

Holy week

2021

50 years



Faith and Light
A treasure to share

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Introduction

Hello everyone,

In 1971, a miracle occurred in Lourdes which has animated us for 50 years. We wanted to be together to celebrate it, thanking the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate who inspired the founders.

Because of the pandemic, it isn't possible to have the meetings and pilgrimages that we had imagined, but we will be united virtually to keep the flame of Faith and Light alive more than ever.

During these days, we will experience the expectation of the resurrection together. A booklet, which has been sent to each community, will help us to follow every moment shared on YouTube.

- Let us begin today by remembering the Last Supper, the last meal of Christ with the twelve apostles on the evening of Maundy Thursday and by living the gesture of the Washing of the Feet.
- Tomorrow, we will live the Way of the Cross thanks to the communities who have mimed each station.
- On Saturday, we will be together in front of the Lourdes grotto, remembering Bernadette and the family of Loïc and Thaddée.
- On Sunday, we will sing our joy together, with Marie-Hélène Mathieu and others who wanted to share the wonder of an experience that has touched the four corners of the world.

Almost 300 people will be present on Zoom on 1st and 4th April but everyone will also be able to experience this celebration thanks to the You Tube broadcast.

These videos will allow our Orthodox friends, before 2nd May, to repeat or experience for the first time each moment and to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

Thank you to the translators and interpreters who have helped to bring these messages to everyone.

May the Spirit accompany us and breath in every house, in every community!

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Maundy Thursday

Message from Raúl Izquierdo and Maria-Silvia Tavares

International coordinators, Spain and Brazil

Dear Faith and Light brothers and sisters,

We are gathered here to experience this paschal time of the Passion, the Death and the Resurrection of Jesus, in this year when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of that Easter in 1971 and we want to remember who we are and how we built our history born from the need of Camille and Gérard, with their sons Loïc and Thaddée, to live their faith, to be welcomed and loved as they were. It is the deepest root of our movement.

During these 50 years, how many times have we welcomed and been welcomed, how many meetings have we held and how many times have we prayed together? How many times have we eaten together at the same table like a real family? How many times have we gone on a pilgrimage and celebrated the Feast of the Light, birthdays, how many retreats, anniversaries, summer holidays, and how many friends, hugs, smiles? How many mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, people with disabilities, friends, priests and pastors have already gone to heaven, watching over us and accompanying us. How many times have we washed each other's feet?

This is what makes up the simple life of any community. We deeply desire to experience the life of Jesus by befriending one another as Jesus befriended his disciples, women and men who followed him and believed in him.

Today, **Maundy Thursday**, we have in mind and heart the Gospel of John, chapter 13, with the washing of the feet carried out by Jesus to his disciples who were with him to celebrate the Passover meal. Jesus knelt and began to wash the feet of his disciples one by one. But Jesus did not just wash their feet, he asked them all to carry on doing it and to wash the feet of one another. And since then, we know that believing in Jesus and following him means loving and serving others. Today, we are called to relive this gesture, to make it a balm for every day, in our gestures, our actions and our decisions. And we also relive today the terrible loneliness of Jesus who will be betrayed, arrested, judged, humiliated and condemned to die on the cross like robbers and villains. We can contemplate the fear and suffering of Jesus that night in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples slept but Jesus failed to settle... "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want..." First, the betrayal by Judas, then that of Peter, who denied him three times. It was more hurtful than any punch...

Tomorrow, **Friday**, we will be able to contemplate Jesus through Isaiah chapter 53: “He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him of no account...” We can imagine the suffering of Jesus, on the one hand the physical with the endless blows and pains, but also the psychological, the pain of the soul feeling poor, alone and abandoned. Because the disciples, those who had eaten with him, who had shared their time and their life with him, had fled. Everyone, except for a few female disciples, including his mother, who remained with him to the foot of the cross. And we can place beside the cross of Jesus so many sisters and brothers who suffer from all kinds of pains...

On **Saturday**, we will experience expectation and confidence after the pain that precedes the joy of the Feast of the Resurrection, which we will celebrate on Sunday. The love of God for us is so great that he raised his son from the dead. The Resurrection is an explosion of joy because we know that nothing is impossible for God and that with Jesus, we will all rise again. Death and sin have been conquered forever; they will no longer have the last word. The first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus were, once again, the women and their testimony became a mission. Fears dwindle. Hope invades everything. It is the celebration, the dancing, the singing, the laughter, the freedom cry, the never-ending embrace... At Faith and Light, we really know all this! Communities called to celebrate in the midst of suffering, is this not a light for the world and the Churches? Is it not one of the greatest testimonies that we can give today?

Our Charter stipulates that the disabled person is a unique person, in their own right, with all rights, above all that of being loved, of being recognised in their being and their choices. She has the right to receive any help needed to go forward in all areas of her life, both spiritual and human. Faith and Light believes that every person is loved by God and that even the smallest is called to live in the life of Jesus, to receive all the spiritual wealth of their Church, the sacraments, the liturgical tradition... She is called to be a source of grace and peace for all the community, the Churches and the whole of humanity.

Our communities are places of meeting and welcome with, each one of us, our weaknesses, our strengths, our qualities and our faults. Were all called to grow. Essentially, our communities are places of growth for everyone. When we recognise ourselves as fragile, we welcome Jesus deeper into our hearts, we feel his presence and we listen to God telling us as in Isaiah 43 verse 1: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine!”

Another important sign of our community life is forgiveness. It is fundamental to strengthening our relationships, our bonds of friendship and trust. Forgive and be

forgiven. God is always ready to forgive and this is why we should always ask him to help us to forgive as he forgives us. Thus, I discover that Faith and Light is my place of belonging.

Have you ever thought that our communities are a miracle? Each community is made up of people whose life stories, cultures, social classes, races or beliefs, ages, physical conditions, professional backgrounds, nationalities are so different... that it is a miracle that we can come together. Jesus unites us with our weaknesses and our frailties.

According to our Charter, we are called to accompany people with an intellectual disability to help them to find peace of heart, hope and the desire to go forward. It is therefore necessary to live in the light of the Gospel. Little by little, we need to acquire the experience for that. Those involved in Faith and Light must become competent in their way of accompanying people who are suffering or in difficulty.

Faith and Light was born in 1971 at the feet of Our Lady of Lourdes, the mother of Jesus, who remained beside her son at the foot of the cross. She was the first disciple and, through her faith and her courage, she encouraged the men and women who followed Jesus. Let us entrust Faith and Light to her, she who has certainly accompanied us and experienced with us all our sorrows and joys. But, above all, let us live these days of Easter 2021 with a heart full of joy and gratitude for the life we receive through our Faith and Light community, this small family to which each one of us belongs and which, together, forms this other large, international family.

Now, let us have our washing of the feet celebration.

Washing of the feet

How to do it?

At the time of Jesus, people moved on foot along dusty dirt roads, wearing simple sandals.

When someone entered a house for a meal, the servants had the task of washing the guests' and the host's feet. That was a gesture of hospitality, which followed a precise ritual: with a towel around his waist, the servant knelt down in front of the person who had to be made "clean", so that he could sit at the table.

Right before his Passion, Jesus makes a gesture which is totally unexpected. The disciples are stunned: He takes off his outer garments, takes a towel and ties it around his waist and then kneels down in front of them and washes their feet. That's how He's going to love his friends "to the end", knowing that after Jude's betrayal He'll be arrested.

In Faith and Light we have learnt to live this gesture with profound delicacy and simplicity.

As Jesus, we take off our masks, we make ourselves small before the others.

First, we prepare our hearts: we make room for mildness, we push away our tension and fears.

Then we take what we need:

- a jug filled with water
- a wash bowl
- a towel
- a candle
- a Bible, so that every gesture we make will be based on the Word of God
- a symbol of Faith and Light

All the objects must be placed at the centre of a circle. The chairs are placed all around it. Everyone takes a seat and we try to create an atmosphere of recollection.

We remain in silence then we sing a song or listen to a recorded song. Someone reads the passage from the Gospel of John (13: 1-15). Next, another person reads the commentary that has been previously prepared.

During the washing of the feet, we remain in silence. A recorded music can also be played in the background.

The person who begins, stands up, kneels down in front of the one sitting on his right, then pours water onto his feet, washing them carefully, one after the other. Next, he wipes them and puts down the jug and the towel. He remains on his knees before the same person. The latter lays his hands on the kneeling person, as a sign of blessing. They remain in silence for a few minutes: they welcome and forgive each other. It's a meeting between two hearts which are ready to share.

The person who has had his feet washed stands up and makes the same gesture to the one sitting on his right. And so on, until the circle is closed.

The people who can't easily move or kneel can wash one hand of their neighbour and then give him their blessing. Finally, we pray "Our Father" and sing a last song.

We used to live the washing of the feet in our communities, but this pandemic makes it hard to meet each other. So, here's some suggestions, if you can't live this gesture all together.

If I'm home alone: "I welcome myself and let myself be loved". The washing of the feet is a gesture of hospitality: I remain in silence and try to clear my heart from the

toils of this difficult time. I welcome my fragility and my loneliness. I welcome my fears and the incomprehension I have to deal with. I welcome the peace that Jesus gives me and I let my hands become his hands, ready to wash my feet. I won't be alone; Jesus will be next to me and make this gesture with me. I read the Gospel and its commentary aloud, so the words may resound around me. I prepare a recorded music and let it play in the background, during the gesture.

