

**September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021 webinar:**  
**“Returning to the source: Charism and the prophetic character**  
**in an evolving consecrated life”**

---

**A Prophetic Letting Go?**

**Nathalie Roberge, o.p.**

It is almost trite to say that the COVID-19 pandemic took us by surprise. We all already know that from experience! Our personal lives and those of our institutes have been turned upside down by this virus and, unfortunately, still are. To use an expression heard a few times and which describes the reality bluntly: “we’ve lost control.” Overnight, our daily lives changed dramatically. Even more tragically, brothers and sisters who were dear to us have passed away, in conditions we could never have imagined or wanted.

At the heart of this viral earthquake, however, a strong desire has manifested itself: the desire to live. With often modest means, we have strived to take care of life. Our creativity has been deployed on material, relational and spiritual levels. Isn’t that a sign of our capacity for resilience? It must be said that consecrated life has long expertise in that field: throughout time and in various ways, it has considered that part of its vocation is to listen to the needs that arise in order to be at the service of life.

In the current process of resilience, a spiritual attitude has gradually emerged over the past few months. It has often been referred to in terms of “letting go.” Inspiring and energizing, however, the expression is particularly modern. Even non-believers use it. To translate this fundamental spiritual disposition, our ancestors in the faith would probably have spoken of an act of worship or even of surrendering to God. However, should we give up using the formula because of that? If “letting go” has the interest of being intelligible to the ears of our contemporaries, it is undoubtedly useful to shed some additional light on its Christian and prophetic dimension.

In everyday language, letting go often evokes the fact of momentarily disconnecting from the hectic pace of everyday life in order to enjoy life. We only have to remember the

advertisements that extol the benefits of travel, good meals, spas, yoga, etc., in order to regain a certain inner balance.

From a psychological point of view, letting go can also refer to the importance of accepting one's limits, of accepting the difference of the other, of agreeing to go through one's grief, of living in the present moment. Depending on one's particular journeys, everyone finds themselves at one time or another confronted with considering these various aspects as avenues for growth.

Without denying the many benefits of the first two levels of meaning raised here, our following of Christ nevertheless calls for a much broader horizon. How can letting go make we baptized and consecrated people unified and fruitful? Under what conditions does it fit into our journey towards Christian holiness? Without being exhaustive, some lines of thought are likely to maintain, even enrich the quality of our spiritual response in a period of daily upheaval.

From the outset, it appears essential to situate letting go within a relational perspective. The primary emphasis is thus placed on the bonds of communion that weave together our existence — even before the structures that support them. Seen in that light, letting go is fundamentally about opening up to the other.<sup>1</sup> It is an invitation to risk trusting to the point of allowing oneself to be reached and displaced by one's own reality, which generally involves forgetting oneself, or even giving one's life.

If this dynamism of letting go is expressed concretely in our fraternal relationships in society — and especially in our being together as religious communities — it nevertheless takes its source and ultimate meaning in God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Perhaps it is more than ever necessary to rediscover how the Trinitarian communion shapes our prophetic way of being in the world.

In God, each of the divine persons is outstretched towards the other, in a love that goes as far as total self-giving. This is the very being of God. Now, it is precisely from this communion that the mystery of the Incarnation emanates. The Father sends his Son to earth, and the Son consents to this abasement in order to lead us to go with him, in this Trinitarian movement of gift and communion.

Certainly, it would be inappropriate to speak of letting go in God. In him, everything proceeds from the freedom of love. No hold stands in the way of life. That said, the fact remains that the revelation of the Trinitarian mystery illuminates our own letting go. The

---

1. Openness to others is one of the major challenges of Pope Francis in the encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*.

revelation resolutely orients our letting go towards the freedom of love, a freedom that involves a radical gift of oneself, for the purpose of the Kingdom. Even more, we discover that we are not left to ourselves in this process of disappropriation. Ever since baptism grafted us onto Christ, the Trinity itself has accompanied and supported us. This “being with us” comes about in various ways. Suffice it to mention the presence of the Holy Spirit who, in the midst of daily challenges, brings us light and inspiration. It is also difficult to ignore the gift of the Eucharist taking place on Holy Thursday. Through this memorial, it is the very act of relinquishment accomplished by Christ on the cross that is actualized, an act that we are invited to unite with personally. Should we repeat that this madness of love leads to the fullness of life that is the resurrection?

When it comes to letting go, the men and women who founded our institutes reveal themselves to be genuine and inspiring witnesses. They had their share of trials, but they had some prophetic twists as well. It would undoubtedly be appropriate, in this time of pandemic, to revisit their legacy to find the spiritual pearls that would be apt to stimulate our walk in faith.<sup>2</sup> To cite just one example, it suffices to recall a letter from Monsignor de Laval in which, confronted with the divergent views of his successor, he lifts the veil on the depth of his attachment to Christ: “But in the midst of all this turmoil, we must not [let our spirits] get down; if men have the power to destroy, the hand of Our Lord is infinitely more powerful to build. We just have to be faithful to him and let him be.”<sup>3</sup>

“To be faithful to him and let him do it”: the expression is splendid! It highlights both the active and passive dimensions of letting go. Doesn't it tell us, in short, that the summit of this attitude consists in opening oneself to the Other, to the point of entrusting oneself totally to Him? In this sense, the present crisis can become an opportunity to give new life to the act of trusting surrender of ourselves made on the day of our religious profession. It is probably at this price that we will be prophetic, even at the heart of the pandemic.

---

2. Would it be relevant to broaden the approach to establish a collection of intercommunity texts?

3. Mgr. François de Laval, Letter to Monsieur Milon, fall 1689.