

CSC Gathering
April 2016 – Canada
Charism and Moreau History

My dear friends,

May the grace of our Lord, the blessing of His Mother, and the protection of St. Joseph be ever with you. Thank you for allowing me to be an ongoing part of your conversation.

You may have many reasons for gathering here today so we could spend some time getting to know one another better and growing in our relationship with the Lord. You may have many reasons for being here today but only one is essential – that is faith. You believe that the Lord is capable of making something essential happen this weekend and you want to open your heart to that divine activity. What a grace!

Earlier we spoke of the flowers in the garden. Now we need to step back and look at the soil. Certain plants and flowers grow in distinct soil – depending on the acidity or alkalinity, the level of moisture, the exposure to sunlight.

Actually the nature of the earth is to grow a living organism depending on the climate and the type of soil. However, if we want something specific to grow, we have to work with the soil to make that happen. Charism is associated with a person or group living creatures growing in a specific environment.

In post french revolution France, priests, neighbors had been martyred. Their blood soaked into french soil. Some clergy and religious had been faithful to the church at the risk of their own lives, some had sided with the government to save their lives, many had fled the country leaving France with a scarcity of ministers in the faith. Education and health care were non-existent. You can imagine the political tensions and the emotional texture of this time.

Who prepared the soil for me? The people who were most instrumental in tilling the soil for me were my parents, my family, my pastor and others in the parish.

Let me share with you a bit about my parents. My parents were simple folk, hard working people. They married on February 12, 1784 – 5 years before the outbreak of the French Revolution.

They were 25 years old. Their own parents were deceased at the time of their marriage so they did not have a huge family support structure. They began their marriage relying on God and the neighbors who surrounded them in the tiny village of Laigné en Belin

because life at this time centered in this small village with people known and trusted.

My father was a wine merchant. In all sorts of weather, he would load the wagon, leave our village, and go sell the wine to the neighboring villages on the fringes of Le Mans which was 30 miles away. He did not know how to read or write so his accounts were very rudimentary. However, he was so honest! When he would come home he would show us the marks on the paper and we would help him with his records. He was always very intent in not overcharging and insuring that all was in order with his records.

Our mother was a woman of the land. We had a tiny parcel of property; she tilled the soil and grew the vegetables which she managed to feed the 14 of us – literally, from the work of her hands. Only 11 of the children survived into adulthood due to challenges of health and sanitation and disease for all of us. You can imagine the toll this loss took on my parents.

In addition to being a farmer, our mother was a born educator. In the evening by the fire after all the chores were done she taught us catechism and our prayers. What a sight we must have been and how patient she was with our normal restlessness of 11 children at the end of the day!

In looking back at my own journey of those who prepared the soil for me, I have to tell you about my older sister, Victoire. She was 7 years older and she helped to prepare me for my first holy communion. I first received the Sacrament at the age of 10. You were suppose to wait until 12 but the pastor, Fr. Julien Le Provost, said I was ready. He, too, was very instrumental in my life.

Fr. Julien was exceptional. He had exercised his priestly ministry in secret during the revolution and after it was over he worked tirelessly to transform the parish. He would gather us into the rectory for our instructions. When I was 12, he approached my father and asked him if he would allow me to further my education. He told my father he was sure I had a vocation to be a priest. I wonder what he saw in me because while I was dependable and usually on-time for everything, I was also very mischievous.

My father did not jump at this suggestion. He thought I was too young and that I needed more time with family and with work on our land. He did not want me to lose myself in books and miss the benefit the manual labor.

Finally my parents agreed that I could begin the study of Latin with 3 other young boys but my father insisted that I continue to pasture the sheep and cattle outside of class time. He was a wise man and what a gift he gave me. I learned early on the responsibilities of being a shepherd, of tending to the needs of others.

We were a very close knit family. When I left for Chateau-Gontier in the fall of 1816, I thought my heart would break and my family felt the same way. They cried at my departure and I wanted to shed tears as well. I felt so torn between wanting to stay and be with them and needing to leave them and enter the seminary. I was especially attached to our mother and I asked the others to take particular care of her as she was really struggling with my departure.

Before I left Chateau-Gontier to move to St. Vincent's seminary, I had a visit with the family and I was able to share some thoughts with our parents. I still have a copy of it even though it is well written on my heart.

What I shared with them, I would like to share with you.

How many precious memories present themselves to my mind. If I reflect on beautiful days of innocence which I spent among you, if I consider the beginning and the progress of each of my brothers and sisters, I see you involved in the care of a difficult business to obtain for us the necessities of life and to raise us in a proper way.

Here I see our hard working father traveling from village to village and across the country-side, there I see our mother concerned every day about her children's lives and always solicitous about what would become of us.

And now dear parents rejoice in the happiness of having raised your children so successfully. Rejoice in the consoling sight of all of us capable of conducting ourselves prudently in the affairs of the world. Rejoice in the pleasure of perhaps seeing one of your children called to the priesthood....

Live on, be happy. May peace and concord give joy to the rest of your days.