Once I've washed my feet, I kneel down before a cross, even a small one that I may keep in my hands: I entrust to Jesus what this gesture will inspire to my heart. I let Him welcome my fragility.

If I can visit a person with a disability: "I welcome you and give you my friendship" I bring along everything necessary; I am very careful and follow the rules of social distancing: we won't touch each other, we'll pour the water onto our feet and wipe them, without touching them directly. Once we have washed our feet, we can avoid touching each other's knees and heads and we can simply remain in front of each other.

We both wear face masks. We use the sanitising gel to touch the jug and the basin.

I live every step of the gesture with him/her. I welcome the other and let myself be welcomed. We remain in silence for a few moments, letting this mutual gift deepen our bonds of love and friendship.

In the family: "We welcome each other"

Family is a small community. Let's try to get out of the roles that characterize us. We are in front of each other; each one is as poor and simple as the other: despite our arguments and our relationship difficulties, the love that binds us will help us to live a gesture of welcoming and mutual forgiveness.

Since we live together, there are no social distancing rules to follow. At the end, we try to tell each other what we have experienced through this gesture, which we may have never dared to make.

In the community: "Union of the hearts: let's share our friendship"

The chairs of the circle must be well distanced. We wear face masks to protect ourselves and the others; we make sure there is a sanitising gel dispenser in the room. We use the gel before and after every gesture, as the jug and the basin pass from hand to hand. We need to be very careful. We touch our friend's feet only with the towel, after pouring water onto them. Then we kneel down, keeping social distance. Each one lays his hands on the other's head, without touching it.

Finally, we remain in silence for a few moments, then we sing a song.

We can live this gesture all together, only if the rules of our Country allow us to do so.

In every situation: we share the prayers of invocation and thanksgiving for the 50th anniversary of Faith and Light.

Word from Don Marco Bove

International chaplain, Italy

From the Gospel of John 13: 1-17

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all." For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when he had washed their feet (and) put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it."

By washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus shows how God loves each one of them, and calls them yesterday as today, to love, to live a boundless love, to love to the end. The meaning of the washing the feet is a mystery, in which each one of us is invited to enter little by little, after hardships and grief. The words of Jesus telling Peter that only «later» he would understand the meaning of this gesture, mean that it's only after the dark night of non-knowledge and only with the gift of the Spirit that we can penetrate this mystery and live it.

Jesus invites his friends to live this mystery, to take off their outer garments, which give them a special status. He invites them to take off their masks, to show themselves vulnerable, humble and poor to the others. In order to become small, we need to have a

deeply loving heart, purified from many fears and also from human securities; we need a heart ready to reach the summit of love and communion, in order to give life to the others.

How can we imitate Jesus according to his will? Through this gesture, Jesus asks us to follow him on the path of smallness, of the communion of the hearts, of trust and vulnerability, without declining on other occasions the role of coordinators, of teachers called to exercise a certain authority over people and groups, with force and justice, warm-heartedness and humility. Jesus invites us to live all the folly of the Gospel, which is boundless love and compassion, forgiveness without judgement and love for the enemy. This is impossible, if we do not take off our garments and make ourselves poor and naked before God, so that we can "put on the risen Christ".

Jesus insists that his disciples follow his example and wash each other's feet. He also tells Peter that it is necessary that he let his feet be washed, otherwise «"you will have no inheritance with me". By doing this gesture, He wants us to take it as a model, because it is a bliss and a blessing of God. And also because He wants us to live constantly in an attitude of love, service and "smallness". But I also think He calls us to this poor and humble gesture that is the washing of the feet, so that we can show our love and respect for each other.

Isn't this the meaning of all the sacraments? In fact, they fulfil God's gift of life and love: the water of baptism washes and gives us life; the consecrated bread and wine are signs of Jesus giving himself, in order to stay in us and live the communion of the hearts with us. These sacraments are the gift, but also the instruments of this gift, provided we receive them with faith, trust and love, that is, with a real sense of mutuality. Jesus can give himself to us only if we open the door of our hearts to him.

In the Catholic liturgy of Holy Thursday, the priest obeys Jesus's commandment by washing the feet of twelve people. But Jesus also invites the members of every Christian community or family to wash each other's feet in a well-prepared liturgic ceremony, to be lived in prayer and recollection. And this ceremony can take inspiration from the one we live in Faith and Light.

So, washing our brother's or sister's feet and letting our feet be washed becomes the sign of our will to follow Jesus in humility, in order to find his presence in the poor. It also indicates that we want to reach out to the people with our hearts, outside any role, and to be in communion with them. It means that we want to live in forgiveness with our brothers and sisters, we want to wash and be washed, so that we are in deeper communion with Jesus.

Good Friday

Way of the cross

1. Jesus is condemned to death

The future parents confronted by a prenatal diagnosis

Here, then, I have today set before your life and prosperity, death and doom. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live. (Dt 30: 15 and 19)

Once more Pilate went out and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him." So, Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he said to them, "Behold the man!" When the chief priests and the guards saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him. I find no guilt in him. (Jn 19: 4-6)

In the parking lot of the hospital where, earlier in the week, they had learned of the terrible diagnosis of the handicap of their child with Down's syndrome, two future parents were discussing it before giving their decision: 7

- *So, have we come to an agreement?*
- *Yes, we will say that we want to keep our child; our encounter with little Mary has given us a complete different picture of trisomy from the one the doctors predicted concerning unbearable things: it is as if they had wanted to discourage us. However, Mary is so happy and affectionate! She spoke to us as if we had always been her friends.*
- *Therefore, it is not our baby that we are condemning to death; through him or her, I would have the impression of putting to death all children like Mary in whom I see no motive of condemnation. It is rather our professional ambition, our desire to control everything about our lives, our refusal to accept our own weaknesses, that we are going to put to death...*

Hand in hand, these young parents leave determined to give their answer; they are glad it is raining; people won't notice how much they have cried...

Prayer

Jesus felt alone and abandoned by all when he was condemned to death despite being innocent.

We entrust you to all people with disabilities and their families who feel alone and abandoned.

May our communities be places of resurrection for them.

2. Jesus takes up his cross

The shock of the birth of a child with a disability

Then he said to all: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." (Lk 9: 23-24)

John has just been born; he has cried a lot and the midwife has washed him and wrapped him in swaddling clothes. The parents are anxious to see this baby they have awaited with joy and anguish since they decided not to listen to the numerous and "kind" advice not to keep the child. It is not the midwife who returns, but an auxiliary nurse who places the child without care into the mother's arms saying: You wanted your mongoloid, here he is! The parents do not answer, but there are tears in their eyes. The father squeezes his wife's hand as if to say: Don't worry, I am here. During the evening, the doctor who was very present during the day, comes for a last visit. He stays for quite a while, examines John, confirms his handicap. The parents listen attentively, fearing another disagreeable remark... But, on the contrary, the doctor takes John in his arms and very gently deposits him into his crib. He stays there and gazes at him for a long while. Then he speaks to him softly: Hi, John, sleep tight. I am sure you are going to be happy for you have parents who will take good care of you.

This was for them a second shock after a long day, but a positive one that made them realise that it was not they who had disabilities and that they had the mission of making their son happy. Finally, they were perhaps going to be able to carry their cross.

Prayer

Lord, we pray to you as you offer your life assuming this weight of the cross: its physical weight and its spiritual weight. Grant us to know how to carry our cross behind you, with you and to be present with our brothers who are struggling.

Especially, during this pandemic, we pray to you for each Faith and Light community, for those who suffer from loneliness in healthcare facilities, hospitals and under lockdown at home.

And we thank you for every member of our communities who put themselves at the service according to their skills, who make sure to keep bonds of friendship and faith. In you, Lord, we put our trust.

3. Jesus falls under the weight of the cross

The difficulties of a father

I lie down among lions that greedily devour human prey; their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues sharp swords. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth. (Ps 57: 4-5)

Francis has everything he needs to be happy, a good trade, a beautiful family. But his youngest daughter is severely handicapped; she cannot see, she cannot speak, she cannot walk. Francis is very unhappy and shuts himself into a state of rebellion and despair. He shuns his home, his friends and cuts himself off from any contact with God.

When young people from his parish one day come to invite Sabina for a weekend, he violently slams the door in their faces and shouts: "You have no right to make fun of my daughter!"

When the same youngsters come a second time to invite her, he relents and accepts. He is very surprised to see Sabina return from her weekend with a lot of joy that is quite visible on her face!

So, he decides to go and see this group that meets each month in the parish and discovers a Faith and Light community. It becomes for him a great and marvellous discovery! His daughter, Sabina, is able to make others happy, she is able to make friends, she is able to radiate the love of God! This is the God he believed to be so evil for bringing on him such a misfortune! And it is his daughter Sabina who will be the one to pick him up, to return to what he should never have left behind, the love of his family!

