

## Fraternal life

These few words from Pierre Goursat follow a teaching given by Laurent Fabre, head of the Chemin Neuf Community, during one of two summer sessions at Paray-le-Monial, on the subject of “Fraternal Love and Community”. Pierre Goursat explains how to go from “Prayer Group to the Community” focusing on the importance of accompanying people. He shares his personal experience of being accompanied, and explains in an illustrative way how to help people move forward.

From Prayer Group to the Community. How a Prayer Group becomes a community of prayer. So, this concerns the little groups just as much as the big groups.

So, I'm going to talk to you about the big groups we have in Paris, and how we've completely failed. Because, in the end, loads of people come, we're completely overwhelmed and we no longer know how we're meant to welcome them. For example, when there's a group of 300 or 400 people, and everyone's arriving. Naturally they all turn up at pretty much the same time. It's a real race<sup>1</sup>. We're completely drowning. So, you want to welcome them. But you can't welcome three hundred people arriving in the space of five minutes. And so, the funniest bit, is that, when it's all over, the wave leaves again in the same way. So, you can't welcome them then either. You are carried away by the current. You drown in it. So, what's the solution? Well, there isn't one. You have to start it all again from scratch! With Jesus as a shepherd<sup>2</sup>. Yes then, so, you start again from zero. You keep the people of course, we're quite conservative. They come here as consumers<sup>3</sup>. We organise things so as to give them really nice little portions. Like that they don't wake up too quickly. And they don't criticise too much, as our friend Laurent would say. And then, they're peaceful.

So, whilst we're waiting, we ask how things are going. Those who aren't yet entirely turned into consumers. So, we tell them: “Listen my friend, what are you doing here? Well, have you understood that Jesus is your Lord?” That, they can understand. But “your personal Saviour<sup>4</sup>”, that bothers them because if it's personal, it requires them to make a change. There's a recognition involved. In the end, it complicates life for them. But in the end, we give them five, six, seven weeks to understand it, gently. So as not to alarm them.

So, finally, they get to the outpouring of the Spirit. Obviously, for the outpouring of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit doesn't need us, in order to descend into a soul. We manage to understand that. And they can understand it too. Which is not a bad thing by the way. So finally, we tell them: “But why are we with you for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Because we should receive this outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a community. If you're not being carried within a community, it won't work.” So, they say: “But everything's ok! I feel great.” So before, we'd say: “There you go, everything's great. You've received the outpouring of the Spirit; we'll give you your diploma. And so now, off you go! You're off by yourself. It's fantastic! You have a fantastic future ahead of you!” Very good. But after a while, as Laurent would say, well, it fades away, it wanes. They seem somewhat sad. They're not happy anymore. And so then, they start to get a little cloud of criticism. There, they see stuff everywhere. In the end, it disappears altogether.

So how can we do things differently? Well, another way; whether it's a little group or a big group; we have to start at the beginning. That means take everyone and welcome them. Because I have quantities of them who come to find me. They tell me: “Oh, you know, my group, and me! It's not much fun!” I say: “Listen, we only need to look at your face, and we can see that it's not much fun! If you don't really believe, how can you expect the others to believe it?” And by the way, that's how it happens.

1 Perhaps Pierre means to say: « parade » or « surge »? (words which resemble each other in French)

2 Allusion to a song being sung everywhere at this time: « You can be reborn, you can start it all again, sweep up your past life and start from scratch, start from scratch with Jesus as your shepherd. »

3 Characteristic humour.

4 Expression commonly used by Pentecostal protestants, which came into use at the beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

