

THE CENTRAL POSITION OF CHRISTMAS IN THE LIFE OF BROTHER SCUBILION

On December 25th 1819, at the age of 22, the young Jean Bernard Rousseau joined the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the parish of Tharoiseau where he had been born.

On December 25th 1822, at the age of 25, Jean Bernard Rousseau joined the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

In the space of three years, Brother Scubilion, as he came to be known, chose the same date, December 25th, to make two major commitments which would influence the rest of his life.

Christmas 1819, when he joined the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart, he made the commitment at the age of 22 "to spend one hour from 5.0am to 6.0am every Holy Thursday in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament". He kept the paper on which he had written the promise till the day he died. Is this not a proof that he always remained faithful to his promise?

Christmas 1822, on receiving the habit and taking the name Brother Scubilion, he began his novitiate. He was in his 25th year. This was a serious commitment that had been thought out and it was for ever. This new robe and white rabato which he wore all his life, and the new name which he was given were so many external signs of his commitment.

We should not, of course, attach too much importance to the choice of Christmas in the cases we have mentioned. Christmas is an important feast, and that is a good enough reason for choosing it. With regard to Christmas 1822, there are certain things one can say. In the Brothers' Institute it has always been a tradition to hold these ceremonies on some significant feastday. Brother Andre Fernet in his book (p. 62) talks about how the Institute was at that time in the throes of reorganisation and that there were many Brothers receiving the habit. What is more, the novitiate which Jean Bernard joined on November 9th 1822 was under the patronage of the Infant Jesus. So it is not surprising that Christmas was chosen. Even if we should not attach too much importance to all this, it is nonetheless true that this coincidence in dates meant something to Jean Bernard. The commitment of Christmas 1822 seemed to be an extension of the Christmas 1819 commitment.

To gauge the importance of these events in the life of Brother Scubilion, it would be useful, on the one hand, to consider the meaning of Christmas; and on the other hand to read the meditation for Christmas Day written for the Brothers by their Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle; a meditation which Jean Bernard heard for the first time at Christmas 1822, the day he received the habit and entered the novitiate.

Christmas is the coming of a Saviour, the Emmanuel, "God with us". It is the gift of the True Light, the gift of God to man. It is God being faithful to his Promise because "he wishes all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2, 4). This young man, 25 years old, was so convinced of the truth of this that his commitment is his response. Love answers Love: "love in return for love" is an expression that is thought to have originated with him.

In his meditation, N^o 86, for Christmas Day, the Founder stresses two points: poverty and humility. Here are three extracts. Let us not be put off by the style which dates from the 17th century: let us rather listen to the central message contained in these extracts.

“We are poor Brothers... Only the poor come to us, and they have nothing to offer but their hearts prepared to receive our instructions.”

“Nothing so attracts souls to God as the poverty and humility of those who try to lead them to him”.

“Rest assured that as long as you have a sincere love for poverty and for all that is humiliating, you will produce fruit in souls... that by your instructions you will touch the hearts of these poor boys...”

And so Brother Scubilion’s prayer sprang naturally from the message of Christmas and the words of the Founder.

As he meditated on the poverty of the Child of Bethlehem he committed himself to the love of poverty and of the poor.

As he meditated on the humble submission of the Child of Bethlehem, he committed his whole life to the pursuit of God’s will in his own life – “God’s will be done”.

As he meditated on the incarnate love of the Child of Bethlehem, he “opened his heart” and committed himself to “touching hearts”.

God took possession of his life: As Chassagnon wrote (p. 207): “His sole concern, his passion was God”.

And so during his life, Brother Scubilion:

- * always sought to be with those who were most helpless, with the poorest (slave and free);
- * was always concerned for those “who are far from salvation”; he would talk about “going to evangelise those good Malagasy people”;
- * he undertook his mission as a catechist with great zeal wherever he went, always trying to make sure everyone understood him;
- * during the last stage of his life, he undertook to visit the sick and the dying;
- * God’s will ruled his life: “As God wants” he would say.

And when he came to the end of his earthly life it was by answering “Forever” to the Brothers’ traditional invocation “Live Jesus in our hearts” that he went to the “God of his salvation”, the same God he had committed his life to so generously at Christmas 1819 and 1822.

Perhaps for us too Christmas could be the centre of our lives?

Brother Roger Petit.