



The hidden fruitfulness of the cross

Churches are getting empty, religious communities die out, scandals rock the credibility of the Church, a secular culture pushes religion out of the public arena, prosperity suffocates the spirit and the search for God. As Christians we find ourselves in a spiritual desert. Failure can discourage those committed to evangelisation and pastoral work. Pope Francis reminds us that the cross is a source of living water, that no work of love, no generous endeavour is ever lost. The desert is the very place where we can rediscover the deep joy that comes from total trust in God.

- ✿ **Christian triumph is always a cross**, yet a cross which is at the same time a victorious banner borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil. The evil spirit of defeatism is brother to the temptation to separate, before its time, the wheat from the weeds; it is the fruit of an anxious and self-centred lack of trust. (Evangelii Gaudium 85)
- ✿ Those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit (cf. Jn 15:5). This **fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable**. We can know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when. We may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. All of these encircle our world like a vital force. Sometimes it seems that our work is fruitless, but mission is not like a business transaction or investment, or even a humanitarian activity. It is not a show where we count how many people come as a result of our publicity; it is something much deeper, which escapes all measurement. It may be that the Lord uses **our sacrifices to shower blessings in another part of the world** which we will never visit. (279)
- ✿ In some places a **spiritual "desertification" has evidently come about**, as the result of attempts by some societies to build without God or to eliminate their Christian roots. In those places "the Christian world is becoming sterile.... In other countries, violent opposition to Christianity forces Christians to hide their faith in their own beloved homeland. This is another painful kind of desert. But family and the workplace can also be a parched place where faith nonetheless has to be preserved and communicated. Yet it is starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us men and women. **In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living**; thus in today's world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, by the example of their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive". (86)
- ✿ In these situations **we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink**. At times, this becomes a heavy cross, but it was from the cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself to us as a source of living water. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope! (86)



- What desert experiences have I made in my own life... in my inner self and in situations I have lived through?
- Where have I found in my deserts „sources of living water“, „an invisible fruitfulness“, „the joy of believing“?