But anyway! Anyway, we must welcome people. So, in order to welcome, [don't give them a] sermon: "You know, you have to be very charitable. You should look after Mrs. So-and-so and then Mr. So-and-so" and all that. The simplest way, is to make them dive into the Word of the Lord, to give them beautiful texts which truly show the marvels of the Lord. And so, we find a text on the marvels of the Lord. So, we praise the marvels of the Lord: "He's done this, He's done that. He's done this, He's done that<sup>5</sup>." And we<sup>6</sup> say: "Yes well, yes that's all very well but He's the Lord. He's up there. And me, I'm on the Earth. And I have a corn on my foot."<sup>7</sup> So, there you have it. There's the problem! So, at this point it becomes mental. We talk about everything. Right. We<sup>8</sup> say: "Well then no, we're stopping, we're stopping." So, we call up Charles-Éric<sup>9</sup> and we tell him: "Please, sing us something because they don't understand. But perhaps by singing it, they'll understand." Amen. So, go on then<sup>10</sup> (*laughter – song*). So, obviously, here, it's easy. We're all together. We can hide behind each other. It's easy to sing. There you have it. But when you find yourselves with five or six people who are looking at you, who, firstly, are singing out of tune<sup>11</sup>, and who don't really want to be singing at all. They're thinking: "But who on Earth is that?" So, especially if you raise your arms and start dancing, well at that point, it's over! You have to take it slow. Christ takes us slowly. He takes his time. Well, take time with the Lord too. That's it.

So, when you've finished the song, you start singing again, without being obvious about it, and you think: "Well, well, they're waking up a little bit. That guy there, doesn't seem to have such a long nose (face) anymore." I always have a long nose<sup>12</sup>, but anyway, that doesn't matter. So, practically speaking, what should you do? Well, you say: "Now, we're going to pray to the Lord." And then, He makes us stumble across a text which speaks about him, of the Lord's love, but also of love for our neighbour. Ah! There we go! That's bothersome. So, if it talks about loving your neighbour, we<sup>13</sup> start feeling that applies to us. So, as we're coming to the end, we<sup>14</sup> ask the Lord to stop things there. Just right so that as soon as it's finished, we can say: "Oh! How perfect! We praised the Lord; we praised him for the love of our neighbour. And well, how do we love ourselves?" So, you start hugging the lovely person on one side of you and then on the other side. Be careful, because with some people this doesn't go down very well<sup>15</sup>. You see. Also, don't address everyone using "tu" ("you" informal French)<sup>16</sup>. See whether you should use "tu" or "vous" ("you" formal French). Very well. Anyway, proceed with caution. And then, it gives them a bit of [confidence]. The ice melts, we could say. The ice melts in the sun of the Lord's love. It creates a big pond, but anyway, they've defrosted! So, they're all small. (...) That's exactly what is needed! So, the conclusion is, it starts working like this. Next time it'll go a bit better.

And so then, take your telephone. Imagining there are two or three people who have the chance to have a telephone<sup>17</sup>. Or otherwise, if they're not too far<sup>18</sup>, you can go and see them during the week. <sup>19</sup> "So, how's it going<sup>20</sup>?" So, don't start asking them questions: "How did it go then?" because he'll immediately recompose himself and say: "Mmm yes, it wasn't that great..." You say: "Oh that's amazing! It worked really well!" And the other person will say out of politeness: Ah yes! It worked really well." So, you keep at it! You keep at it, you say: "Oh yes, it's extraordinary. The Lord is extraordinary!" So, they say: "Clearly, He's extraordinary!" That's it.

So, on the same subject; next time, it's a bit better. And then, little by little you get it. Finally, you see there's something which doesn't quite sit right. You say to them: "But, your faith isn't going so great, is it?"

- "No, it's not that" – "So, you're having problems." – "Ah, yes! Ah yes, you know, my children, I'm having problems." So, they start talking to you about the rosary, not, unfortunately, Mary's Rosary but a rosary of all the problems they have with their children. "My husband, my children..." So, you listen, you listen, you listen and you pray to the Lord. You say: "Lord, when I find the right moment..." Bam! You strike. So, you shoot an arrow. But, the arrow curves, it doesn't hit home<sup>21</sup>. But anyway, it will get there one day.

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5 Pierre says this with a droning voice, like reciting the times table. It's the way in which some of the people (we welcome) will hear the marvels of God spoken about.

6 The people we welcome.

7 Pierre often employed this image when we were complaining.

8 The person who is doing the welcoming.

9 Charles-Éric Hauguel was in charge of the singing and liturgy in the Community and during the sessions at Paray-le-Monial.

10 Pierre is addressing himself to Charles-Éric and asks him to intone a song.

11 A small laugh comes from Pierre (he is thinking of himself as an example when he talks about singing out of tune...).

12 Pierre is joking about himself again.

13 The person being welcomed.

14 The person doing the welcoming.

15 Some people don't like big hugs.

16 At the beginning of the Renewal, we had a tendency of addressing everyone informally, as we considered ourselves all brothers and sisters in the same family.