Prayer

Lord, help us to be brave to always get up from our falls, give us the strength to overcome our fears and accept our fragilities to continue walking with the cross of hope, keeping alive the flame of love, friendship and prayer.

We pray to the Lord.

4. Jesus meets his mother

Little things make a mother happy

"Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Mt 12: 48-50)

Madeleine is taking part in the pilgrimage of Faith and Light at Lourdes with her daughter, Juliette who is in a wheel chair. She is in line to enter the grotto of Mas-sabielle with many other pilgrims of her community. In the middle of this joyful crowd, a man seems surprised to see that group and so much joy coming from such very handicapped persons. Finally, he comes forward and asks Madeleine:

– Hi! You seem to be part of this group; I see there are many wheel chairs?

- Yes, we belong to Faith and Light, and about 15000 pilgrims from all over the world came to give thanks to Mary for the gift of Faith and Light.
- But how can we give thanks when we have like yourself a child with a disability?
- I will tell you why I am thankful, but everyone here could do the same. I came here ten years ago and I had said a special prayer to Mary: I wanted my daughter who had never smiled to show me some affection for I take care of her each day.

The man approaches Juliette who gives him a magnificent smile! Very moved, he asks Madeleine:

- I see that your prayers have been answered!
- Yes sir, and today, I have come to give thanks to Mary and ask her to do the same thing for others...

Prayer

Lord, you ask us to look at the suffering of those we love, which is more difficult to bear than our own.

We too must stand at the foot of the cross and look at the suffering of our loved ones, the pain, illness and grief of those we love. We must also let them look at our own.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, for by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross

The communion of friends' prayer

Then he put them all out. He took along the child's father and mother and those who were with him and entered the room where the child was. He took the child by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum" which means "Little girl, I say to you, arise!"

(Mk 5: 40-41)

Little Elizabeth with Down's syndrome, fifteen months, is waking up. A nurse is by her side to make sure that all is well. She is reassured that all the monitors are quiet and that the little heart of Elizabeth is normal. This organ had been dormant for two or three hours while the surgeon was repairing it; a work of great precision! During this delicate operation, an artificial pump circulated the blood in Elizabeth's body. When all was finished, the surgeon replaced the heart in the rib cage and restarted it thanks to a small electric shock.

At last, the parents are allowed to enter the room where their daughter awaits them; she is no longer in the recovery room and welcomes them with a timid smile. She is still a bit groggy after this long operation and she is still in a bit of pain in spite of the analgesics she is receiving through a drip.

During this long morning when Elizabeth was in the skilled hands of the surgeon, her parents had not remained inactive; they prayed a lot, went to mass... twice! And all the parents and friends who had been invited to join them through prayer were all in communion with them, and we can say that the hands of the surgeon, as skilful as they were, were guided... Years later, the results of the tests are always excellent and the heart of Elizabeth continues to beat with great regularity!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, God's compassion has no limits and he comes to our aid, soothing our hearts. At the source of all consolation, there is always the merciful hand of God. We ask that we may never stop trusting in you and that you support us when we encounter those who suffer the most in this world.

6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

A photographic testimony

See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father. (Mt 18: 10)

Ann, who has a slight handicap, is going to speak today to some school kids and has prepared herself well. Her friends have asked her to enunciate well in order to be understood; she is a bit nervous, for she is aware of what's at stake.

Having arrived at the school, she crosses the recreation yard with the three friends who are accompanying her: it is a time for a break and there is a lot of shouting and laughing! A few students come up and stare at Ann... She stops and tells them in a loud voice: Do you want my picture? Embarrassed, they leave her and continue to play.

The session with the youngsters of third year goes very well, and Ann tells them with enthusiasm about her life, her family, and her community of Faith and Light. A slide show accompanies her testimony and we see all the joyful moments of friendship she has with friends, with her brothers and sisters... and the audience is very attentive, not only because the teacher is seated in the classroom... and everything is concluded by a long applause! Ann is relieved and happy that all went well!

Upon leaving, Ann must go through the recreation yard again and feels a bit uncomfortable when she sees the little group that had stared at her. They approach her and one of the girls says:

– Thanks for your testimony. I was very moved and I promise you that my outlook has changed...

She hesitates a bit and adds:

– When we first met, you said: “Do you want my picture?” As a matter of fact, I would very much like a picture of you, could we make a selfie of both of us?

Ann leaps with joy and willingly accepts! This draws attention and there is a long line of those who want their picture taken with Ann!

Prayer

Veronica approaches Jesus with great compassion and does what she can in this situation. She wipes his bruised and bloodied face. With this gesture, she cannot save him, but she can show him that she is there with him.

How many Veronicas do we have in our Faith and Light communities who are close to us and do what they can? They offer their time, their closeness, a word or a cake.

Thank you, Jesus! When you suffered the most, you left a visible mark of your presence in a piece of cloth. A cloth so light, fragile, and you made it the sign of your infinite love.

7. Jesus falls for the second time

When the handicap destroys a family

When Jesus saw this, he became indignant and said to them: “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.

(Mk 10:14-15)

Bruno is very upset because his eldest daughter, Martine, is severely handicapped. He cannot tell whether she is suffering or not, for she cannot speak and can only express herself with her eyes and gestures. She has, however, such beautiful blue eyes and we can see very well what Martine wants to say: joy, worry, peace, anger at times, but as for suffering, almost nothing... Her gestures are quick and precise and she likes to retain friends by the hand she squeezes vigorously. Bruno, however, suffers a lot and the handicap of his daughter reminds him too much about his own personal difficulties, his failures and his woundedness. He has a very low self-esteem. But he has found good friends in the community of Faith and Light and has put aside his temptations to flee...

But, one day, the difficulties that Martine be accepted in a residence with specialised care have become for Bruno an insurmountable obstacle! So many papers to fill out, so much proof to be shown! Once again, he had to explain that his daughter was not miraculously cured and was still handicapped... He tore up all the paperwork and left, slamming the door of his home. He returned but had become gloomy and angry... and one day, he definitely left. He continues to visit Martine for whom he has a particular affection, and his encounters are like a ray of sun in his monotonous days...but nothing will be the same for Bruno. He will always carry his suffering over his shoulder.

Prayer

Jesus, you fall the second time under the weight of your cross.

I was weak, did I fall too? Out of selfishness, I isolated myself from your love, Jesus. You carry the cross of every man, because You love us, you forgive us.

I see a huge procession on your way to Calvary. There are people of all ages, of all races, of all religions, who are suffering. How many times have they fallen?

Jesus, you are among them. Help me to carry my cross!

8. Jesus consoles the daughters of Jerusalem

God loves me as I am

A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children!” (Lk 23: 27-28)

Young François, a boy with an intellectual disability, has just made his first communion. After the beautiful ceremony in the parish, his mother invited a few persons for a family reunion. The godfather of François comes up to her and tells her in a soft voice:

- What a beautiful ceremony! But how unfortunate that this poor little one didn’t understand a thing.

There are tears in the eyes of the mother. François, who heard and saw everything, comes up to her and tells her softly:

- Don’t worry, mom, God loves me as I am!

With these words, he gave the essential message of the Gospel that we have so much difficulty in believing and that the theologians will never finish scrutinizing.

Prayer

Our Lord, Jesus, we are weak and fallible. We are filled with fear and despair at the sight of so much suffering. We also cover our faces; we just have tears. But you don’t ask to be sorry. You say we have to weep for ourselves. Your words touch us.

Thank you, Lord, for your words to us in pain. Tear down the walls of commiserating between us that we accept our weakness to meet you.

Lord, have mercy on us.

9. Jesus falls for the third time

Abandonment and acceptance

If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. (Mk 9: 47-48)

Bernard and Therese waited a long time before having a child, too long, and the couple almost gave up with their first trial. Bernard could not accept not being able to become

a father and thought that it was his spouse, Therese, who was sterile... He had thought about all kinds of solutions, including a separation, but after spending a retreat together in a monastery, they renewed the promises they had taken at their marriage, and decided to stay together no matter what happened.

When they discovered that they were finally going to be parents, they were very happy, but when they found out a few weeks later that their child had a severe genetic handicap, they were disconsolate. They cried a lot, for they had waited such a long time... Plus, their doctor told them that this handicap was accidental, and that they could have other children without feeling the sword of Damocles over their heads; but they were going to have to undergo a medical interruption of the pregnancy... Bernard and Therese had an argument about this. Bernard wanted to accept this interruption and Therese refused... Both their families intervened to help them, but the family opinions were far from being unanimous. Some were for it, others against it... Bernard finally left the house and settled far from his wife...

When the child was born, Bernard came to the maternity ward to see his daughter Marie and with Therese, they cried a lot... Bernard came back to the house, but remained very distant; he would be very loving with his daughter, but the occasions of being together became more and more infrequent... Finally, after much reflection, sharing, arguments, Bernard and Therese took a difficult and painful decision; they concluded that other parents would take better care of their daughter than they; that it would be a way of saving their marriage. Marie has found a welcoming family that gives her all the love she needs. Bernard and Therese are still living with an open wound in their hearts... even if they have two more children, both healthy.