What a memory that is for me! All of us together in joy celebrating life, celebrating the joy of family! I won't ever forget it.

I recall that moment so well!

My friends, I hope that you have some moments in your own life that you recall and treasure: moments of togetherness, moments of insight, moments of recognition of the working of God in your life and in your family.

Because we were so close, a moment of deep soil tilling with a heavy tool was the death of my mother in 1825. She died when I was 26 years old. She was 59 years old. I remember that she died as she had lived, with sentiments of lively faith and perfect resignation to the will of God. Her last moments were singularly edifying and have left us with precious memories. She had long borne many crosses following Jesus Christ and

imitating his patience. Her devotion to the Blessed Virgin was great and I had no doubt that Mary stood before her Judge as her protectress.

She had such a joyful expression on her face during the 24 hrs that her body was exposed to the numerous persons who came to pray for the repose of her soul. Her smile indicated to everyone the peace of her conscience and of her passing. Some on seeing her smile and the peace on her face could not refrain from kissing her.

Without any agony, she was conscious to the end and as she died her eyes fixed themselves on me for the last time as she repeated 3 times after me – Into your hands I commend my spirit.

There was something else very special about her death.
I added it in a note.

“I could add that about the middle of the night, while I was praying at her bedside, 2 angels appeared over the bed, holding a crown in their hands.”

I offer this memory to you for your own reflection and I share with you that the serenity of her death was the stamp or seal of the Lord’s love in her heart.

In hindsight I know it was my mother, who from my earliest tears, opened for me the way that led to my relationship with the Lord.

Oh, I tell you I did not know what it was to lose a mother who sacrificed herself so entirely for her children – but I knew at that moment. For so long after she died, I struggled with wanting to actually be with her and also wanting to do whatever the good God was asking of me. Two questions wrestled in my heart:
When will I be with my mother?
Lord, what do you want of me?

The soil of my faith life was deeply tilled once again at the time of my father’s death in 1830.

I wrote an account of his death in 1846 from the notes which I recorded of this event in 1830. I now share these notes with you.

Our father, Louis Moreau, died having patiently suffered blindness for more than 5 years. I remember those days as if they were yesterday.

This good father said to us: “I pray the good God to bless you, and I bless you myself with all my heart in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

Spirit.” Then we asked him to forgive us, and he answered us: “Everything is erased from my heart.”

... The next day Mademoiselle de Boismont, our good friend from the parish, who had come to see him, asked how he was. Our father said: “I must go to see God.” And in the evening he said: “My God! Why did I have to begin to love you so late?” Then he prayed, “May your gospel be announced everywhere on earth, may all my children sing your praise, and may your missionaries be accepted everywhere. That is what I wish, as you know Lord; that is what I want...” The following day he urged us to remain united to one another and to love God.

The struggle with death continued for 6 days. In the midst of his sufferings, our good father found time to joke about the “forgotten corner” in which God was still leaving him. As the end approached, he clasped his crucifix, kissed it repeatedly, and answered Amen to all our prayers.

On Sunday, at 10:00 AM he lost consciousness while the Salve Regina was being sung at high Mass for a lessening of his sufferings.... Coming to his senses toward evening, he said: “God does not want me; death passed over my bed twice and left me. Lord, have mercy on me! My God, take my soul!”

In the middle of the night: “God has forgotten me.”

Later: “Let’s go! Courage! Let’s be firm, and this time let’s try not to miss.”

On Monday morning: “Now at last the time has come.... As I was reciting the Litany of the Dying and at the moment when I was saying: “Give your soul into the hands of God; may the angels come to meet you and lead you into paradise” he expired.

Like no other experiences in our lives, the loss of those nearest and dearest to us is soil plowing time. There is an abrupt turning of the soil and a hollowness is created. Then the soil needs to lie fallow to be washed, renewed, opened to new life.

The soil of my early life was tilled sometimes gently, sometimes deeply, sometimes by hand, sometimes with the plow and sickle.

The soil of my early life was tilled in Ligné en Belin, in Château-Gontier, in Le Mans, in Paris and at all times and seasons, it was tilled with love.

In these early formative years, faith and love sprouted in the midst of the trials and difficulties, the hopes and joys of a community of believers in the aftermath of the French revolution. Out of war, violence, betrayal, fidelity, forgiveness – my parents, my family, Fr. Julien, Mademoiselle de Boismont used their hands to plow the fields, to sow the seeds for a work of resurrection!

So many tended the earth in these early years when the seeds of Holy Cross were still beneath the soil waiting to spring forth at the time designated by the Lord.

Charism, a living organism, springs into being at a specific moment, in a specific environment with many tending the earth, protecting the new growth.

Do you see in the background of my life the seeds of this charism unknowingly planted with such care and persevering love? Something essential was happening in the lives of so many to ready the soil and seed for the tree of Holy Cross.

Let us pause and honor the memory of all those who have gone before us, whose lives provided the essential elements of the gift of this charism.

I place my hands in yours and keep you in my heart as I remain affectionately and deeply united with you in Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,

Fr. Basil Moreau

Mary Kay Kinberger, MSC
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