

April 2016 – Canada Holy Cross Spirituality

Other than the Marianites in France, the members of Holy Cross did not speak about Basil Moreau to any significant degree from the 1870s until almost the 1920s and 1930s. By then, everyone who would have known him personally was either quite elderly or deceased. And since Holy Cross was growing most rapidly in North America during that time, stories from Europe were not a priority.

During the administration of James Donahue as superior general from 1926-1938 and the administration of Thomas Barosse from 1974-1986, Holy Cross began reclaiming Fr. Moreau as the founder and thus exploring once again the richness and wisdom of the heritage he passed on to us. Subsequent general administrations of Holy Cross have continued and promoted this study as we do today.

In beginning our discussion on spirituality, we can affirm that the characteristics or elements which we spoke about regarding charism are the same for spirituality. The elements of:

- God calling us.
- God naming us.
- God directing us on the journey.
- God leading us on unknown paths.
- God blessing us and enabling us to be a blessing for others.
- God calling us into an ever deeper relationship of mystery and transformation.

Similar to charism, the invitation to spirituality is an adventure on an unknown path to a strange land confident in God without knowing where God is leading, as if “seeing the One who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). We journey with courage and audacity because the “One who has called us is faithful” (1Cor. 1:9).

This allurements invites us to enter into the love affair between Father and Son; to be drawn and guided by this relationship; to hear Jesus say to us – I love the Father so much; I invite you to enter into this relationship with me. Your best self, your truest self will grow and develop in the embrace of this relationship. I want you to taste, to feel, to touch what it is really like to fall totally in love with my Father. Make this relationship the reason you get up in the morning, the reason you leave loved ones, the reason you hold someone in your arms, the reason you let them go, the reason you embrace what life demands of you and offers to you.

Entering this love affair pulls upon our energies, stretches our every capacity while the Father constantly brings us into greater depths of intimacy. Jesus reminds us: the Father

and I are one. This is what I offer you, total intimacy: not just in your head, although your head is involved; not just in your heart, although your heart is involved, but in every facet of your being. Without this growing relationship, there is no spirituality!

Father Moreau did not develop a distinctive spirituality to characterize Holy Cross. Rather he drew from various sources: Ignatian, Sulpician, Benedictine, Carmelite, etc. to create a synthesis of many elements. This synthesis of many elements reflects the general nature of 19th century apostolic religious communities.

However, according to Fr. Mork in his work, *Moreau Spirituality*, what distinguishes Holy Cross much more than any original spirituality is the structure which Father Moreau built into it – three equal societies of men and women, lay and ordained religious; and most especially the interdependence that Moreau insisted mark all the relationships among them. This interdependence was more than practical; it was a call for union among all the members.

Father Moreau was insistent on unity in his Association based on the theology of the Mystical Body. A superficial reading of the passages on union in the Mystical Body may leave us with the impression that Father is only using this doctrine in order to insure harmony, obedience and charity: a sort of theological means to insure that the members send in their accounts on time and to fulfill the other requirements of good stewardship. After all, Father Moreau was a pragmatic peasant. However, it is significant that Father Moreau refers to the doctrine of the Mystical Body at all. This doctrine, to be used so pragmatically, had to be meaningful for both Father Moreau and the members of the Association.

In view of his writings and teachings, his meditations and exhortations, we can only conclude that the doctrine of the Mystical Body was fundamental to his understanding of the Christian life. He could only think and live in terms of the body of Christ. And so, Father Moreau's concept of the Association, priests, brothers and sisters, was that of the Body of Christ. All were to be under the one superior general, who took the place of Christ. As we know, Rome did not approve of this centralized form of government and the men and women were given their respective major superiors.

Today the Association consists of four independent congregations: the Priests and Brothers of Holy Cross, the Marianites of Holy Cross, the Sisters of the Holy Cross, and the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Nevertheless, Father Moreau's theology of unity for his Association still holds for each of these Congregations. What he wished for the whole Association, he wished accordingly for each of the Congregations.

