

Homily for the Joint DMJ/CJ Celebration Day in England for the Commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the death of Our Venerable Founder

Emmaus May 2015

150 years ago Constant Van Crombrugghe died. But he lives on in us his daughters and his sons. Our Venerable Founder continues to inspire and that inspiration has been adapted, developed, reformulated and shaped by many generations of DMJs, Josephites (CJ) and our sisters in Belgium.

A twofold question could be asked;
What would the Founder make of us today? And Given our varied realities what would he do today?

Today he sees his daughters and sons working in many countries of the world, some of which he may not have even heard of. He would also see us doing a diverse range of apostolates; education, health, parish, social work, advocacy you name it - but is all this work recognisably part of his vision? I think the answer to this is “yes” because it is essentially evangelising, about nurturing growth into fullness of personhood in Christ. Boys, girls, Mums, Dads, teachers, doctors, nurses, co-workers, the elderly as well as the young, all have been brought to the face of Christ by our actions essentially through the tenderness and compassion that underpins all we do. Douceur, politesse, Esprit de familie, zeal, mercy are for all of us the tools through which we express our community life and apostolic ministry. These are attractive qualities. They invite and welcome encounter...and when that encounter takes place what do people see? – The face of Christ the loving shepherd, the friend, the merciful, the consoler, the encourager.

The reason I remain a son of CVC (Constant Van Crombrugghe) is precisely that our CVC way is, I believe, a vital and vitalizing expression of the Good news of the aboriginal love of God for all. But these CVC qualities/attributes/ habits/ Charisms- call them what you will - are not just tools of evangelisation they are evangelical in their own right. They are good news because they are the way of Christ the good shepherd who guides and protects, nourishes and leads his flock to green pastures and in doing so calls it to conversion. Pope Francis in an address to the Brazilian Bishops during World Youth week in 2014 said;

“In reference to the conversion in pastoral care, I would like to remind you that “pastoral care” is nothing other than the exercise of the Church’s motherhood. She gives birth, breastfeeds, let’s grow, corrects, nourishes, leads by the hand.... There is need therefore for a Church that is capable of rediscovering the **womb of mercy**. Without mercy it is scarcely possible today to penetrate into a world of the “injured”, who need understanding, forgiveness and love”.

Our First Reading text from Isaiah 2:1-6, [the text about going up the mountain to encounter the Lord in his holy Temple] is one of aspiration to meet and grow. Through us people go up and encounter the truth the word of God which is his merciful love, resulting in peace and harmony. The Lucan text of the Ascension used for our Gospel is also obviously about the going up of the Lord to the heavenly throne but before he goes he calls his disciples and us “witnesses” to the Good News of the sacrificial merciful love of God for us. And when he disappears from their sight, even without the fullness of the Holy Spirit, The Advocate, they are full of praise and joy. Well so much more for us today who have the fullness of Pentecost and the fullness of the evangelising word. Pope Francis says in Evangelium Gaudium 174

“All evangelization is based upon that word, listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. ...The Church does not evangelise unless she constantly allows herself to be evangelised. It is indispensable

that the word of God be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity. God's word, listened to and celebrated, above all in the Eucharist, nourishes and inwardly strengthens Christians, enabling them to offer an authentic witness to the Gospel in daily life. ... The preaching of the word, living and effective, prepares for the reception of the sacrament, and in the sacrament that word attains its maximum efficacy."

So key words are coming to the fore; witness, evangelisation, the Word, tenderness and compassion, conversion. These are all part of the parcel wrapped up in our charism of *douceur*, *politesse*, zeal and mercy that is our CVC gift to the Church.

Going back to my initial questions what would CVC think of us today? Well I think he'd be proud and full of praise – why not? We've survived if not thrived, doing excellent work in God's vineyard for nigh on 200 years and 150 of those without him here with us. It is in many ways a different life and approach to ministry to that which he knew but he was an adaptor (as noted in the opening of the CJ constitutions). That is what we have done over these years, we've adapted, but clothed those adaptations with those same charisms which we so cherish across the centuries, cultures and countries we've worked in.

And what would the Founder do today? Well I think he would encourage us to be resolute and courageous in our adaption to the times and yet call us to be true to our charism with zeal for the souls placed in our care and above all to do it with a sense of "tenderness and compassion, slow to anger and rich in mercy" that reveals Christ in the midst of our turbulent times and sometimes disturbing world. We must continue to be Fathers and Mothers to them or perhaps Joseph and Mary to them. I like to think CVC would perhaps realise that our way has matured and deepened and he'd enter into it because the generations of our religious ancestors have forged the basic tools he gave us in the furnace of witness by the white heat of the Holy Spirit [sorry Harold Wilson!] tempering our charisms and thus making them stronger and purifying them and thus making them clearer. Take a look around you gathered here today. We are the witnesses of a vivid and much needed expression of the glory of knowing Christ. We are Good News, for many have, are and will continue to come to encounter and know Christ through us. No, CVC would not be proud...he is proud.

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