

MODERN SPIRITUAL MASTERS SERIES

BROTHER ROGER  
OF TAIZÉ

Essential Writings



*Selected with an Introduction by*

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## A Parable of Community



### *A Community of Kindness of Heart and Simplicity*

When I was still a child, some summer afternoons we would get together to read texts aloud. Among the stories that were often read were some excerpts of the history of Port-Royal, written by Sainte-Beuve. It told of a Cistercian community of women that lived near Paris in the seventeenth century.

When the abbess died in 1602, Angélique Arnauld, the daughter of a Parisian lawyer, replaced her. According to the custom of the time, her grandfather had taken steps to ensure that she would be elevated to that office despite her young age. She remained in the monastery against her wishes and lived there for several years in great inner distress.

One day, writes Sainte-Beuve, when the young abbess was seventeen years old, a priest passed through and gave a meditation to the community. It was common knowledge that this priest led a disordered life, but that day he expressed clearly God's love, his inexhaustible and unlimited goodness. Those words caused an inner upheaval in the young Angélique Arnauld: "God touched me so deeply that, from that moment on, I considered myself more fortunate to be

a religious than I had previously thought myself unfortunate to be one.”

As a result, returning to the wellsprings of their vocation, she introduced radical changes in the life of the community; gradually it became known far and wide and had a great impact. Among others, Blaise Pascal’s sister entered the community. Men came to live beside the monastery for shorter or longer periods of prayer and study; they were known as the “Messieurs de Port-Royal.”

My mother had so much admiration for that period of the history of Port-Royal-des-Champs that she had placed a portrait of Mother Angélique Arnauld on her desk. “She’s my invisible friend,” she used to say.

And myself, I was captivated to discover what a few women, living in community, had been able to accomplish. Close to our house there was a large yew tree with very dense foliage. One day when I was about sixteen, I stopped by that tree and said to myself, “If those few women, responding in all lucidity to a call to community life and giving their life for Christ, had so much impact on those around them, could not a few men living in community do the same thing?”

Since then, I think that I never lost the intuition that community life could be a sign that God is love, and love alone. Gradually the conviction took shape in me that it was essential to create a community with men determined to give their whole life and who would always try to understand one another and be reconciled, a community where kindness of heart and simplicity would be at the center of everything.

— *God Is Love Alone*, 22–24

### *You Are No Longer Alone*

Desiring as you do to give your life because of Christ and the Gospel (Mk 10:29, Mt 16:25) always keep in mind that you are advancing with him toward the light, even in the midst of your own darkness.

So, no longer looking back (Lk 9:62), run forward in the footsteps of Jesus the Christ. He is leading you along a path of light: I am, but also, you are the light of the world (Jn 8:12, Mt 5:14).

You wish to prepare the ways of the Lord Christ for many others (Mk 1:3), kindling a fire even in the world's darkest nights (Lk 12:49).

You know that Jesus the Christ came for all (Titus 2:11), not just for a few. Risen, he is united with every human being without exception. Such is the catholicity of heart God has set within you.

Will you let an inner life grow within you, one which has neither beginning nor end? There, you stand at the threshold of the Gospel's joy, where human solidarities plunge their roots.

Making the earth a place where all can live, be they nearby or far away, is one of the beautiful pages of the Gospel for you to write by your life.

By forgetting yourself, by not seeking your own advantage, you are enabled to stand firm in the midst of the human family's situations with all their constant ebb and flow. Will you seek to understand, without letting yourself be carried away by the successive waves?

By sharing, are you among those who, with very little, generate a fine human hope?

With almost nothing, are you a creator of reconciliation in that communion of love which is the Body of Christ, his Church?

Sustained by a shared momentum, rejoice. You are no longer alone; in all things you are advancing together with your brothers. With them, you are called to live the parable of community. — *The Sources of Taizé*, 48–49

### *Peace of Heart*

The peace of your heart makes life beautiful for those around you.

Being wracked with worry has never been a way of living the Gospel. Founding your faith on torment would mean building a house on sand (Mt 7:26–27).