Prayer

Jesus, this is your third fall. We fall for the tenth, twentieth, and hundredth time, committing the same sin over and over again. We pray, Lord Jesus, for all the people enslaved by repetitive sin, especially we pray for those who struggle with Internet addiction, impurity and alcohol; give them the strength to rise up, like you, Jesus, and to find in you the Way of true freedom.

10. Jesus is stripped of his garments

When weakness stirs up aggression

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So, they said to one another: "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." (Jn 19: 23-24)

There once was Ann, a young trisomic girl who went each day to a farm where she took care of the animals. To come and go, her journey brought her to walk along a forest. One day, as she was coming back, she saw a young wolf come towards her. Ann is very frightened and does not move. The wolf tells her:

– I do not want to harm you, but if you do not pet me, I could eat you...

Ann puts out her hand and trembling begins to pet him when a hunter arrives. When he sees what is going on, he begins to cry out:

– Go away, evil beast, or I will take out my rifle and kill you!

The wolf immediately escapes into the forest.

Having returned home, Ann tells her parents what happened, and this time, they are the ones who become frightened. The father brings his daughter to the police station to complain. There, Ann must tell them once again what happened which does not make things peaceful... The police promise to patrol the area so that the wolf may not return, and the father regularly follows his daughter on the road, ready to pounce on the wolf should it appear. Fortunately, the wolf never showed itself again and Ann was able to continue her work each day.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, how did it feel when you were stripped of your clothes? We ask you to open our heart to be able to look and be looked at, at all times, as God looks, helping those who feel humiliated to see themselves as his children. Give us the strength to look and help others.

11. Jesus is nailed to the cross

The wound of not being welcome

There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle. (Jn 19:18)

Gérard and Camille, parents of two severely handicapped children, Loïc and Thaddée, had the great desire to go to Lourdes with their two sons and bring them to the grotto, the four of them together, to pray to Mary. When they come to the secretariat of their parish to apply for the pilgrimage of the Diocese, the answer is hard to take: it is yes for the parents, but no for the children. They won't understand anything and will disturb the other pilgrims.

It was like a nail sinking into their right hand...

But Gerard and Camille did not give up on the idea of going; they leave by car for Lourdes with Loïc and Thaddée. They have trouble finding lodging and finally a hotel accepts them but on condition they remain in their room where their meals will be served. There also is the question of the tranquillity of the other hotel clients. It was like a second nail sinking into their left hand...

From the hotel, they were able to go to the sanctuary and the grotto of Massabielle! They were very happy to have realised their dream, but, while they were still at the sanctuary, they heard disparaging remarks from some pilgrims... With children like that, it would be better to stay home... It was a third nail sinking into their feet...

Prayer

Lord Jesus, who can understand the pain of the righteous? We ask that we never be a source of suffering. Help us face the mystery of tears and do not allow despair to take away the faith of any of your little ones.

12. Jesus dies on the cross

A flower for a bullet

Thus, says the Lord: In Ramah is heard the sound of moaning, of bitter weeping! Rachel mourns her children, she refuses to be consoled because her children are no more. Thus, says the Lord: Cease your cries of mourning, wipe the tears from your eyes. The sorrow you have shown shall have its reward, says the Lord, they shall return from the enemy's land. There is hope for your future, says the Lord; your sons shall return to their own borders. (Jr 31: 15-17)

- They are at the end of the street. We must flee! We do not have time to take anything with us. What are we going to do with Youssef? He won't be able to walk very long, and if he slows us down, all three of us will be killed.
- It is out of the question to leave him behind!
- I will hide him in a closet and will fetch him tonight with a wheel chair, and if I don't find one, I will carry him on my back. We must hurry. They do not give Christians much time to choose between denying their faith or die...

The parents of Youssef leave after hiding their child in the house with a bottle of water. He must wait for his father who will fetch him at night.

When his father returns to the house, he finds Youssef on the floor in a pool of blood. His throat has been slit; he bites his hand not to yell out his despair.

Youssef had left his hiding place when he heard men enter the house... According to his habit, he went to the head of the group and, with a large smile asked:

- What's your name? And added: Will you be my friend?

Prayer

We pray for all the members of our communities who have died as a result of this pandemic, in many cases feeling completely abandoned by their loved ones who were

unable to help them and due to the negligence of the authorities. We also pray for all those who have watched with pain the loss of family members and friends feeling powerless for not being able to do anything to prevent it. May the love that is lived in our communities heal our wounds and help us overcome pain and adversity.

13. Jesus is taken down from the cross and given to his mother

Behold the transfigured man

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. (Mk 9: 2-3)

At birth, Matthias was a beautiful little boy, a little prince... But the Evil One hates beauty, especially when it comes from God: He ravaged his poor body, disfigured his face, destroyed his intelligence, but could not damage the intelligence of his heart, so pure, so innocent. He knew but one thing: to love. And Matthias was faithful to his mission till the end.

At a pilgrimage to Lourdes, during the Way of the Cross, in the prairie, facing the grotto, he got up and latched onto the one who represented Christ on the cross, remaining motionless for a long time, in an imploring attitude but also full of confidence and tenderness.

Matthias was also quite a joker. He loved removing shoe laces from his neighbour's shoes and pull his neighbours' hair with incredible speed and precision.

And his gaze was impressive when he stared at you with insistence; he would ask the fundamental question directly, without beating around the bush: Do you love me?

On his death bed, his mother saw in his eyes his transfiguration! His body was gradually in transformation; his skin was becoming white and transparent like delicate porcelain. His face was no longer that of an adolescent, but of a young man of thirty-two, beautiful, a beauty that is not of this world... And she was able to say: Lord, today I can render you my child whom you entrusted to me in the past. Behold my only son. He is Yours, transfigured into your image and likeness.

On the coffin of Matthias, an icon was placed, the icon of the Transfiguration with a message that read: Behold a man transfigured, behold humanity transfigured!

Prayer

Jesus, how brutally you were put to death. How gently you are taken from the cross. Your suffering and pain are ended, and you are put in the lap of your mother. The dirt and blood are wiped away. You are treated with love.

Help me look for the good in those around me, especially those I love the most. Help me live this day as if it were the last. Help me become a more gentle and loving person through my greater appreciation for those around me.

O Mary, Mother most sorrowful, the sword of grief pierced thy soul when thou didst see Jesus lying lifeless on thy bosom; obtain for me hatred of sin because sin slew thy Son and wounded thine own heart, and grace to live a Christian life and save my soul.

14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

When a mother becomes a widow

Martha said to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (Jn 11: 21 and 32)

When Franz boarded his boat, his travels were often very long for he would go to the ends of the world. Each time, he would take the time to explain to Guénola, his wife, and to his three children with disabilities, Guillaume, Armand and Kateri, with the help of a map, his itinerary, and especially when he would be back. And when he did return home, there would be a feast: he always brought back souvenirs of his foreign stops and the children were anxious to discover them!

When he retired, everyone was very happy to have a husband and father who would no longer travel...

And one day, when they came to get him to board the "one-way" boat, he didn't tell anyone... it was a Sunday evening. As consolation, he had gone to confession eight days before and had received communion that very morning.

A few days later, after the funeral mass, everyone went to the cemetery for a last farewell to Franz. When the coffin was lowered and the monument installed, Guénola and the three children remained a long time, all four of them, holding hands in great communion. Perhaps they were saying to one another what Martha and Mary had said to Jesus: Lord, if you had been here, my husband, my dad would not have died.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you who, in the power of the Holy Spirit, were led by the Father from the darkness of death to the light of a new life in glory, may the sign of the empty tomb speak to us and to our communities, and may it become for each of us a source of faith, charity and hope.

Holy Saturday

Message from Ghislain du Chéné

Former international coordinator, France

Hello, I am very pleased to be able to address you; touched too that you thought of me... it is true that these past twenty years in the service of Faith and Light International, from 1998 until 2018, have made a great impression on me, from the Europe Atlantic North Zone to the International level as well as the most beautiful of continents... Africa!

It is Holy Saturday, a day of silence and recollection that follows the passion and death of Jesus and precedes the resurrection, which is today a great hope... These days have been familiar to us in Faith and Light since 1971.

Today, when I look back at what I have experienced in Faith and Light, I see so many beautiful things, but I will only share a few of them: I give thanks for the retreat we did with Isabelle at the Foyer de Charité in Brittany – it was in October 1983 – that is where, for the first time, we heard about the poor and fragile person and about Faith and Light in such a beautiful way. So, when on 12 April 1988 (Faith and Light was celebrating its 17th anniversary on that date – you know 12 April is the anniversary date of Faith and Light, isn't it?), Julie was born, at first it was a huge shock, a very painful shock, from which we recovered in part thanks to the memories of the retreat we had attended three and a half years earlier. This is how we very quickly found ourselves in a Faith and Light community, from 1989, how we went as a family to Lourdes in 1991, then in 2001 to celebrate the 20th anniversary and then the 30th anniversary of Faith and Light. I do not know if I have done any good in Faith and Light but Faith and Light has done me a lot of good: I have discovered the universal dimension of the attention to the most fragile, I understood a little better the Good News of Jesus especially this verse from Matthew that was read at Julie's baptism: "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven." (Mt 18, 10). I have also understood that this attention to the most fragile was the same in all Christian faiths, and that ecumenism was in the genes of Faith and Light.

