

Exercising charity

Article signed by Pierre Goursat, laying out the one rule he suggested for the Emmanuel Community: no criticism.

A family of comedians

When born into a family of comedians, irony is easy: jibes are thrown about between cousins, caricatures of other's habits or noses. It doesn't get in the way of friendship, quite the contrary; in any case, in a game like this one, one quickly loses their sensitivity...

This is why, until now, I haven't taken offense to the criticism our community has suffered here and there.

But I recently noticed that other prayer groups, notably ones outside of Paris, have also been an object of criticism or hasty judgement.

This opened my eyes, and above all my heart: perhaps through my past behaviour, some of my jokes, or banter, have been taken seriously and have hurt a brother or sister.

By the way, when building love, in order to avoid making any cracks, the first rule we made for our community life was no criticism between us, evening jokingly.

Couldn't we, then, live by this rule in the wider community, which makes up the Renewal?

Harmless remarks

Often, we believe that what we've said about a brother or sister, in all light-heartedness, doesn't hold any significance. But in fact, it's almost always due to these harmless little remarks, or apparently insignificant commentary, that criticism grows in a community, and propagates from community to community.

The remarks we've made unintentionally get amplified, repeated, twisted, until it comes around to the person in question and can hurt them deeply.

I don't like it; is this the only criteria for discernment?

From time to time, we may find ourselves joining in a prayer time with a group that's not our own.

If we turn up with our prejudices, and our ideas about the way the prayer should be led, there's a big risk we'll be disappointed because the prayer doesn't correspond exactly to what we're used to. We think the songs are too slow or too fast, the praise non-existent or too noisy!

If something bothers me or if I don't like it; is this the only criteria in discernment?

We take ourselves too seriously!

Where does this spirit of judgement come from?

From our tendency to take ourselves too seriously. As such, we neglect thanksgiving, we forget the power of the Holy Spirit. We only consider events and people according to our own way of thinking and acting...

The Accuser keeps his lamp pointed at the little details which I find annoying. Afterwards, I leave the group criticising others, or absorbing all the criticism which might have been made about me. When maybe, that very evening, Jesus was waiting to shine a light on a never-before reached corner of my heart; and I wasn't listening to Him because I was distracted by the details.

Maybe He wanted to reveal his face to me through this assembly; and I missed the meeting because I was too rich of myself, with my judgemental mindset;

"And sent the rich away empty" Lk. 1:53.

Should we abandon all forms of critical mindset?

We sin more often through negative exaggeration than mistakes or lies. What we've seen has truth, but we've made a detail bigger of it than it is, and to the detriment of what is essential.

Let's not forget that lucidity without love, is how the Devil perceives things, not Jesus.

As Fr. Garrigues tells us, [cf. *Il Est Vivant* n° 14, 'The Community and Spiritual Combat']

"We can see certain shadows in the scene at certain times. Some people may see them more than others, that's normal. But we should regard them "as if we don't see them", according to St. Paul's expression. When I say, "as if we don't see them", what I mean is without letting the enemy tie up our hearts by the shadow we've noticed, because the Accuser is there, very happy to show us the cracks appearing in each other.

Believe me, I'm not speaking in favour of blindness, because there's cowardness in blindness. The ostrich's approach, is not what Jesus asks of us."

It's something the Renewal is often reproached for: by continually diving into prayer and praise, we reach a point we no longer see everyday realities.

See with eyes other than those of human reason

The Holy Spirit, the Illuminator, guides those who let themselves be modelled and moved by Him, to *"all the truth"* (Jn. 16:13). He teaches us to see with eyes other than those of human reason. He enables us to see the life that is germinating in each of our brothers and sisters, in each of our communities.

"So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints..." (Eph. 1:17-18).

And so, little by little, we love seeing our brothers and sisters, happy to discover in them the work of grace, more deeply each day. We admire the power with which the Holy Spirit acts in them, transforming them and renewing them, and we marvel at the over-abundance of graces which the Lord gives them...

Their weaknesses are put into perspective, moved into a more appropriate place; and if they still exist, they don't block our view...

We truly start seeing the Lord, little by little, living in our brothers and sisters, and expressing himself through them.

Aware of our own poverty

But how can we experience this goodwill towards our brothers and sisters if we haven't already a deep awareness of our own poverty, and also Jesus' forgiveness?

At some point, Jesus enables us to accept our poverty, to not be afraid anymore, because he helps us understand that He loves us as we are; so we find the value we have for the Lord surprising. His Love is not blind, but it transforms our sin: if our heart condemns us, God is bigger than our heart. Jn. 3:20.