17 At this point in history, not every household had a telephone.

18 If they don't live too far away.

19 Between two prayer assemblies.

20 The latest assembly.

21 Humoristic image. Pierre uses the expression « shoot an arrow » in the true sense (with a bow) and in the figurative sense which means to make a witty jibe, which is in fact a criticism, but less obviously so.

Right, so little by little you start – that, is the mystery of the Lord, whom you’ve prayed to – touching their heart. You don’t know how, but it’s the Lord who has touched their heart. Because, you see, you must have a love of charity. So, for that, you have to ask the Lord. And that, you’ll find, comes with practice; it is experienced in adoration. If you haven’t prayed for half an hour before meeting the woman, well, you’re done for. You’ll mess up and [you’ll say] exactly what you shouldn’t have said! You’ll say: “Now I’ve done it<sup>22</sup>! I’ve put everything back three weeks. We’ll have to start again from zero.” But if you’ve really prayed, the Lord will speak through you, without you knowing it. He’ll speak a word which touches their heart. So, we’ll score a point. That makes one. And from one! And then another. And then two! And then three! So, when there are three of them, it starts getting more solid.

So, little by little, it’ll start making progress. So, what’s interesting, is that these people start getting a taste for it. It’s less fun for you, but it’s more fun for them. Because they want to telephone you all the time to tell you about their life. And little by little you listen. And little by little, they start to change themselves. Because you talk a little bit about the Lord. So then, talk to them a little bit about the little cloud<sup>23</sup>, you see. Explain to them what Laurent said earlier. In the end, instead of always being centred on themselves, they start opening up to the Lord and centring themselves on God. So, you see, there really is the problem of getting to know them. If people feel welcomed, in the end, as they feel welcomed out of love, in the end love engenders love and love brings us to love and brings us to Love with a big L. So much so, that they are brought to the Holy Spirit who begins to teach them.

So, I was saying to you then, they start getting a taste for it. So, you’re<sup>24</sup> thinking: “My friend, me, I don’t have the time anymore! I have Madame Mathurin, I have Monsieur Ursule, I have Monsieur Jakowski<sup>25</sup>”, very well. And the conclusion is that you don’t even have time to eat. So, be careful your husband doesn’t start making a fuss! [there’s a risk your husband will say]: “You understand, with all of your comings and goings, I don’t get to see you anymore!” And then there’s the children. So, pray to the Lord for everything to go well, that you can give time to each one of them.

But as they<sup>26</sup> get a taste for it, well, they want to do it. And of course, you haven’t spoken to them about spiritual companionship. Because that, to have someone accompanying them, who breaks and enters into your private life, is terrible! So, as they start calming down<sup>27</sup>, and begin a devouring love for you, you can try to transform them over to a love that’s a little more spiritual. And little by little, it takes hold. The commitment is there. So, how do you proceed?

Spiritual companionship is very important because we cannot make ourselves holy, alone. Especially in the upside-down world in which we find ourselves, we can’t make it alone. And if we’re not together, it collapses. And it’s terrible, even for the souls, especially, for the souls who are quite strong. The souls that pray, who are quite marvellous. Others instinctively attach themselves to these kinds of souls. He<sup>28</sup> attaches one to his arm, another to his other arm, to his legs. By the end of it he starts drowning. He drowns with them. They all drown. So, we read in the miscellaneous news items: “Mr. So-and-so wanted to save people. He died and they all died too.” It makes a good headline, but it’s still pretty sad. Whereas if we stick together, well then someone throws a punch to the jaw of that person, of this one, clears out, we help them stay afloat and so in the end everyone arrives safely on the shore. With the Lord. And that’s why you should not be by yourself.

So, you’re thinking: “Listen, that’s all very nice. Now, I’ve got three, four<sup>29</sup>. You know, my husband...<sup>30</sup>” So, if you say ‘my husband’, women understand that you shouldn’t go much further. Very well. And then “my children.” And so, you’ll say to the others<sup>31</sup>: “My little friend, now that you’re accompanying people, you can help me a little with accompanying.” So, they’ll say: “Me? accompany! Now really, what are you asking for! But me, I’m not capable!” – “Well, obviously you’re not capable. But the Lord is capable!”