At every moment, do you hear these words of Jesus the Christ: “Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. Let your hearts cease to be troubled and afraid” (Jn 14:27)?

This deep-seated peace provides the lightness needed to set out once again, when failure or discouragements weigh on your shoulders.

And sheer wonder comes alive, along with a breath of poetry, a simplicity of life and, for those able to understand it, a mystical vision of the human person.

For you this Gospel prayer: *Bless us, Lord Christ; bless us and those you have entrusted to us. Keep us in the spirit of the Beatitudes* (Mt 5:3–12), *joy, simplicity, mercy.*

*Joy.* Peace of heart is a mainstay of the inner life; it sustains us as we make our way upward toward joy.

Peace and joy are Gospel pearls. They come to fill chasms of anxiety.

Will you welcome each new day as God's today? In every season, will you find ways of discovering life's poetry, on days full of light as in winter's frozen nights? Will you discover how to bring joy to your humble dwelling by small signs that cheer the heart?

The presence of the Risen Christ leads to unexpected moments of happiness; it breaks through your nights. "Darkness is not darkness with you; the night shines bright as day" (Ps 139:12).

Do not be afraid of suffering. In the very depths of the abyss, a perfection of joy can be found in communion with Christ Jesus.

Dare to rejoice in what God is accomplishing through you and around you. Then all forms of pessimism about yourself and about others, which were waging war on your soul, will melt away.

If you forgot the gifts of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:6-7) in you, and if you lost the last traces of self-esteem, then what a risk of losing your balance...! The void attracts, fascinates.

With joy comes a sense of wonder. Such a joy needs nothing less than our whole being in order to shine forth. It lies in the transparent openness of peaceful love.

Unless the grain of wheat dies... (Jn 12:24). Paschal joy, the joy of Easter, brings healing to the secret wounds of the soul. It does not make the heart proud. It can do without applause. It goes straight to the gateways of light.

*Simplicity.* Through the Gospel, you have heard of the young man searching in God for the will of his love. He came to Christ with his questioning. One day Jesus addressed this call to him. It is one of the most astonishing in the Gospel: "There is one thing you lack: sell what you have, give the

money to the poor, then come, follow me” (Mt 19:21). And the young man went away sad.

Why did he go away? Because he had great possessions. He wanted to follow Christ and at the same time hold on to his riches. He did not have the freedom to give, through love, even what he possessed.

Our vocation as community has committed us to live solely from our work, accepting neither donations nor bequests nor gifts — nothing, absolutely nothing.

The boldness involved in not ensuring any capital for ourselves, without fear of possible poverty, is a source of incalculable strength.

The spirit of poverty does not consist in looking poverty-stricken, but in arranging everything with imagination, in creation’s simple beauty.

Happy all who love simplicity: in them is the Kingdom of God (Mt 5:3).

A constant simplifying of our existence keeps us far from those tortuous paths where we go astray.

Simplicity devoid of burning charity is a shadow without light. If a great simplicity of life were full of bitterness and laden with judgments, then where would be the joyfulness of each present day?

Sunlight breaking suddenly through the clouds: when the energies of the prime of life combine in you with the spirit of childhood, your soul draws near to serene joy.

*Mercy.* If you were to lose mercy, heartfelt compassion, you would have lost everything.

Will you let yourself be challenged by that absolute of love, the call to forgive even seventy times seven times, in other words always? (Mt 18:21–22).

With lightened step, you will go forward from one discovery to another.

For those who love and forget themselves, life is filled with serene beauty. All friendship involves an inner struggle. And sometimes the cross comes to illuminate the unfathomable depth of loving.

Rather than trying to impose yourself by creating a bad conscience around you, or slipping into an ironic tone, will you let yourself overflow with kindness?

In the transparency of this loving, admit your mistakes simply and do not waste time looking at the speck in your brother's eye (Mt 7:3–5).

Happy the community that becomes an abyss of kindness: it lets Christ shine through, incomparably.

*Trust Is at Hand.* Christ, love of all loving, is a fire that burns within you. And when love is forgiveness, your heart, though tested, begins to live once more.

