

## LIVING FRATERNITY

**Theme: « Our Sister death ....how must we welcome it? »**

In November, we offer you the following from the text *The Passage by Kahlil Gibran*. We do not often have the opportunity to reflect and share together on the theme of death. These excerpts will allow us to consider in fraternity this passage of life towards another life that our patron saint Francis called *our sister death*.

Recall: At the monthly meeting, we would suggest a deepening of the Gospel and our Rule of life. Thus the fraternity is invited to make good use of the Bible at its disposal.

*Good preparation --- Good meeting*

### NOVEMBER 2015 MONTHLY MEETING

**Opening Prayer and Song:** (According to the Ritual or chosen by the Fraternity)

**Reading:** (choose a person who reads calmly)

#### **Death ....**

*A word that terrifies us, but a reality which we must all face. In the world in which we live, we are not very often confronted by death, we hear about it on television, it is sanitized in funeral parlours. But who has held a dying person in their arms? Who has felt life leave a body? In other countries, it is quite different, the people rub shoulders with death daily and consider it as a reality of life. For them, death is painful but they accept it still more easily than we do.*

*When I was younger, I read some books on life after death, and I believed that I did not fear it any longer. Several years later I discovered Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and her work with the dying. Death no longer evoked shadows for me but it was a light. Nevertheless, when I received a diagnosis of cancer, I panicked: I saw the spectre of death, and I realized that my fear was still there. Why?*

*After much reflection I understood that this fear contained many other emotions: the guilt for causing grief for my relatives, to abandoning them, the deception of not having accomplished everything that I wanted to accomplish, the fear of suffering, the sadness for not having known my future grandchildren... Death is much better accepted when it comes at the end of long and cruel suffering. It is terrible to see someone you love suffer without accomplishing everything I would have wanted to accomplish. We should rejoice for the deceased.*

## **Sharing:**

Take a moment to share on the previous paragraphs using the following questions:

(About 15 minutes)

1 – Do you agree with the content? Why?

2 – What is more difficult, to be confronted by one's own death or that of a dear person? Why?

Continue the reading.

*All the books dealing with spirituality maintain that death is a tool for transformation. It is often when we are condemned that we realize that we are not fully living, and that we authorize ourselves to do so. Certain persons draw a lesson from their ordeal and come out of it enhanced. Therefore the illness can be a very strong agent of transformation and awakening.*

*Even when the illness is concluded by death, an awakening has happened, a true transformation. These people have healed their soul before dying. Dying before death, this means to be ready to let go at any moment, leave the past scenarios that have a tendency to be repeated indefinitely.*

*We are also told to live as if this day was the last, by being aware that we could die at any time. Not in a state of fear, but in a state of intensity! See, smell, touch, feel, in other words become aware, cease living like an automaton! Thinking about one's own death, is not having a morbid spirit, it is touching Life!*

## **Sharing:**

Take a moment of sharing on the following question:

■ What do I think of it?

Continue the reading.

*Professional mourners, stop moping! On the other side of the mirror, death shines with its thousand splendors...*

*We often speak of death as a passage. We also say that death does not exist, since Life continues afterwards in another manner. Our life would only be an illusion, as if we were living in a dream without being aware of it, and when we die we awaken and we realize that it was not a dream. The greatest question is: what happens afterwards? We read and hear about so many things! And each religion believes it possesses the exclusivity of paradise, each according to its culture evidently. I believe that what is most important, is to die in peace with one self and with others. Dying in a state of letting go, of abandoning. Without fear. What will happen afterwards will be according to our emotions and our beliefs. In the Book of the Deceased Ti is aware of this, the monsters disappear. It is like having a nightmare: if we realize that we are dreaming the fear disappears and the monster becomes harmless.*

*It is certain that death must seem more difficult for someone who believes that everything ends, that there is nothing afterwards. But is this nothingness more terrifying than the idea of hell and the eternal flames? In her work of accompaniment of the dying, Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross has realized that these people need more than medication to ease their pain. The dying frighten, we*

*shun them as if they were plague victims. However, they are really in need of compassion, of an attentive presence, of someone listening. They do not need to feel our fears and our sorrow. This is why there are volunteers who often accompany the dying in centres for palliative care. Marie de Hennezel, a psychologist in such a centre, has written a very nice book on her experiences with the dying (see references at the bottom of page 4).*

**Reflection:** A moment of silence, then answer the following question:

- Have you had this experience as a volunteer or have accompanied someone?

(About 15 minutes)

Continue the reading.

*Christine Longaker directed for a number of years seminars on the formation for the accompaniment of the dying. She maintains that facing death prove to be for certain persons a touching and inspiring adventure... a gift for life. Here according to her are four tasks of life:*

- *Understand and transform the suffering*
- *Create a link, heal the relationships and let go*
- *Prepare one's self spiritually for death*
- *Find a meaning to life*

### **Explanation of Palliative Care**

*Our Secular Franciscan brother, psychologist Dr. Richard Casavant, was the founding director of the Ottawa-Carleton Palliative Care at the Élizabeth-Bruyère Health Centre in the early 80's. Its purpose is to provide pain and symptom control to the terminally-ill as well as respite-care to the family. Having studied with Dr. Kübler-Ross and other seminal practitioners, Palliative Care fosters a natural process of life surrounded by the loved ones. "We have changed from abandoning the patient in the last dark corner room with curtains drawn and door shut with no one going in into a pleasant homey, warm and calm ambiance where the focus is the patient and family, by expert staff well trained in pain and symptom control and volunteers. In dying fear of pain is the major issue patients have reported followed by fear of the unknown. People who had a strong faith died much more calmly and more so when surrounded by their loved ones."*

*Death is a complex subject on which we could discourse for a long time. We can see it as a natural and essential phenomenon of life, or we can see it as a monstrosity. This brings to mind the words of the Bohemian Rhapsody: the young man knows that he will die, and he goes through all sorts of emotions: the regret, the fear, the revolt, and finally the let go. ... Nothing matters any more, as if you could see it, nothing has any importance for me ... In any case the wind continues to blow.*

### **Biblical Reflection:**

Next listen, in silence, the reading of the following excerpt from the Gospel according to John 12, 24-25 ... and then take some time to answer the questions that follow:

*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

1. What does this Gospel teach us?
2. To whom does it speak?
3. How does it reach us personally?
4. Where is the message of hope? How and why?

## **Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions**

### **Rule**

#### **Article 19, par. 3**

Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

### **General Constitutions**

#### **Article 23.3**

To safeguard peace in their family, the brothers and the sisters, in an appropriate time, will set up by will the disposition of their possessions.

### **Life – Objective:**

In the month of November, let us try to remember the happy memories that we have had with our dear departed, as gifts from God in our lives.

## **Events and Information from the Church and the Order**

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

**End of the meeting:** (a prayer or song chosen by the fraternity)

### **At home**

It is good to not hide your head in the sand by refusing to think about our death. On the contrary. We must think very seriously about it, while we are still healthy, to make our will, to put in writing our wishes as to the disposition of our possessions and to the power of attorney concerning our health needs and the sort of end of life we desire. It is important.

Also, to help and support us in a more profound reflection on death, here the titles of books found at the end of the text of Kahlil Gibran:

**ON DEATH AND DYING** Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, (Simon & Shuster/Touchstone), 1969

**Death: The Final Stage of Growth**, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, (Simon & Shuster/Touchstone), 1974

**LA MORT INTIME** Marie de Hennezel, Éditions Livre de Poche

**The Tibetan Book of the Living and Dying**, Sogyal Rimpoché,

**Life After Life**, Raymond Moody, (Harper)