

# HOPE

## **Nicolas Barre's spirit of Hope**

There is an element of tenacity in Fr. Barre's spirit of hope. He comes across as someone who does not give up easily, nor is he easily discouraged, and this is very evident in his Maxims:

"Hoping against hope, and when everything seems to be against hope, we must go forward all the more in hope, saying: Even if He were to kill me, I would still hope in Him'." (FM 13)

What is it in Fr. Barre that keeps him hoping even in the face of seeming hopelessness? He gives the answer: We have to live in a spirit of complete abandonment to the desires of God and of Jesus, ready to accept the failure of our work, should it please God and Jesus. Nevertheless, we must pray to Him with all our heart and place our confidence in Him." (FM 13).

Fr. Barre's spirit of hope is evident in his complete abandonment to God's will, and total confidence / trust in God — both of which are underlined by his deep faith in God.

## **Abandonment to God's will**

According to Fr. Barre, we should be ready to accept the failure of our work if that is God's will. In the same serene manner, he places the charitable schools in God's hands: "The Institute of the Charitable schools resembles the Church. As it progresses, it will encounter persecution. trouble and opposition. What appears to destroy it is precisely what will strengthen it. Hence, it is necessary to live always in a spirit of abandonment to God, trusting in Him for all our needs." (FM 12)

Behind the face of failure lies a certain promise of success. This is the heart of our experience of resurrection. For Nicolas Barre, this world is a place of purification — educating us to understand that God is a loving Father behind the appearance of a task master: 'Outwardly, His will appears to be demanding, but deep down it is truly paternal and generous. Be faithful in allowing yourself be led by the Spirit, like a feather drifting in the wind, receptive to His inspirations and obedient to what draws you to Him." (L 9)

A sure indication that we are abandoning ourselves to God's will is when we follow closely in the footsteps of Jesus as revealed to us in the New Testament. With that in mind, Fr. Barre reminds his Sisters: "Total conformity with the desires of Jesus, abandoning yourself to the wishes of your

ALL, your King, your spouse Jesus... Seek therefore to surrender your own will, entirely and always, so as to surrender to the will of God with a living faith and an ardent love. In this way you will preserve yourself from all that would lead you away from God and from all harm." (L 12)

Our hope will not falter if it is anchored on Jesus, and if we consistently seek His will even though we may not understand. Fr. Barre reminds his followers: "Let Jesus reign and let whatever happens happen, even with regard to eternity. This is Jesus' affair and not ours, since He already knows the plans He has in mind for us. May His will be done even in ways unknown to us and without having any assurance, idea, or sense of what may happen to us." (L 47)

Fr. Barre could speak from his own experience of "abandonment to all that God wishes" (L 24), and invite to "a total abandonment of oneself into God's hands, for time and for eternity." (MD 50)

### Confidence / Trust in God

Confidence in God is an indispensable pre-requisite of hope. Fr. Barre puts it cogently in one of his letters: "Whatever happens, my dear Sister, be always at peace and trust in God. What you will experience will be in proportion to your faith, your hope and your love." (L 61)

To Fr. Barre, "Filial confidence is nothing more than the total surrender of oneself to God, our only Father, forgetting all that we are and placing all our concerns in His hands. We know that He will take great care of us and that all that relates to our salvation will be under the guidance of His providence, to His glory and ours. There are very few spiritual people who abandon themselves solely and truly to Him, relying neither on themselves nor on anyone else." (L 22)

To give an example of the need for an unquestioning trust and confidence in God's excessive love for us, Fr. Barre relates a parable:

"A master orders his servant to draw water from a well and pour it into a drum. The water escapes from the drum through a series of holes and flows into several canals. The master has set up these canals to water different parts of the garden, but the servant, being unaware of this, grumbles against him and complains that it is a waste of effort and time. But later, when the master leads him to the garden and shows him the well-filled reservoirs of water, he recognizes his master's wisdom, and resolves in future to carry out his orders without bothering about anything else." (MAP 201)

We are encouraged to hope in the face of seeming hopelessness, lack of understanding, apparent waste of time and effort. There must be the trust that God knows best.

### **Faith: the foundation of hope**

In one of his Maxims, Fr. Barre says: "Often the greatest saints were attacked or tormented by temptations against the faith" (MAP 20). He portrays such a struggle in one of his letters; he confides to a friend his interior struggle of faith in not seeing his prayers answered: "We often send letter after letter to heaven, by prayer, by groans and shouts, by sighs and anguish, and agony that seem to push us to despair, to discouragement, to blasphemy: to atheism, to abandonment by God and all His heaven."

(L 54).

We can see in this, something far more than a passing discouragement or a hesitation out of weakness. It is a temptation to atheism, to despair. It is a radical questioning of faith which is the foundation of hope.

Fr. Rene Thuilier, Minim and biographer of Fr. Barre, praises his faith in saying that Nicolas Barre seemed to 'see' the truths of the faith rather than believe in them. In reality, Fr. Barre's faith was exactly the opposite of 'seeing'. It is consent to the truth in spite of darkness. He believed because he wished to believe. His faith is a struggle and a willing acceptance in the night, a 'hoping against hope" (FM 13).

In sheer faith, Fr Barre looks at God's graces as favours which God 'distributes or refuses, which He gives and takes away. as He pleases' (MAP 198). In faith, "we remain constant in carrying out our apostolic activity and in the faithful practice of the duties of our state" (L 46)

In the Spiritual Canticles, Fr. Barre describes a soul full of hope and trust:

All her happiness lies in the letting go of her will.

All her eternal riches lie in neither having. nor desiring to have, anything." (SC 24)

## References

The texts of Fr Nicolas Barre

**Director in the Darkness** by Dr. William Makin

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