

Spiritual Message – October 2015
Quebec Provincial Leadership Team
Benevolence¹

Benevolence is one of the core values which we, the Quebec Leadership Team, are prioritizing. And what a challenging value it is!

Lytta Basset, a contemporary author, tells us:

*Coming into the world was a frightening experience. Taking root there would have been impossible without the benevolence of at least one person. Without it, we would simply not have been able to survive.*²

But what is benevolence? Among the many possible answers, we can say that benevolence is compassion; it is the goodness which rejoices in another's existence.

Certainly, God casts a benevolent look on each one of us. God wants us to be aware that we are always *in the presence of [a God] who wants to be with us, who is comfortable with us even when we are not comfortable with ourselves.*³

Since God's benevolence is generally transmitted through a human being, it is both important and necessary for us to become benevolent people. We know well that it is almost impossible to better ourselves if no one expects anything good from us. Unfortunately, we often look at others, and even at ourselves, in a negative way.

Unfortunate too is our tendency to shape God in this same image! But what a misrepresentation, what a false image of God! God is Benevolence itself and welcomes us unconditionally and wants us to respond to this welcome.

*As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust. (Ps. 103: 13-14)*



Such is the

And God wants us to resemble him. God believes that each person has the capacity to accept the benevolence directed towards her/him and to offer it to others. In accepting the benevolence of others, we learn, little by little, to look at ourselves and others benevolently. In the presence of a benevolent person, we are empowered to be ourselves, no matter what we have done. We know that this person only wants what is best for us, looks on us as precious and rejoices in our existence. In this person, we recognize God.

benevolent look of Jesus for each person. We find an

example of this unconditional benevolence in Jesus' perception of Zacchaeus, a sinner known for his dishonesty. Jesus even asks him for hospitality. (Luke 19, 5) Jesus wants to be in the presence of Zacchaeus. Jesus offers him a benevolence which motivates Zacchaeus to set out again on the path of relationship and to become responsible for his actions.

Daily, Zacchaeus experienced the contempt of his faith community, not to mention the feeling of being rejected by God. Through mere contact with Jesus, he immediately and clearly saw what was destroying his relationship with the Other. It was as if he were looking into God's mirror and, almost instantaneously, this discovery moved him to decide to change his way of living.

This story of Zacchaeus continues today in every life-story, each one with its own color. For example, a person who feels rejected by God might be tempted to perceive her/his self-worth by resorting to perfectionism which fosters the illusion of being in good standing with others and with God or by resorting to extreme activism, including paradoxically altruistic and committed service. But these two attitudes can sever authentic interpersonal relationships.

And God wants to have an authentic relationship with us. God focuses on our core rather than on our behaviour. God does not want to make us feel guilty, accuse us or punish us. God believes in the transforming power of a benevolent glance. God looks to the future, towards what we are capable of doing and being with his help.

So, let us allow God to define us. Jesus recognized Zacchaeus as a true son of Abraham, a child of God. God recognizes each of us as his beloved, as his chosen in whom he is well pleased and on whom his favor rests. (Mt. 3: 17 and Is. 42: 1)

Questions for reflection and/or discussion

1. What words, what ideas in this text speak to you? How do they speak to you?
2. What Scripture passage or which of Jesus' actions speak to you of benevolence?

3.



4.

5.

Who is someone who has believed in you, in your potential? How has this person shown benevolence towards you?

Recall a situation in which you have been benevolent to someone with whom you have no affinity.

Who from among those around you is in need of your benevolent glance? How can you be God's benevolence for that person?

¹Much of this text is based on the book, *Oser la bienveillance*, by Lytta Basset.

¹ Lytta Basset, *Oser la bienveillance*. Paris : Albin Michel, 2014, p. 307.

² John Kirvan, *Raw Faith*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Sorin Books, 2000, p. 111.