Father Mork explains that Father Moreau's spiritual vision of union modeled in the Holy Family provides the authentic unifier for Holy Cross. "Who, notwithstanding their

difference in dignity, were one at heart by their unity of thought and uniformity of conduct.” (Circular Letter I) Each is called to imitate the charity that united the three members of the Holy Family. Each is to be united under its major superiors as the parts of the body of Christ are united with Him. Each lawful superior holds the place of Christ and each congregation as well as the individual houses serves as an ecclesiola. So today each Congregation is the church in miniature, the Body of Christ for its members.

How do we manifest this spirit of union today? Certainly it is more than a union of prayers and suffrages, of sharing health updates and death notices and news bulletins. It requires a common interest in spiritual things, common sentiments about the issues of the day especially regarding peace and justice. It necessitates a common interest and sentiments for the spirit manifested in the life and works of Father Moreau. Father Mork states that when the members of the four congregations of Holy Cross make the spirituality of Father Moreau their own, they will have a force for unity that will make statutes and decrees superfluous.

In addition, Father Moreau’s fundamental union, fundamental because it is the basic union for all Christians and, therefore, necessary for the religious of Holy Cross, is that of the three Persons of the Trinity. “Just as in the Adorable Trinity there is no difference of interests and no opposition of aims or wills, so among the priests, brothers and sisters there should be such conformity of sentiments, interests and will as to make all of us one in somewhat the same manner as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one.” (Circular Letter I)

We are in the one Body of Christ, living by the one life of God, in whose life we enter by the fact that we are in Christ. Father Mork explains that in Holy Cross our common life means that we have basically a unity of hearts; our deepest desire for ourselves, for our brothers and sisters, and for the world, is the deepest desire of the Sacred Heart – God. In this we are of one mind and one will. Because of this, with the solidarity of the human body, we interact with each other, our chief thought being of the other, with complete self-forgetfulness. And all of this with human warmth and solicitude. (*Mork, Moreau Spirituality, Pages 80-81*)

This oneness in the Body of Christ leads to union and it is this union which is the powerful lever that can transform the world. This union is held together with compassion which clarifies for us who is able to grow in the garden of Holy Cross. Not all plants are suited. Not all varieties can grow together. Some need to be removed and placed in other soil. If allowed to remain, they will smother the other roots, block the sunlight, and drain the soil of moisture and energy needed for the other seedlings.

Father Moreau was not naive about the cost of this structure rooted in union in the

mystical Body of Christ. Through his experiences and his struggles to make this a reality in the Congregation, he learned the reality of life centered on the Cross of Christ. He often echoed the words: Take up the Cross, deny self, and follow me. (Mt. 16:24-25)

Either explicitly or implicitly the Cross has special meaning to us and to our spirituality as members and associates of the Congregation. It is the flower in the garden of the gospel which attracts us. When I was in congregational leadership, one of our elderly Sisters held her small crucifix in her hands each night as she slept. Toward the end of her life she struggled with heart failure. One day she was rushed by ambulance to the hospital and she insisted on taking her crucifix with her. That night in the hospital she slept with the crucifix in her hands but the next day when the bed linen was changed the crucifix was accidentally taken to the laundry. When this was discovered, Sister was distraught. The person in charge of laundry came to visit her and explained that with 500 beds in the hospital it was close to impossible to locate a small crucifix. After speaking with him and realizing the magnitude of the problem, she finally reconciled herself to the fact that it was lost. Unbeknown to us all, the man from laundry went back to the basement and spent hours of his own time that evening searching for the crucifix. Later that night he gently knocked on her door, walked in, and presented Sr. Edmund with her lost treasure.

