", ABC Radio National**

*"...The opponent of God's truth in the Bible is Satan, the father of lies. And his lies do not consist in being economical with the truth, or making errors of judgement as politicians say these days. It is not even just that he tells fibs. His untruthfulness is in sowing doubt and mistrust between God and Adam and Eve. He makes them suspicious. His name, 'Satan' means 'The Accuser', and the Bible concludes with the saints singing that 'the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down'. For Christians the great lie is to see other people unmercifully, to shut our eyes to the goodness of their humanity and to weight them down with the burden of their sins.*

*...So the conflict between truth and falsity within the Bible is not just about accuracy, about describing what is the case, though that matters. More profoundly it is the conflict between God's Word, which gives being, and makes us flourish, and the word of the accuser, which undermines, and denigrates and belittles...."*

One aspect here seems to be essential: we can believe in God, but it is not enough. We have to grow into a way to become really rooted in him, and in him only, because he is our source of life and our growth. This new intimacy abolishes the distance which separates us from him and we can grow in him as a plant which gets nourished abundantly by him and only by him.

### **Time of personal recollection:**

What is the difference between believing in God and being rooted in him? How does this difference express itself concretely in our life?

### **Sharing**

## **2) Redemption: God's offer of infinite love**

### **Readings: Jn 3:16-21,**

*16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

*17 For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

18 *He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

19 *And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

20 *For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*

21 *But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.*

### **Ep 1:3-14**

3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,*

4 *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.*

5 *He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,*

6 *to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

7 *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*

8 *which he lavished upon us.*

9 *For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ*

10 *as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

11 *In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will,*

12 *we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.*

13 *In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,*

14 *which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

The tradition says that Jesus died for our sins. This way of expressing the truth of redemption insists on our sins and on Jesus' death, it means it insists on what has been overcome; we could say it is a negative way to express the truth about redemption, because it does not say what has been given to us. For me, it sounds more positive and more adequate to say that Jesus has expressed his love for us to the ultimate degree and that he has made us free to be accepted and loved as we are.

This infinite love is the core of his message; it is the reason why our awareness that he loves us gives us a new access to life. God loves us as we are; our state of sinner does not matter. He loves us beyond our weaknesses. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have the same will. Our redemption is their common work. Jesus is not sacrificed by the Father but he is the incarnation and expression in the flesh of this infinite love of the Trinity for the Creation. Jesus takes our shape and shares our destiny to show us how he cares for us and how our humanity is our way to salvation if we remain rooted in God.

The love he expresses without limit by dying on the cross, instead of preserving himself, shows us another reality which we could not grasp before. This infinite love is the light which reveals us this other reality; it is the light of truth which reveals the true nature of everything. This light is the clear-sightedness of judgement, because justice is nothing else than the truth appearing in the true light of compassion. Compassion makes everything clear and allows us to see everything as it is, because it makes us free of our privileges and free of our limitations.

Through this practice of compassion, Jesus shows us the way to God: we have to die to ourselves in order to be able to be reborn in him, to become rooted in him. Redemption is in fact a revelation of ourselves and of God. It is a revelation of the true nature of life. This is God's offer: he loves us without limit. This love opens to us the gate to real eternal life, beyond all our limitations.

### **Time of personal recollection:**

Let's share now what we wrote before.

### **Sharing**

## **3) Salvation: how do we respond to God's offer?**

### **Readings: Jn 1:29,**

*29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

### **2Co 5:16-21,**

*16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer.*

*17 Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.*

*18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;*

*19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

*20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

*21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

### **Jer 1:17**

*17 But you, gird up your loins; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them.*

God is our only possible source of life. Salvation is an absolute offer without conditions. It is an integral part of God's nature. It is another way of looking at life which changes completely our perception of what life is. Life is true love in God. There is no other way. Salvation is the absolute truth and there is therefore no condition for salvation; we can be certain of being saved. The fact God loves us as we are is our security. In this infinite love, our certainty for salvation is taking root. Sin has been taken away; it is much more than remission. It is a complete transformation of our reality.

If we accept this other reality, this certainty of being accepted and loved transforms our life. It is a complete transfiguration of our ways of looking at the meaning of life and therefore it is a transfiguration of our being. It changes our perception of everything. We do not have any more to prove our value. We have only to enter into this other logic of life which is pure acceptance. Our answer to God's offer consists in accepting to undergo this personal inner transformation and to try to see reality in this new way. This acceptance is the only condition for our salvation: nobody can force us to comply with the essence of life, not even God. We have only to make the choice of accepting this other perception or reality and trust our inner transformation without being dismayed, as it is said to Jeremiah.

