

Living Holy Cross Spirituality

Basil Moreau passed on a rich and enduring heritage to the religious family of Holy Cross and to all those associated with Holy Cross through life and ministry. In fact, this gift has been a tremendous blessing for the entire Church—especially since his beatification on September 15, 2007.

The Moreau heritage is a challenging call to transformation; it is a heritage to be lived so that the message and mission of Jesus can continue. It is an incarnational heritage that can be recognized primarily in the context of daily life and in the faithful striving to live and love as Jesus did. Here we find little theory and mostly practice. As Father Moreau understood it, personal transformation has significant apostolic implications; it is nothing less than the catalyst for the transformation of our world. As he said, this was the primary way in which “to prepare for better times than ours.” If taken up faithfully, that preparation would be the prelude to realization.

This heritage is born of the charism of Holy Cross, that distinctive gift given to Basil Moreau and continued by all those sharing his legacy. That charism is to revitalize Christian faith, to regenerate society, and to realize those “better times” by responding to the most pressing needs in our society and our world.

How do we live this heritage? How do we take up this revitalization, regeneration, and realization? What guides our response? What are the basic elements of Holy Cross spirituality for daily life? Four elements will be highlighted here.

Conforming to Christ

The first element is “Conforming to Christ.” Every dimension of our personal lives must reflect the example and teaching of Jesus. This is the solid foundation upon which all transformation is built. Father Moreau writes, “Christianity is nothing else than the life of Jesus Christ reproduced in our conduct.” Such conformity is not confined to special occasions or periodic events. It must pervade our entire day, every day. Because this conformity must be complete, there are no exceptions. Moreau teaches us in one of his sermons,

In whatever interior dispositions you may be and in whatever life situation you may find yourself, look at your Model and apply yourself to imitating him; be assured that in doing so you will be perfect and you will have a sure guarantee of your salvation; because our movement toward glory depends on our resemblance to Jesus Christ.

This imitation, this conformity, is the basis of Holy Cross spirituality.

Trusting in Providence

The second element is “Trusting in Providence.” The work of Providence and the call to trust in Providence appear on almost every page of Basil Moreau’s writings. This was

one of his most profound convictions. It remained unshaken regardless of the dilemmas or disasters that confronted him. “Divine providence has given us too many motives for encouragement and consolation for me to refrain from asking you to join with me in thanksgiving, and to leave your whole future in God’s hands without anxiety over the things which take up the time of those who are of the world.” Whether he had to deal with disappointments in ministries, lost opportunities, financial setbacks, or even unexpected deaths among the members, he was convinced that God had been, is now, and will continue to guide and bless us. Our task is to be attentive to the many ways that God’s will can be revealed in daily life. He assures us,

I am convinced that Providence, which has in the past done everything necessary for the development and perfection of its work, will continue to bestow on us the most abundant blessings. To insure this, we must be constantly animated by the spirit of zeal and generosity which so holy an undertaking requires. We must place all our confidence in the Lord.

We have cause for such confidence because God is always present and active among us.

Being United

The third element is “Being United.” None of this is taken up in isolation from others. Our union and cooperation with others are more than camaraderie; they are a powerful force for transformation. In his very first letter to the community Father Moreau wrote, “To succeed in the important undertaking entrusted to us, we must be, first all, so closely united in charity as to form one mind and one soul.”

In another letter he said that our union is “a powerful lever with which we can move, direct, and sanctify the whole world.” This union is not a luxury; it is an urgent necessity. We must take the prophetic stance that simple differences need not degenerate into sharp divisions. Very early in its history, Holy Cross became international through its presence and in its personnel. It was necessary to work together as one if anything was to be accomplished effectively in continuing the mission and living the gospel. So it must be today. Through daily life, we must demonstrate the truth that it is possible for people of different perspectives and politics, languages and lifestyles, cultures and colors to live and work together. The choice to work for unity is ours. Father Moreau wrote,

Let us stand in closely united ranks and, far from separating and scattering, let us live in such a manner that, as it sees the members of our family, the world may say of us as it was said of the first Christians: ‘See how they love one another!’ This is the most ardent desire of my heart.

Unity is a gift that the heritage of Holy Cross can bring to the world.

Hoping in the Cross

The fourth element is “Hoping in the Cross.” Each of the preceding elements, and all of them together will lead to the cross, even as events of Jesus’ own life led him to the cross. Basil Moreau was blunt about this. “In vain shall we seek any way leading to heaven other than the road to Calvary.” This is a fundamental tenet of Christianity and a consequence of following Jesus of Nazareth. Moreau challenges us to hope in the cross because he knows it is a blessing that will lead to new life. The motto he gave to Holy Cross is *Ave Crux, Spes Unica*, “Hail cross, our only hope.” It expresses his confidence in the promise of that new life.

In 1857, when he visited Canada (Montreal) and the United States (New York, Notre Dame, Philadelphia), he offered some reflections to the community members in Canada that articulate well his understanding of the place of the cross in the spiritual life, and in the heritage of Holy Cross. He explained,

In following Jesus we are sure of reaching heaven. To follow him, however, it is necessary to deny ourselves and carry the cross. If we carry our cross after Jesus we will live. Life is in the cross and no place else. But we must not only take up the cross, we must carry it with courage. If we drag it after us, if we abandon it after having taken it up, if we trample it underfoot, it will not save us. Human life is a long way of the cross. It is not necessary to enter the chapel or the church to run over the various stations. The way of the cross is everywhere and we walk along it every day in spite of ourselves and often unknown to us. After all, what else should we desire since there is no other way to reach heaven.

The cross holds the promise of transformation to new life; we must embrace it.

The elements of Holy Cross spirituality—“Conforming to Christ,” “Trusting in Providence,” “Being United,” and “Hoping in the Cross”—are much more than theological constructs or clever theories. They constitute a way of life that will be nurtured by personal and communal prayer, and specifically lived out through our own vocations and commitments. This Holy Cross way of life continues the mission of Jesus. So, it contributes to revitalizing faith, regenerating society, and realizing the “better times” that our world desperately needs and awaits. Evidently, this can only be, as Basil Moreau himself consistently said, “not a human work, but God’s very own.”

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