For Father Moreau, the name of the congregation, Our Lady of Holy Cross, became the mark of the will of God. According to some historians, the property was the site of an ancient monastery named for Our Lady of Holy Cross. For Father Moreau, the name of the Congregation was pre-determined by an act of God's Providence. Thus the name acquired a value and a prophetic meaning for the work and he gave as a motto to the Congregation the verse: *Hail, O Cross, our only hope.*

Father Moreau wrote of the mystery of the Cross in his early circular letters. Describing the difficulties encountered in the missions, he said:

“The tree of the Cross has been planted where our worthy religious dwell! At times, its roots are the fewness of members and the lack of funds; at others, sickness and contradictions. But these religious have learned to savor its life-giving fruits, and if God in His goodness preserves them in the admirable dispositions which they have shown thus far, they will never taste death, for the fruits of the Cross are the same as those of the tree of life which was planted in the Garden of Paradise. But this fruit is bitter for a time, and how few there are who wish to feed on it! Consequently, how few there are who enjoy true life! ...Try, then to become perfect copies of the divine model, and nothing will ever shake your vocation. Not only will you carry whatever crosses you encounter in accomplishing the duties of your holy state, but you will love these crosses. Yes, you will even desire them and, after the example of our Lord, will choose them in preference to everything else.” (Circular Letter, January 8, 1841)

Father Moreau did not establish a specific devotion to the Cross nor to the Passion in his religious family. Father saw the difficulties, contradictions and sufferings that were the lot of Holy Cross as a providential sign. And it was toward the Cross as the loving presence of God, that he turned the gaze of his followers: to the Cross as light on sufferings and joys; to the Cross as hope and comfort in trials and struggles. And thus it was of the Cross, carried as our share in the salvation of the world, that he often reminded the members. The practices of devotion in honor of the Passion and the Cross of Jesus that he recommended were simply those that the liturgy of the Church proposed to all Christians, those that a long tradition had rendered familiar to the people of God.

A special insight into his thoughts is found in a conference given at Saint Laurent, Canada, 1857.

“What is our Cross? Oh, it is our own desires and unruly inclinations, our covetousness, our disagreeable faults and our imagination. That is our Cross. Human life is one long way of the Cross. It is not necessary to come to church to make the stations; the way of the Cross is everywhere and we walk it every day.”

As revealed in this conference, the Cross for Fr. Moreau is no longer outside ourselves. The Cross is in our weak and limited being as well as in our graced and redeemed being.

The common Rules of 1879, that situated the Marianites in reference to the mystery of the Cross, also gave them their own motto “In the Cross of Christ” or “In Cruce Domini Nostri Jesu Christi.” This motto from the epistle of St. Paul was the grace proper to the Marianites: to be born, to develop, and to persevere “in the Cross of Christ.” It also expresses their ideal at that time: to grow and mature as a group and as an instrument for the mission “in the Cross of Christ.”

According to Sr. Graziella Lalonde, CSC, from the very beginning of the Sisters, every generation has experienced, in one way or another, according to the times and the action of God, what it means to live one’s life “in the Cross of Christ.” Every sister has had to learn, according to the grace given her, what it means to move toward Paschal transformation by passing through the Cross of Christ.

It is paschal mystery transformation because the Cross is a sign of glory. It is the love of the suffering Savior declared on the Cross which led Father Moreau and which leads us to join him in glory. It is not the instrument of torture or of pain which draws us. It is the Cross as a manifestation of love, a love which led to the faithful accomplishment of the will of His Father, a love which extended to the finality of commitment. The Cross, then, is our hope, it is our salvation and liberation.

Father often reminded the members that these lessons of hope, salvation and liberation are first learned in community because the charism of Holy Cross is situated in and through

community. We commit ourselves to live apostolic community. Thus, community is in itself a ministry to the world and the church. It is a witness to the Cross that we offer. In fact, community may be among the greatest gifts – while one of the greatest struggles – that we bring to this century. We live in a world and a church that needs to see that women and men are able to care deeply about one another, to work together in good times and in difficult times, to persevere in living gospel values. Such a witness proclaims that other-centered love and forgiveness are possible with the grace of God.

This has been difficult in Holy Cross. We have experienced the sorrow and joy of the Cross in striving to live this ideal. However, our founder tells us that life is a way of the Cross. And he had many experiences of the Cross during his own life. These included the infidelity and betrayal of some of the members, challenges from Bishops, political intrigue, and struggles with some of his most trusted religious in the foundation of Holy Cross.