This transfiguration of ourselves is the work of the Holy Spirit in us because he or she is our guide on our new way of being nourished with the energy of love. Salvation tells us that God is not far away. Although he seems to hide, we learn to recognise him in the love which we can experience in ourselves, and also in the others and in the whole creation. This love is the active force which transforms the whole universe into the Kingdom of God. Love is the way to our own salvation, but nevertheless salvation cannot be only individual; our own salvation is only a tiny participation in the salvation of our brothers and sisters, and in the salvation of the world. Redemption activates this force which unifies us and gives shape to the community as our real body in Christ. Salvation is not an individual process; it links us with the Church and the whole creation. It is the unifying force of true reconciliation. In giving shape to the body of Christ in the Church, it creates a new incarnated reality which becomes visible. Being redeemed, we can incarnate this force of love which transforms the creation into the accomplished kingdom of heaven as one body of the whole humanity. The Church is in this way the foreshadowing of the coming accomplishment.

### **Time of personal recollection:**

Sharing in pairs: where and how do you see the new wo/man taking shape in your life? What has changed since you try to trust more in God?

### **Sharing**

## **4) Confession: in the contradiction between sin and salvation**

### **Readings: Mt 21: 28-32**

28 *"What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'*

29 *And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he repented and went.*

30 *And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.*

31 *Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

32 *For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.*

### **1 Jn 3:3-10 + 5:18**

3 *And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

4 *Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.*

5 *You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.*

6 *No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.*

7 *Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous.*

8 *He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

9 *No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.*

10 *By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother.*

(...)

18 *We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.*

If salvation is a certainty, evil remains nevertheless real; it means that our temptation to be side-tracked and taken away from God's love remains active at each instant. On one hand, there is the absolute reality of salvation, which is the growing force in us, it means the accomplishment of our true self which is rooted in God. On the other hand, there is the pressure of our own weakness which remains exposed to doubt, it means the retaining force in us and the non-accomplished which is like a force of inertia preventing us to come to the light. There is like a contradiction between these two forces, between the force of salvation and the force of inertia. We are caught between our vocation to abide in God, according to the promise for salvation and, on the other hand, our heaviness or weakness to really believe in our salvation.

Humility arises out of the clear awareness of this state of weakness, out of the insight that we cannot find life without being animated by God. Salvation can become our own reality only if we recognise that we cannot be transformed and have access to life without God acting in us. There cannot be any salvation without humility because humility is the expression of our need for God, an expression of our taking root in God. It is the key to our openness to his gift of life. Humility is the key to confession which recognises our incapacity to respond by ourselves to God's call. Confession situates us clearly in this tension between our limits and our vocation to be saved.

When we recognise it, our weakness becomes the link between all beings in the creation. The weakness of our humanity is what we have in common as human beings: our humanity consists at the same time in our destiny to be saved and also in our incapacity to be saved without God transforming us.

Through salvation, we learn to love our humanity which becomes the expression of God and the incarnation of his presence in the world. Our humanity, which is often felt as our heaviness because of our material existence, becomes, through salvation, a source of light despite our imperfection, because it becomes a way of making God more visible in the world.

In order to become more open to this expression of God, we have to lose our preconceived forms of identification with the different aspects of our person: we have to see that we are much more than this body, or this mind, more than our social status, more than our profession, because we are before all a sacred expression of God's love. Therefore we need to purify ourselves in order not to stay in God's way. Humility is essential; it is not a negation of what we are; it is only an awareness of us being incomplete if God does not embrace us. It is just a serene way of opening ourselves to his expression.

### **Time of personal recollection:**

How do we experience this contradiction between sin and salvation? Sin has been taken away: what does it mean concretely for our everyday life?

### **Sharing**

### **Prayer (gift of wisdom)**

Spirit of Wisdom, lead us to our completion.  
Let us taste the richness of God's mercy  
so that we may be filled with spiritual joy  
and your tender consolation.  
Give us a deep understanding of God  
so that our hearts cleave to him unwaveringly  
and our spirit becomes one with Him. Amen.