I have understood that fragility can be a strength when I do not seek to hide my own wounds, my own weaknesses; we say it in our beautiful prayer that I encourage you to say every day, and to say it in all communities: Teach us to accept our wounds, our weakness so that your power may be revealed.

I have kept friends all over the world, who are regularly in my prayers: Leo (Mexico) "viva el Christo rey", Freddy (Peru) "el embajador", Vanessa (Brazil), Tiago (Paraguay), Eneko (Spain), Patricia (Uganda), Lin (Rwanda), Justine (Philippines), John (New Zealand), Lucas (Mauritius)... not forgetting those who have departed to prepare a place in heaven for us: Angelo (Italy) and Piotr (Poland).

All this makes up my treasure accumulated over so very many years; thank you for giving me the opportunity to share it with you. And I tell you again, as my friend, Sahar, from the Egypt Centre province, regularly tells me: I miss you sooo much!!

If I have a message to pass on to you, it is the one that I received from Marie-Hélène. You have to call, call, call tirelessly. There are so many families waiting for us and for whom Faith and Light could do so much good that we must not sit and wait for it to happen... I repeat for you the names of the countries that I mentioned in July 2018: after starting in the Central African Republic, Ghana, Albania and El Salvador, we can dream by thinking of all these countries: Wallis and Futuna, Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Dubai, Mozambique, Gabon, Senegal, Belarus, Latvia, Uruguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon.

Finally, my dearest wish is that Faith and Light, on the occasion of its jubilee, sets off with a renewed energy and that unity is and remains our most precious possession! With a few hours of anticipation, let me say to you joyfully:

“Christ is risen! Yes, he is truly risen!”

Interview with Loïc Proffit

Co-founder of Faith and Light with his brother Thaddée
and his parents Gérard and Camille

Hello Loïc!

Did you see that we are being filmed Loïc? Because we are going to do a small message for all your Faith and Light friends. This is an important year for them because they have been around for 50 years. Yes! And if they exist, it is partly thanks to you, your younger brother and your parents. So, I believe that this pleases your Faith and Light friends... -Yes, it pleases you too? - so, to show you and to show them a bit about who you are and how you are today... Are you ok with us chatting together? So today, Loïc, you are 65 years old. You are the elder in MAS because you arrived in 1978, you opened the foyer de la Forestière. Therefore, you have seen people come and go. Friends, assistants... So, shall we tell them what you love about life? Yes! What is important? (Loïc speaks) Well, you have a lot to say! So, what we have noticed is that you really like music. Loïc has seen very many assistants come and go

therefore plenty of styles of music. I think that you have had a little bit of all styles. But it feels like you like classical music best, don't you? It's good for you. You love someone to sing with you too. You like songs to Mary. You also love the singing of the "Hail Marys".

What do you like...? You like to take good baths, good hot baths with bubbles. You love relationships Loïc. That's right, you are someone who needs space for you. You need to be a little alone but what is also important is being in touch with others. You often recognise the former assistants who come to see you, you are loyal in your relationships. Sometimes you greet us, you give us a little blessing like so... You do this to us sometimes!

You love to go to mass. I think that Jesus is someone who is important to you. Even if at times it is a bit long, there are also moments when you are calm and at peace. Do you agree?

So, as we said, today Loïc you are 65 years old and you are getting a bit tired. Are you still telling us things Loïc?

I think that people who live with you, they remember – because you also have a tenacious character – but it is also your great kindness. In your looks, in your touches. Even if you aren't looking at me anymore!

I think that you are someone who is important to a lot of people Loïc.

Message from Philippe de Lachapelle

Director of the OCH Foundation, France

The meeting has been at the heart of Faith and Light for 50 years. 50 years that the meeting has been giving life and it is still interesting to look at how this meeting was born, how it sprang up. It sprang up in Lourdes 50 years ago. It is a place, Lourdes, where there was a very special meeting that was the founding of Faith and Light. It was the meeting between the Virgin Mary and St Bernadette. This meeting sheds light, in particular, on what the mystery of Faith and Light is and what the fruitfulness of Faith and Light is. If you look at Mary and Bernadette, you see the Virgin comes to meet a young girl who is small. She said herself "I was the smallest. If there had been someone smaller than me, the Virgin would have chosen them". She was chosen because she was the smallest and even the most ignorant. This is what she said herself and she, Bernadette, was humiliated by it. Humiliated because she was seen as someone who was worthless to a certain extent. Indeed, she was refused the communion because she could never remember the words, she could not repeat.

I think that Faith and Light is the mystery of a meeting where we join one another in something that, in us, is humiliated. Our smallness and our humiliation are what make up a little of the mystery of the meeting in Faith and Light. It wasn't only Bernadette

who was humiliated, her parents too were a humiliated man and woman. You must remember that Bernadette's dad was a modest craftsman. He had 3 mills and then he went bankrupt. He was forced to find work with other employers and he was even accused of stealing flour. He was put in prison falsely. The humiliation of this dad, the humiliation of the mum who had to cope, the humiliation of Bernadette who had to help her parents. It was as she was gathering wood in a damp grotto, she who was asthmatic. It was in a damp grotto, full of mud, that the Virgin came to meet her.

It was mysterious, this meeting where the Virgin came and joined a small, ignored woman, a small, humiliated woman in a damp grotto. It is a bit like Faith and Light, we join with one another in our smallness and our humiliation.

But the mystery of the meeting between Bernadette and Mary is that we are not satisfied with the humiliation. The Virgin is not happy with Bernadette's humiliation. On the contrary, she truly lifts her up like at Faith and Light, the meeting that we have with each other, with this friendship that brings us together, it lifts us all. How did she lift Bernadette? She lifted her by smiling at her. You know, there was an astonishing sentence from Bernadette who said of the Virgin: she smiled at me. You feel that this smile was anything but a teasing or belittling smile, on the contrary, it was a smile that lifted. Bernadette felt lifted by Mary's smile. I think that in Faith and Light, the smiles that we give to one another lift us from our frailties, our humiliations and our smallness. We stand up together.

It is also the look that is the mystery in the meeting between Mary and Bernadette, as in Faith and Light. Bernadette has this extraordinary sentence: "she looked at me like a person who is talking to another person". This sentence contains all the grace of Faith and Light. We look at each other as people who are talking to other people. There are not the big and the small etc. We are people and at Faith and Light, we can look at each other with this look of benevolence, this look that lifts, like people who talk to people. I feel that it is a sentence that contains all Faith and Light.

When we are in Lourdes, we always look at the grotto by raising our heads, it is true that the Virgin is above but it is important to know that the Virgin sometimes came down into the Grotto to put herself at the height of Bernadette to talk to her. I think that Faith and Light is a place where we come down to each other to join each other at our height. Even for those of us who are in a wheelchair, we know how often the person approaching, instead of looking down at me from above, crouches down next to me to be the same height. Putting yourself at the same height is putting yourself in this look where we look at each other as people, where we can smile like people who have equal dignity.

And then the mystery of Bernadette with Mary is the duration, the time. Mary took the time to meet as we in Faith and Light take the time to meet. We know that the meeting takes time, it isn't done all at once. With Mary, it went on for a long time. She came, I no longer know if it was 18 apparitions. She came often to make this relationship strong. At Faith and Light, we take to time to meet each other. This time is fruitful. Sunday after Sunday, every month, we can meet up to be together in this shared joy, in this shared look, in these shared smiles that lift us and that mean we do not remain in our humiliation but that they mysteriously become the place of blessings that we experience together.

The last thing that marks the relationship between Bernadette and Mary is that it isn't enough to leave the humiliation to enter into the joy of the meeting, there is a mission to be given. Mary gave a mission to Bernadette: Go and tell them to build a chapel here and come to it in a procession. That is what Bernadette did and today in Lourdes, there is a chapel and there are processions where millions of people come. Faith and Light is a place of mission: Go and tell our world, that is so hard, that kindness is possible; go and tell our world, where we so need to know that we are lovable as we are, that it is possible. Go and tell our competitive world that communion is possible. Go and tell our world, where fragility is forbidden, that fragility is not a risk. On the contrary, it is not a threat, it is an opportunity to meet each other, to put ourselves at the service of one another and to make a body together. All members of a body are necessary to one another and where no member can say to another: I don't need you and where the weakest members are honoured. It was St Paul who said it and Faith and Light has done it for 50 years now. And I think that for the next 50 years it will be even more necessary that this grace of Faith and Light be fruitful in our world.

Thank you all for being involved, thank you for finding the joy, thank you for sharing the joy.

Easter

Message from Raul and Maria-Silvia

Jesus is risen, he is living, he is among us!!! Alleluia!!!

It is Easter, Jesus is risen, he is living. Happy Easter to everyone. We greet the person beside us and wish them a Happy Easter. Jesus is risen and has conquered suffering and death forever. If Jesus is risen, we will rise again with him. Love has the last word. Faith and Light was born 50 years ago in Lourdes at the feet of the Virgin Mary, mother of God and ours, and who, as a disciple and witness of his resurrection, shows us where Jesus is.