And so, you mustn’t make a mistake. Because, you start to see, taking form in the distance, the shadow of the Spiritual Father who says: “But really, what on Earth is all this accompanying? That’s not how it should be at all. I’m your Spiritual Director. I don’t understand this. Firstly, it’s very dangerous. And I don’t understand this at all.” We reply<sup>32</sup>: “You don’t have to understand. It’s not forbidden to not understand.” Well, you’ll tell him: “But father, it’s not like that at all. You are a father for our soul. You are the doctor of the soul.” And then, adopt a [theatrical tone]: “of the souuuul.” (Laughter) “And we are simply nurses, we action your treatment plan! Because I’ll tell you something, between you and me: well, they<sup>33</sup> don’t use your treatment plan. They come to see you every three weeks with a new prescription. But they haven’t taken anything in the interval. They throw it all<sup>34</sup> in the bin!” So, you’d say, by the way, if you’re even humbler yet<sup>35</sup>: “You understand, this

22 Ironic comment. Pierre means to say: « I’ve messed up »

23 Cf. note 5 : the « cloudy thoughts » of criticism.

24 The person who is doing the accompanying.

25 Different people being accompanied.

26 The person being accompanied.

27 The people being accompanied.

28 Those who pray and attract other souls.

29 The people being accompanied.

30 Probably implying: « My husband thinks I’m doing too much. »

31 To someone we feel is capable of accompanying others?

32 Or more likely: we think it in our heads.

33 The people you are following.

34 Medicine (or prescriptions).

35 The person who is doing the accompanying, addresses himself to the spiritual father who has given advice to the person he is following. Pierre gives the example of a doctor’s prescription for a young woman who has just given birth: don’t stand up.

person has just given birth. So, [you told her that] she mustn't get up because there's a risk of a blood clot. So, because she, understandably, has a little self-respect, when she needs to go to the toilet, to the secret place as it's said in the Gospel, well, she gets up! And then, one day, she's found dead. Because she suffered an embolism. And all that because of a lack of simplicity, or because she had no one to help her." So, you'll say: "I'll pass her the bedpan<sup>36</sup>." So, the priest says: "Alright, alright, alright, that's very good, yes, it's perfect!" What more do you want, that's how it is! That's life! We're simple. And, by the way, it'll do a lot of good to this person because they'll say to themselves: "Well, there you have it<sup>37</sup>." She'll become humble, simple, like a child.

So, you see that it's really different to spiritual direction. And that simple people can do it, especially if they're humble<sup>38</sup>. Because obviously, you give it to someone to look after and one day, they'll turn up with a big fish<sup>39</sup>. They'll<sup>40</sup> fall back, horrified saying: "But it'll swallow me up<sup>41</sup>." And yet, what happens? They keep they're cool, and instantly go and see the head<sup>42</sup>, the head, you know what I mean, the group leader and tell him: "Well, well, my friend!" Under the seal of professional secrecy<sup>43</sup>! No but that's very important! "It's really very serious! I can't possibly take care of this. I really think you should talk to him and maybe see a priest about it<sup>44</sup>." And then in the end, we decide he should see a priest. So, all of that needs preparing for, and we can see that. And you can see it together. And then, just like that, little by little, you'll carry him. After a little while, everything will be much better!

So, Laurent was telling you earlier that with criticism, you can see the things which grow up like that, with the enemy. But with the Holy Spirit, there are wonderful types of flowers growing! And then which suffocate! It's the opposite: it's not the flowers which are suffocated by the thorns, it's the thorns which are suffocated by the flowers.

So, we progress, gently, like that. And so, you'll say to me: "But really, all that, what has that got to do with the Community?" So, I'll tell you then, we've come to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I'll tell you:

"Above all, keep going afterwards<sup>45</sup>. Keep going. It's the most important moment of all." You tell them: "Well, now that you've experienced together this preparation for the outpouring, you're going to form a small personal development group, in all simplicity." And then, they carry on together, they're accompanied, and little by little, they transform.