The contemplation of his forgiveness becomes a radiant kindness in hearts that are simple. And the holiness of Christ is no longer out of reach.

We know him so little, but he is in our midst (Jn 1:26). And there arises a breath that will never die away . . . and that little is enough for us.

Do not be afraid, trust is at hand, and with it a happiness.

—*The Sources of Taizé*, 62–68

### *A First Rule of Life*

While I was still young I had realized that I would need a point of reference on which to build, references taken from the Gospels which spoke powerfully to me. Without something very central to which I would return throughout my

life, how would I ever develop myself within? It was not that I wanted to make some sort of system, but that I hoped to create a little inner unity. If it was going to be a question of taking great risks for God and for Christ — and it was risks and not ease I hoped for — there would be a need to keep a watch on myself, to refer to something which throughout my life would be a point of reference, something constantly to return to.

— Throughout your day, let work and rest be quickened by the Word of God.

— Keep inner silence in all things so as to dwell with Christ.

— Be filled with the spirit of the Beatitudes, joy, simplicity, mercy.

— Quoted by Kathryn Spink, *A Universal Heart*, 45ff.

### *The Life Commitment*

Beloved brother, what are you asking for?

*The mercy of God and the community of my brothers.*

May God complete in you what he has begun.

Brother, you trust in God's mercy: remember that the Lord Christ comes to help the weakness of your faith; committing himself with you, he fulfils for you his promise:

Truly, there is no one who has left everything because of Christ and the Gospel who will not receive a hundred times as much at present — brothers and sisters and mothers and children — and persecutions too, and in the age to come eternal life (Mk 10:29–30, Lk 18:29–30).

This is a way contrary to all human reason; you can only advance along it by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7), always

sure that whoever gives their life for Christ's sake will find it (Mt 16:25).

From now on walk in the steps of Christ. Do not be anxious about tomorrow (Mt 6:34). First seek God's Kingdom and its justice (Mt 6:33). Surrender yourself, give yourself, and good measure, pressed down, shaken together, brimming over, will be poured out for you.

Whether you wake or sleep, night and day the desire for trust in God and in your brothers springs up and grows, you do not know how (Mk 4:27).

Avoid making sure you are noticed by others to gain their admiration (Mt 6:31). Never let your inner life make you look sad, like a hypocrite who puts on a grief-stricken air to attract attention. Anoint your head and wash your face, so that only your Father who is in secret knows what your heart intends (Mt 6:16–18).

Stay simple and full of joy, the joy of the merciful, the joy of brotherly love.

Be vigilant. If you have to rebuke a brother, keep it between the two of you (Mt 18:15).

Be concerned to establish communion with your neighbor.

Be open about yourself, remembering that you have a brother whose charge it is to listen to you. Bring him your understanding so that he can fulfil his ministry with joy (Heb 13:17).

The Lord Christ, in his compassion and his love for you, has chosen you to be in the Church a sign of brotherly love. It is his will that with your brothers you live the parable of community.

So, refusing to look back (Phil 3:13), praising, blessing, and singing Christ your Lord.

*Receive me, Lord Christ, and I will live; may my expectation be a source of joy.*

Brother, remember that it is Christ who calls you and that it is to him that you are now going to respond.

Will you, for love of Christ, consecrate yourself to him with all your being?

*I will.*

Will you henceforth fulfil your service of God within our community, in communion with your brothers?

*I will.*

Will you, renouncing all ownership, live with your brothers not only in community of material goods but also in community of spiritual goods, in utter openness of heart?

*I will.*

Will you, in order to be more available to serve with your brothers, and in order to give yourself in undivided love to Christ, remain in celibacy?

*I will.*

Will you, so that we may be of one heart and one mind and so that the unity of our common service may be fully achieved, adopt the orientations of the community expressed by the prior, bearing in mind that he is a poor servant within the community?

*I will.*

Will you, always discerning Christ in your brothers, watch over them in good days and bad, in suffering and in joy?

*I will.*

In consequence, because of Christ and the Gospel, you are henceforth a brother of our community.

— *The Sources of Taizé*, 72–74