On Easter Monday 1971, 12000 pilgrims from 15 countries, including 4000 intellectually disabled people, accompanied by their parents and friends, mostly young people, met. Radiant, they wanted to continue the adventure. The organisers suggested: “Carry on meeting in small communities, do what the Holy Spirit inspires you to do.”

And here we are celebrating our fiftieth anniversary, 50 years later, having made the journey in the hands of God. We have known difficulties but the boat hasn't sunk. There have been storms, tidal waves and thunderbolts but the boat, even whilst capsizing, has managed to carry on sailing and discovering new and beautiful horizons, never imagined. We all row together, each person according to their abilities. All together with Jesus at the heart of our crew.

Today, we are more than 1350 communities in 52 provinces on five continents, that is to say 86 countries and 38 different languages. Two thirds of the countries where Faith and Light is present are tackling great economic difficulties or political instability and enormous health problems caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. However, today we can say loud and clear that despite these issues, we know that Jesus is accompanying us.

We have a treasure to share with many intellectually disabled people, families, priests...Many people are waiting for Faith and Light; let us travel through the streets, the districts, the towns and the countries, bringing this treasure that is the simple life of our communities! Let us call everyone, let us invite them all to the feast that Jesus himself has prepared for us.

Let us begin our celebration and our feast with a heart full of gratitude and joy by singing the hymn created to celebrate our anniversary.

Celebrate in Every Land

50th anniversary song

Refrain

Come and dance. Come and sing. Come and share the joy we bring.
Come and dance. Take my hand. Celebrate in every land.

Verses

1. Look at me. What a sight! Share the joy of Faith and Light.
Look at me. Sing along. “Love for Others” is our song.
2. Look at me. See my skin. See the God who dwells therein.
Look at me. See my face. Come together and embrace.

3. Look at me. See my heart. God and I will never part.
Look at me. See my hand, helping others rise and stand.
4. Look at me. See my pain. Trust in God to rise again.
Look at me. See me smile. Wider. Wider. That's the style.
5. Look at me. See me go. Reaching high and reaching low.
Look at me. See the Earth. Helping Nature to give birth.

Message from Marie-Hélène Mathieu

Co-founder of Faith and Light, France

With great joy and emotion, I meet you tonight, a little confused, however, because it is the first time that I have participated and taken part in a videoconference. And I would have liked so much to see you, see the old friends that I have already met, and then get to know you, the new ones, who are numerous, and that's good! It is a good sign!

I want to tell you a little about my life today. For almost 3 years, I have chosen to live with the Little Sisters of the Poor, in an EHPAD (Residential home for the elderly) to stay close to the sick and people with disabilities who have been my universe almost all my life. If you go to the back of the house garden, you will be surprised to find the Lourdes grotto, which is a place where I go often, where everyone goes often. We are drawn to Lourdes.

I must also tell you that I will be 92 years old, a lifetime! I had a difficult time recently: a lockdown for two and a half months. But I liked lighting up my globe, resting a little with you, the Faith and Light communities in the world and entrusting you to the tenderness of Jesus and Mary, that helped me a lot.

For a long time, I no longer have official functions in the structures of Faith and Light. However, I remain close by the heart and I was very touched that Raúl, our International Coordinator, and the Council invited me to join you for this incredible challenge of an international meeting (by videoconference). In my opinion, almost as incredible as what we experienced fifty years ago.

Today, here, I simply want to be a marvellous witness of the birth of our movement from its very beginning. To tell you once again: this is truly the Lord's work, a wonder before our eyes. This certainty was confirmed to me by a chaplain from the sanctuary. He said in Lourdes: two miracles appear to me to be the greatest.

The first is that of Bernadette, this 14-year-old girl, the most miserable in the whole region. A “good for nothing”. And it is her that the Virgin Mary chose because she was the weakest in the world. However, her heart was so open that it impressed me. It is when we asked her “who is God?” at catechism, she did not know, we had not told her. But she replied: “God is love”.

An inspired response of love, of course. And then it is based on her only testimony, of this illiterate little girl (a single testimony that is not normally valid), that millions of pilgrims come each year to renew themselves, to convert, it is their highlight of the year.

The second greatest miracle is that of Faith and Light. The miracle of people with intellectual disabilities, their families, their friends, who are excluded from Lourdes and marginalized in the Church. The pilgrimage will be a huge discovery. A wall of ignorance and prejudice crumbles: not only are they not intruders, but they are the heart of the Church.

How could this be done? For a few moments, if you don't mind, I will immerse myself with you in the unfolding of these mysterious events.

Who are the real protagonists? They are Loïc and Thaddée, born with a very deep intellectual disability. Their parents, Camille and Gérard Proffit, are farmers. They got married 10 years ago, they wanted a big family and these two little ones were born, whom they don't even know if they can recognize them. Huge ordeal!

In an act of great hope, they decide to go to Lourdes with them. They are rejected in the diocesan pilgrimage: “they will not understand anything of what is happening, they will disturb the piety of the other pilgrims”. They then leave for Lourdes on their own. Another disappointment, in the hotels, no room for their children.

A hotel manager feels sorry for them, he wants to take them, but on the condition that they take their meals in their room. In the sanctuary, in town, they are hurt by looks, reflections of pity or disapproval: “when we have children like that, we stay at home”. They feel a little excluded from the Church, now they are excluded from Lourdes.

Shortly after, they found the opportunity to confide in me and Jean Vanier about their indignation and their pain.

An idea came up, why not organize a pilgrimage especially for people like Loïc and Thaddée and for their parents who are so hurt?

In fact, we think that it is an inspiration from the Blessed Virgin herself, hurt because her children who are dear to her, the smallest, the most fragile, are not welcomed into her sanctuary. To human eyes, the project seems crazy, but if it is God's plan, everything becomes possible.

We make contact with close people. What do they think of it? Many, especially parents of course, were very supportive, even enthusiastic. Others were hesitant. Still others were very reserved, even hostile, especially among members of the clergy. We did not want to decide anything without the agreement of the Church. The bishop responsible for pastoral care for people with disabilities gave us the green light. Then everything would start.

Three years of preparation, a huge project, everything had to be invented on all levels since there had never been people with intellectual disabilities on pilgrimages. The adapted liturgy, a very thorough spiritual preparation, accommodation, security, sanitary measures, etc. A huge project.

A fundamental idea and contacts emerged, it would not be a pilgrimage of individuals, but a pilgrimage of communities. We would not come to Lourdes alone, we would form, if we could come, a community of 20 to 30 people, made up of people with intellectual disabilities with their families and friends, especially young people. A priest if possible, because what we wanted was to avoid the loneliness of Camille and Gérard at all costs.

Our second concern was that we should, without further delay, create a logo. Translate into a symbol the spirit of the pilgrimage better than words and which would make us vibrate in unison. We asked Meb, a painter with Down syndrome, who had a real talent if that would inspire him. He presented us with a drawing that amazed us: a boat with 12 small figures (even though Meb did not know how to count). Jesus, he said, sleeps at the bottom of the boat. Amid the threatening clouds, the luminous rays of the sun emerge. The caption: "The clouds have opened to your Light, Lord, you have come to us". Meb has it all figured out. His drawing was reproduced in all countries, in all materials, wood, soil; it was even reproduced in gemmail¹ in Lourdes and is still exhibited in the Basilica of Saint Pius X for all pilgrims, to remember or tell about the 1971 event.

Finally, D-Day arrived. On Good Friday, in front of the grotto, at 3 p.m., 12,000 pilgrims are gathered; 4,000 of them have an intellectual disability and had never gone out, they have always remained locked up, either in their homes or in other places. They came from 15 countries.

¹ Panel made up of pieces of coloured translucent glass juxtaposed and superimposed, without setting.

The Bishop of Lourdes, was there to welcome us with all his kindness. He began: “A historical event such as never was in the Church, nor in the world”. The Bishop’s words moved us, they united us.

And now the song “My friends, let’s sing all our joy”, which was created especially for the pilgrimage, was coming out of a community, and it was full of Alleluia. It was planned for the Easter Vigil and now the Holy Spirit allowed it to flow on Good Friday at 3pm in the afternoon, as if to say where there is suffering, if there is love, joy is possible.

And for 4 days, the Alleluias flowed from morning to night to say hello, thank you and sorry. The miracles of hearts that we asked for, we now witnessed! What we were also witnessing was the joy of people with intellectual disabilities in Lourdes. They discover that there, in Lourdes, they were at home, Mary was their mother and she welcomed them. And through her, Mother of the Church, they were at home, in the Church, even in her heart.

This initial grace, what a discovery! It is part of the treasure at Lourdes, of the treasure of Faith and Light for the whole Church and for the whole world, they are the heart of the Church, they are the whole Gospel. God who chooses the weak to confuse the strong.

God who hides his mysteries from the wise and who reveals them to the little ones... God who goes so far as to identify with them: “Everything you do to one of these little ones, you did it to me”. Jesus is present, as he is in the Eucharist.

On Holy Monday, we invited the community leaders to join us in thanks. They didn’t hear it this way, they didn’t want to be thanked. A pilgrim father of a family stood up and said: “We want to tell you one thing, and not only us, but all pilgrims: we do not want Faith and Light to end. We have experienced too many important things together, the communities do not want to separate, we want Faith and Light to continue”.