In the autumn of 1855, overwhelmed by financial problems and slander, he foresaw the ruin of his congregation. Feeling responsible, he underwent a time of great inner turmoil and trial, a veritable dark night of the soul. Father explained that he understood something of Our Lord's feeling of abandonment in his agony, as he went from his father to his disciples without finding any consolation. He said:

"I understood perfectly Judas' suicide and it would have been a great favor if only someone could have removed the two objects that I had acquire which were lying on top of my desk. One was a passport to go abroad that I had requested from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the other five hundred francs to pay for my trip. I would have certainly yielded to the temptation had I not kept my eyes fixed on my crucifix all the time."

"I began to become very preoccupied by the political upheavals I was afraid of the high cost of food which could be a real problem for the community. I saw or I believed I saw very clearly the imminent, complete ruin of the congregation, even abroad. An unusual clarity about this struck me. There was no possibility of doubt...I was reproaching myself over the injustice of the bread I was eating... my only thought was to recommend myself along with the entire work of Holy Cross to the prayers of a desolate community.... This is what saved me."

"... I did not give up my prayer... Every evening... when the community had retired, I would remain there... in the chapel for long hours, and what was I doing? I was going from one station to the other, looking for a light, an idea, and I was finding nothing, absolutely nothing."

"This lasted for 2 months when I received a letter coming from more than 250 km away from a person who could not know my state..."

She wrote: "I see you in the same state as Peter sinking into the waters."

"In the wink of an eye, the light came back into my soul; my confidence returned

completely; the trial was over.”

What can we take from his experience for our own spirituality? It calls us to honesty, humility, persevering prayer, acceptance of assistance from surprising places, renewed faith and hope. Father Moreau honestly and humbly shared his experience. Through it all, he persevered in prayer in the midst of darkness. Although his family had tried to comfort and strengthen him, he remained in turmoil. He still looked for a sign. And a sign came from a very unexpected source – a lay woman. She must have been someone he trusted on a very deep level because in one sentence she was able to help him reach out in faith, like St. Peter, to the One who could save him. The trial was over.

At the end of Father’s life, we see the fruits of his fidelity to the Cross of Christ. Condemned by the General Chapter of 1868, he was stripped of everything. The Motherhouse, his secondary school, the two novitiates, and his church were all put up for sale. In April 1869, with only a few possessions left to him he found shelter with his two sisters in their small house near the church. Since the Congregation of Men did provide him with any means of support, the Marianites brought him food and took care of his needs. He defended himself against the deluge of insults and lies without any bitterness or hate and in 1871, Father Moreau wrote “I forgive with all my heart those who have wronged me either by damaging my reputation or the assets in my care, and I respectfully beg Divine Mercy, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, to forgive them and I bless God for having found me worthy enough to suffer in working for His glory.”

He was able to forgive those who had betrayed him; he was able to continue in ministry preaching and teaching the gospel until a few weeks before he died; and then he was able to die in peace. His death reflected his own words he had written on his meditation on death: “Thus dies the just man in the arms of his God and his last sigh is the beginning of his glory and his new life.”

Take up the Cross – Fr. Moreau desired that we live in such a way as to make the spirituality of the Cross explicit, visible in our lives. Take up the Cross – the sign of life and hope, salvation and liberation. Take up the Cross because through the Cross,

God calls us.

God names us.

God directs us on the journey.

God leads us on unknown paths.

God blesses us and enabling us to be a blessing for others.

God calls us into an ever deeper relationship of mystery and transformation.

People should feel safe in sharing with us in Holy Cross their own experiences of the Cross because they see us being faithful to our way of the Cross – a way marked by joy, sorrow, hope, disillusionment, peace, frustration, healing. Over time we learn to trust our journey of being called, named, led onto unknown paths, blessed and a blessing to others into an ever deeper relationship of mystery and transformation.

Take up the Cross! Follow me!

Mary Kay Kinberger, MSC

CSC Congress

April 15 – 16, 2016