"Because you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you" (Is. 43:4).

As such, because we know we are poor, and forgiven, we become indulgent towards the poverty of others: we become merciful.

How can we not let a song of thanksgiving rise up in our heart, an eternal recognition of our God who takes delight in accomplishing such great wonders through our fragility.

And if we've been tempted once or twice to take the glory for certain successes, a clear analysis of our sin and disgrace will quickly dissuade us.

"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

Perpetually renewing a state of wonder

This over-abundance of love fills us with joy and thanksgiving because it opens our hearts, enables us to put our finger on the rebounding thanksgiving in ourselves and in our brothers and sisters. Without this state of wonder being perpetually renewed, there is no true life in the Spirit.

The Lord gives us "tyres", so we can be moved, guided and redirected by Him onto the new paths He's prepared for us; but we can't follow them if we keep our hearts hardened by criticism and our eyes fixed on all that's going wrong around us.

"People are always looking at what's 'falling down', but when we look at what's growing up, it's extraordinary" ¹

¹ A note here sends us to a testimony from P. Xavier Lefèvre, 'In Contact with the Living Word' ('Au Contact de la Parole Vivante'), on page 15 of the same edition.

"For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." 2 Cor. 5:14.

Emulation in Love

This interior exultation, becoming more and more true as it resides more and more deeply within us, erases any trace of fear or jealousy from our hearts, and so, any desire to compare ourselves to others, disappears.

When the Christ's love becomes something urgent in us, it makes us witness to the marvels the Lord is accomplishing among our brothers and sisters. In the Holy Spirit, competition dissipates: it becomes instead, encouragement and emulation in Love.

And as God has total confidence in us, why shouldn't we, who are so weak, in turn, have the same trust in our brothers and sisters?

The time we previously spent on criticising and on vain words, should, as of today, be given in prayer for our brothers and sisters, and in supplicating the Lord to complete His work of conversion in them. And how can He not answer our prayer, made in faith and love, Him who each day realises the wonders of conversion, to which we are all witnesses.

Rejoice in the graces others receive

Then we won't be tempted to try and find out, like the Apostles did before the Passion, "which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (Lk. 22: 24), which community is God's favourite.

On the contrary, we rejoice with each of them for the graces the Lord has given to them, for what He is accomplishing in them and through them. This joy radiates from us, becomes infectious... and it's a relief to recognise that each community, each 'shepherd' is blessed by the Lord in a particular way, each according to their own vocation.

Unity in diversity

If we open ourselves wide to the graces the Lord gives to other communities, these graces spill over onto us and we are enriched by them, in the same moment. The diversity of gifts reinforces the unity of the body.

We were able to experience this during a big meeting at Pentecost, in Lyon, last year: each of our communities received a grace, from the Lord, of respecting and loving the other communities as they are, each according to their specific call, each according to their own vocation. In this way, unity was made deeper and truer between us; because in the Holy Spirit, differences are transformed into riches, diversity into complementarity.

Those who have had the chance to be present at regional meetings this year, may have discovered with a new intensity, how it is the same Spirit at work everywhere, acting with power, in diverse ways, according to the temperaments, spiritual sensitivities and appearance of different prayer groups.

We're no longer trying to catch from the corner of our eye which of us will get the biggest slice of the Lord's cake; we know that this cake is inexhaustible, and that each one of our communities is welcome to the biggest slice...

We know our limits

We know our limits, and we know we're not going to be healed overnight from the bad habit of criticising, or be able to bridle our tongues and fully live this attitude of goodwill towards everyone, and between communities also.

But, if we truly desire to go from theory to practise, from intention to action, why not make a commitment towards each other, to not criticising anymore?

We commit to not criticising anymore

For example, here is a list of concrete points, from which each of us can take some inspiration:

- Do not criticise a brother or sister, or a community, even jokingly;

- When something goes wrong in my community:

1. Consider myself responsible and pray it gets better;
2. Do not talk to people who it's useless to talk to, who I risk bothering, and all without fixing the root problem;
3. Pray to know who to talk to, the moment to do it, and the right thing to say.

- If, once or twice, I let myself slip into criticising again, write to the brothers and sisters involved, or to the community, to ask forgiveness, whether or not they were aware of the criticism made.

Anyone who wants to make this commitment, could do it after a preparatory novena, asking the Holy Spirit, the Purifier, to change our hearts, and to change the perceptions we have of our brothers and sisters.

"Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful." (Col. 3: 13-15)

Pierre Goursat
and his brothers and sisters

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