I think it was the Holy Spirit. What to answer? Do whatever the Holy Spirit inspires you, gather in communities, and we will see. We will meet again in a few months; we will see what happens. The pilgrimage was over, but the Faith and Light movement was born. 50 years ago. The miracle continued; it was truly God’s work! And today you are here! And it is extraordinary!

How can we ensure that everything we have lived is not lost? In all corners of the world, how can we make sure that this is remembered, singing the mercies of God?

I am asked to write the story. Another great job, 3 years of work, fortunately helped by many good volunteers.

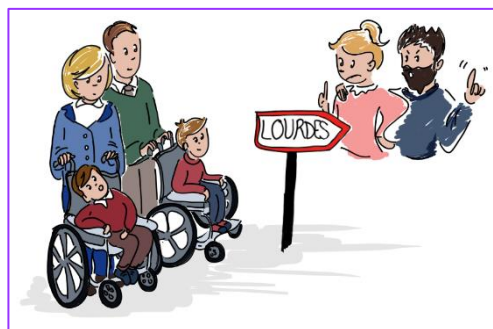
And the book *Never Again Alone* came out, which basically says the essentials of Faith and Light: we are no longer alone, we are in a community, we have friends, we are welcomed into the Church, which is increasingly open. This is what I had to say in this book, which is now translated into about ten languages and I suppose it will continue in other countries. Because, even if there are only 100 people, there is always someone who wants to work and then others who start editing.

I have told this story of Faith and Light hundreds of times, but I never tire of it. Each time I feel like it's new to me, it teaches me something new. So, from the bottom of my heart, I hope I can continue to inspire everyone to constantly renew ourselves in our mission.

Little story of Faith and Light

Illustrated by Marie du Chéné

1. We were in Lourdes in 1968; Gérard and Camille, the parents of Loïc and Thaddée, went to present their two sons to Mary. It was their greatest desire, because they relied on the comfort, she was going to give them; Loïc and Thaddée are indeed very severely disabled. But they were going to leave with a very heavy heart. They went alone because their parish did not want to enrol them on the diocesan pilgrimage; in Lourdes, they found it difficult to find a hotel; and within the sanctuary, the “good pilgrims” told them that their place was not there: “With children like that, stay at home”.



2. On their return, they had the grace to meet two friends of disabled people: Marie-Hélène and Jean. Marie-Hélène had founded the Office Chrétien des Personnes Handicapées (OCH) and Jean had founded l'Arche, supported and shared living. After listening to Gérard and Camille, they decided to organise a pilgrimage where families like that of Gérard and Camille would have their true place, first! On 8



December 1968 in Montmartre, the project was launched with an international team.

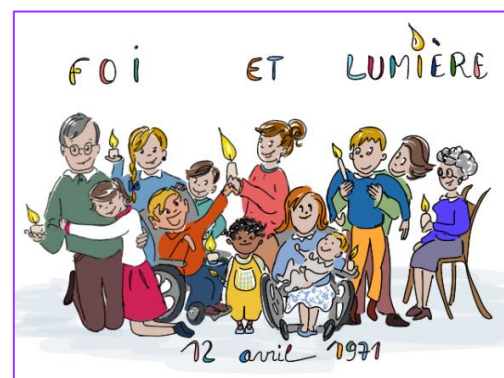
3. The message spread quickly: "Great, we are finally going to go to Lourdes!". During this time, the organising team met with much reluctance: "Why bother? They are not going to understand anything; the parents are going to be disappointed on their return at not having seen their child cured. How will you manage security on site?" But the team hung on and Marie-Hélène had the right answer: "We are only asking for a healing of hearts!"



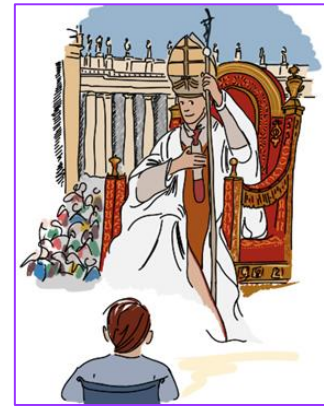
4. In order not to be lost in a large crowd, the pilgrims began to forge bonds of friendship in small groups of about 30 people with families, friends and a chaplain. The joy of the disabled people was very strong, they really felt that a great event was being prepared and that they were at the heart of it. On Maundy Thursday 1971, 12000 of us came from 15 countries and a joyful crowd spread across the town of Lourdes, singing, from Good Friday, the song planned for the following evening... "Friends, let us sing our joy, Alleluia!"



5. On Easter Monday, a first assessment meeting took place before leaving. All the regional leaders said: "It is not possible to leave it at this, we want to continue the adventure, we do not want to go back to our isolation and solitude." Marie-Hélène and Jean answered: "Continue to meet in your community and we will see where the Holy Spirit wants to lead us." And so, Faith and Light was born on 12 April 1971.



6. In 1975, a second pilgrimage was organised to Rome; it would be called the pilgrimage of the confirmation of Faith and Light, four years after the birth and baptism in Lourdes. The joyful crowd of communities invaded St Peter's Basilica, all were happy to meet Pope Paul VI. The latter arrived in the "sedia", a raised armchair. As he spoke, visibly moved, the Holy Father digressed from his speech to say, as if he was personally addressing each person: "you are loved by God just as you are".



7. Communities grew in a lot of new countries and the number of banners for the pilgrimages to Lourdes increased with a mysterious fertility, from 1981 (300 communities in 27 countries) to 1991 (1000 communities in 60 countries). The Middle East climbed into the Faith and Light boat from Lebanon, the Eastern countries from Poland and the Ukraine, Latin America from Brazil and Argentina, Asia from the Philippines, Africa from Zimbabwe and Rwanda.



8. Right from 1971, Faith and Light has been an ecumenical movement; all the Christian traditions joined together to tell of and proclaim the value of the most fragile. Unity was the theme of the 1991 pilgrimage to Lourdes; everyone of us sang: "Father, make us one, that the world may trust in your love". On the last day of the pilgrimage, a mime showed the risen Jesus (a disabled person); he asked Mary Magdalene to go and find his brothers, a female Methodist pastor, an Anglican bishop, a cardinal and a Catholic bishop. They all knelt before Jesus then embraced one another and asked all the pilgrims to share the peace of Jesus.



9. In 2001, we returned to Lourdes to come to the waters. Another pilgrimage to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Faith and Light. There were 16000 of us and that caused some concerns for the organisers; many could not enter the Basilica for the Easter Vigil... Fortunately, screens allowed everyone share in the celebration and on Easter morning, 28 liturgies were celebrated representing six traditions in fourteen languages.



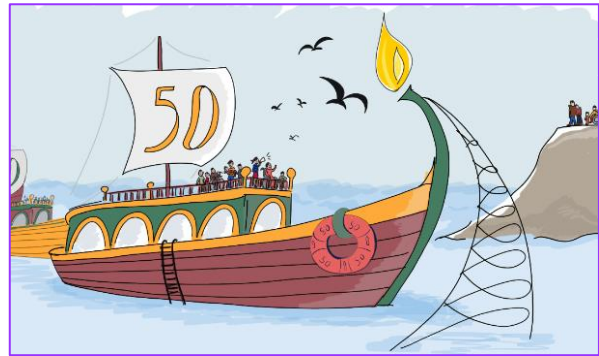
10. In 2002, the international meeting took place in Rome and we were surprised to be received by Pope John Paul II in his residence at Castel Gandolfo. Already weakened by illness, we felt that we were before a disabled pope. His message was very much appreciated: “By welcoming all these little ones affected by an intellectual disability, you have recognised in them special witnesses to the tenderness of God from whom we have a lot to learn”.



11. In 2011, it was no longer possible for all the countries to gather in Lourdes and the celebrations were multiplied across the world; 40 pilgrimages to celebrate 40 years of Faith and Light, bringing together many more pilgrims than the pilgrimages to Lourdes. We were all pilgrims of joy. The communities from Madagascar, for example, were extremely touched to be responsible for preparing a pilgrimage and welcomed pilgrims from Eastern Africa and the France Sparkling East province!



12. In 2021, it is the great jubilee of Faith and Light throughout the whole world. We have accumulated so many treasures during this 50 year journey that we really must consider sharing it. We have to make known the secret of our joy, the spring from which we draw our energy. For this, we are going to call, call and call again. There are so many families who are still too isolated and who are waiting for us to bring them out of their isolation. Joining a Faith and Light community does so much good, lives are transformed! And after this jubilee, we will carry on tirelessly.



Message from Maureen O'Reilly

Former international coordinator, USA

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, FAITH AND LIGHT!

I wish I could be with all of you in your homes, to see you personally, to see what it looks like in your homes, your church, your country!

A Birthday is such a day of joy! I know that some people never have a Birthday Party. No one was ever excited that they were born! And I know other people live in countries where it's the custom for the Birthday Person to give gifts to everyone else because they are so grateful to have been born!

And so, what we're celebrating is the Birthday of Faith and Light. WOW! What was it like 50 years ago? Some of us were alive at that time but didn't know about Faith and Light. We learned from others about that first Pilgrimage to Lourdes and what happened afterwards and how we ourselves discovered Faith and Light.