Because, the doctor says: "But that's strange, this medicine, doesn't seem to be having an effect<sup>46</sup>." Obviously, they're not taking it! But the doctors have never thought about this, never [thought] we wouldn't take our medicine or that we might forget. Especially homeopathy. I don't know if you're familiar with homeopathy. So, you have to take something and you mustn't touch the pills because there's nothing left. And then, you have to take them four times a day. You understand, four times a day! Right, very well. So, you need someone close to you to tell you: "Take your pills, take your pills, take your pills." But it's true! It's so simple, but that's what is needed! The number of people who don't say their prayers. Why? Because at the last minute, they're too tired, they look at a magazine and they lose time. If there's a sister by their side who says: "But what happened to your half-an-hour? Go and do your half-an-hour!" Straightaway they'll go and do their half-an-hour. They've been given this little prod, like Laurent was telling us about, which pushes them to pray! And I promise you, for us, in the Community, it's fantastic for transformation. I mean, apart from me. I'm always behind. So then, they pull me along, they pull me along. But it's fantastic. Because it's something practical. [Alone], we skid and slip, we lose a fantastic amount of energy.

So, we're always there, on the journey. People say: "But it's extraordinary. I feel more and more like talking to him<sup>47</sup>. But I'm going to talk to him on the telephone." Then there are the telephone statements, it's terrible! Don't show the telephone statements! Pay the phone bill directly, without running it by your husband. Because he'll say: "My God, what's going on in these statements!" By the way, you can also get them to call you back!

So, in the end, people say: "But, in fact, I need brothers and sisters." They start to understand they're in need of brothers and sisters. So, little by little, it comes. And then, one fine day, they say: "Listen, I don't know. I'm completely crazy! I feel like I want something more<sup>48</sup>." So, if you truly feel like it, you can pray with your brothers and sisters and little by little, a small group of non-residential community life is formed. Non-residential. Because you mustn't get together straight away with people<sup>49</sup>... because there you'll have a catastrophe! And little by little, with the path guiding you, you'll see if you manage to have a community life together.

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36 Pierre is speaking from experience: he spent time in hospital and needed at one point to use a bedpan, something for patients to urinate in.

37 Implied: « Everything is simple! »

38 They don't try and solve difficult cases by themselves.

39 A person who is difficult to accompany.

40 The person who is doing the accompanying.

41 Humorous development of the image.

42 Pierre rarely employed the word « shepherd », commonly used in prayer groups.

43 Pierre insisted a lot on being discrete.

44 That the person being accompanied meets with a priest.

45 With following people.

46 Pierre uses again here the comparison of a Spiritual Director, to a doctor.

47 People start opening up more to those accompanying them.

48 People come to desire committing more to community life.

49 Living under the same roof.

But you see, these are very, very simple things and which move very slowly. It's the law of growth in the Spirit. And it's not the same thing for every person. Time is different. So, here's another situation. It's that if there are six of you, and three of you who want to have this community of life. The others feel stuck, saying: "No, no, I don't want to. I'm too afraid." So, the conclusion is: they are scared, but they're even more scared of being alone. So, at this point, they'll act amenably and say: "Yes, yes I want to do it!" And then, they're stressed and then it doesn't work. Whereas if they feel like they'll continue being accompanied, and you're kind to them also, and you don't act differently with the others, and you reply to them: "Committing to a non-residential community life, that's not what's important, that's just the means! The aim of it, what is really important, is union with God." So that's what you should tell them.

And you see, we had, for example, fifty-two making their commitments<sup>50</sup> a month ago and there were one hundred<sup>51</sup> there. You see, it was only half. Well, in the end, we made everyone come. And we asked those who weren't making their commitments, to pray for those who were making their commitments. And then, as they are all being accompanied, well, they weren't frustrated by it, they didn't get the impression they were stuck, broken down. So, you see, I'm explaining the whole thing to you. You should stay at the level of your current group. But you can appreciate the journey a little. You can see the general plan.

Pierre Goursat  
and his brothers and sisters

[www.pierregoursat.com](http://www.pierregoursat.com)

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50 Pierre is talking about those committing to join the Emmanuel Community on the 18th June, previous.

51 Total number of people following the Community.