We know many, many, many of our Faith and Light family are in heaven, rejoicing with us.

I'd like to tell you about one person in my Faith and Light community who taught me about Faith and Light in ways that I never knew before.

Beth was a friend in our community and she was not intellectually challenged, but she had suffered a lot of pain growing up, from a lot of emotional and physical abuse. Her family was not a very happy or healthy family.

But when she grew up and discovered people with disabilities, she became their champion; and in Faith and Light she was really, really happy to be a friend! She would go with me to buy materials for crafts and she had an eye for what would work for our special friends.

Then as our Faith and Light community got older and we lost some members to heaven or they couldn't come anymore, we had to think about whether we could continue to be in Faith and Light. And Beth was the strongest champion for keeping Faith and Light. She said, more or less, "If it weren't for Faith and Light, I wouldn't be alive! My life would be nothing without Faith and Light!"

That's how much it meant for her to be able to meet with people who accepted her, who needed her, and who she could love...and she DID love... until the damage she had suffered so much early in life started to eat away at her mind and it got a point where she didn't remember things.

I would come to her house to bring her to Faith and Light and she kind of knew me, but would ask, "Where are we going?"

"Sacred Heart Church."

"What's that?"

I would say, "You'll see when we get there."

When we arrived, the Faith and Light members would welcome her just like before, but she didn't know them. She was still OK with being there, and didn't ask to leave, but she didn't know who we were, or what we were doing.

And then came the time when the phone came and she had died and gone to God in heaven. And so, she's still a part of Faith and Light, watching out for all of us.

I bet you could tell lots of stories like that, too! Who are the people in your own Faith and Light community who were the ones who gave the most, loved, the most, needed the most? And who are ALL our friends who showed us the way and still do?

So, we have a LOT to thank God for, and HAPPY BIRTHDAY, FAITH and LIGHT! HAPPY BIRTHDAY to each one of you for wherever you are in your Faith and Light journey. Wherever you are, we are all together forever in Faith and Light.

Thank You, God! Thank You, Mother Mary!

Bye-bye for now!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Message from Antonio-Carlos Donega Aidar

Former zone coordinator, Brazil

Hello friends,

In a family, siblings are the those who have the same origin and blood ties.

For this reason, the unity between brothers and sisters is ever eternal because they are united by bonds of blood.

L'Arche and Faith and Light are brother and sister. They were born from the will of the eternal Father in the light of the disabled person, which is why they are brother and sister.

The bonds that unite people from l'Arche and Faith and Light are precisely the presence of the disabled person at the heart of these two movements.

Each brother has his characteristics, his specific way of being, his differences but what unites us is love. The same love that unites l'Arche and Faith and Light is the love that unites brothers and sisters, love unites these two movements in the passion for the little ones of God.

L'Arche and Faith and Light have a very special place in my life. I have been in Faith and Light for many years whilst accompanying l'Arche. Today, even more intensely since I live in an Arche community whilst accompanying Faith and Light very closely because Faith and Light is always in my heart.

L'Arche is our older sister and, like an older sister, she must always take care of her brother. Not to help him, not to correct him but to commemorate his discoveries, to celebrate his growth and his journey.

The older sister is proud of her younger brother and feels happy about what he is doing.

Today, l'Arche is very happy to congratulate her little brother on his 50th birthday.

We are happy because our life is about seeing people happy, it is about making the journey together and learning how to be happy from them.

From the gentleness of community life in l'Arche to the explosive emotional expression in a Faith and Light community, a very powerful beacon of light erupts. It comes from the eyes of these people, who so often seem elsewhere or disconnected, but it is they who bring this light into the hearts of each one of us and into the hearts of the people who are passionate about these two movements.

We from l'Arche, we want to congratulate Faith and Light. We want to give you this hug that is so dear to us and that we learn with people who have much more to give us through love than through intelligence.

We want Faith and Light to be happy and to continue making people happy.

We also want to say to our beloved little brother: rely on us where and when you need to because we are brother and sister.

Happy birthday Faith and Light!

Message from Viviane Le Polain

Former international coordinator, Belgium

Hello dear friends, I am delighted to meet you again today to wholeheartedly wish you a beautiful Easter. “Christ is risen” is what we sang at the tops of our voices in Lourdes and what we are also commemorating today. It has been 50 years since the Faith and Light movement was born and often, we have heard Marie-Hélène tell us that it was an invention of the Blessed Virgin. Yes, in Lourdes Mary brought us together and for 50 years, she has guided us in our communities. She teaches us to “live near the crucified of our world” as we say in the prayer but above all she invites us to live in the spirit of the Resurrection, with the strength of the risen Jesus.

So, I really do join you with joy and it touches me a lot to have been able to see all your faces at the international meeting that you had at the end of February. The technical means we have today really do help us to get through the times of pandemic, lockdown and separation from one another. Today, I am especially thinking of the Gospel text that we are going to hear in a few days, the story of Mary Magdalene seeking Jesus. She is seeking the dead Jesus and finally she meets the gardener, she recognises him when he calls her by her name and she gives him all her love, all her tenderness, she wants to touch him but Jesus says to her: Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to my brothers and tell them that Jesus is risen.

This is what we also experience in our communities. I have been asked to talk to you today as Laurent’s mum. You know that Laurent has been in heaven almost 9 years but with all our friends from Faith and Light who are already in heaven, we continue to go forward together as pilgrim people and as people loved by God. So of course, touching is important to us. Touching the one we love is something that we miss especially this year since we have to have masks and the barriers around us. It is particularly difficult for our Faith and Light communities but at the same time we have these graces to invent the ways of meeting and the web is one of those means. In any case, in my community, I can tell you that this year has allowed us to be inventive, creative and to be really much more present for one another through all the small attentions and the concern for each other that we have been able to have. Finally, this difficult year has swelled our hearts and brought us closer to one another despite not being able to see one another, hug one another, eat together... Other things have been put in

place. What I truly wish for you in your communities is that you continue to be inventive and creative so that those who suffer most, the smallest, the loneliest are not excluded but that this fraternal communion between us continues to find new ways of being realised.

I have chosen to take my place quite close to the Faith and Light icon, which truly is the wonderful way we have of praying together and I wish you to experience this Easter period by being close to one another, close to your communities, close to those you love and those who are awaiting your love and availability in all the little things of life. We can continue to pray knowing that it is the risen Christ who gives us joy and strength and that together, we can pray before this icon and before all icons of the resurrection. We are in communion with one another.

I wish you a beautiful, beautiful Easter. Alleluia, alleluia, as we sang at Lourdes and as we sang every time we met. Even today, we can sing: alleluia, alleluia, Christ is risen!

I send a big hug to you all.

Message from Time Baluwa

Former vice provincial coordinator, Zimbabwe

It is a great pleasure and honour to connect with you, my brothers and sisters.

My name is Time and I am in Larche Zimbabwe.

My journey started many years ago when I joined Faith and Light as a friend in the late 1990s. As a young person, I always looked for meaning and purpose, and Faith and Light provided that in abundance. I met wonderful people, from persons with intellectual disabilities to families and friends. It's the mutual relationships we had that transformed me and brought so much joy. We had fun together. We organized pilgrimages, we had monthly meeting days and we always looked forward to them. The dances, the games, the mimes, the sharings – they shaped us and united us. I am very happy that I encountered this great movement which transformed me and many others.

This 50 years was well-lived – Happy Anniversary!

Sending

Raúl and Maria-Silvia

Dear friends,

We invite you to maintain the flame and to share the treasure that we have received over the past 50 years. Let us take up the torch of so many women and men who were

part of Faith and Light before us. May we joyfully renew our call to be part of a Faith and Light community. May we celebrate the feast of the call to the mission shared with others. May we enjoy God's love, his unique and infinite embrace and his mercy. May we continue to get to know more about Jesus Christ so as to be able to love and follow him more.

There are many people waiting for us, people who are seeking a place of growth and belonging. Let us get to know them, to make ourselves known, to be visible, to not be afraid.

Let us wholeheartedly invite people to come and see the good!

In these times of pandemic and uncertainty, when we do not know when and how we will get back to our habits and meetings, let us strengthen our friendship, invent ways of maintaining our bonds of belonging, experience and deepen our monthly meetings through the Guidelines. We invite you to experience each community meeting as a gift, as a precious opportunity to celebrate and grow, always expressing our creativity because we know what we are and the treasure we possess.

Easter blessings

Don Marco

On this day when we joyfully celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord, while remembering the birth of Faith and Light, we ask God for his blessing on us all, on our families and on all the Faith and Light communities across the world:

We bless you **Father** because you snatched your Son Jesus from death and brought him back to life: give us the hope of a new life and fill our hearts with your love.

Lord Jesus Christ, you have conquered death and you have risen. Resurrect all those who are in sadness and fear, give them and all of us the joy of your presence and peace.

Holy Spirit, you gave the apostles the strength and courage to proclaim your Gospel to the small and the poor. Support our journey in Faith and Light so that we may bring the joy of your resurrection to everyone while keeping the flame of your love alive.

Almighty God bless us.
Father + Son + and Holy Ghost
Amen