



The Calvary of Pontchâteau shelters a House to rebirth

PONTCHÂTEAU, France - An article from the French review "Famille Chrétienne" n. 2280 (author Olivia de Fournas) presents how the Sycamore house located at the Calvary of Pontchâteau, allows psychologically injured people to live in a family and spiritual environment.

The Sycamore immediately appears as a non-conformist house. Outside, this former "pilgrim's shelter" is dressed in a tired plaster and enlarged disparate results from donations. The household has just taken up residence there. The building is located on the sanctuary of Pontchâteau, property of the Montfort Missionaries who animate this place of pilgrimage. It remains to finance a room called PMR, for "person with reduced mobility" and the Sycamore will have its almost final face. Outside, this unique place set on one hectare takes on the air of a Garden of Eden with its vegetable garden, its carpentry workshop and its farm animals.

The appearance of the place reflects its atypical spirit. Sycamore indeed offers a simple life shared between psychologically injured people. Unlike other structures of this type, it does not hesitate to display its denominational character. This strong choice, since it involves renouncing public aid, is marked by times of prayer and a way of living in an assumed dependence on Providence.

At the head of the house, we have Patrick and H  l  ne Rougevin-B  ville. Before settling in in September 2019, this former specialist educator had worked at *Apprentis d'Auteuil* for twenty-two years. His wife H  l  ne, a nurse for a time, was a volunteer at Tilma, an association for young pregnant women. These parents of seven children were looking for a place to welcome Louis-Marie, their nephew, suffering from autistic disorders, whom they occasionally lodged at their home in Vannes, and with whom they discovered "the joy of welcoming". Providence facilitated the task of the two quadras on the way to Saint-Jacques by placing before their eyes "*The Village Saint Joseph: And everything becomes possible*" (Nouvelle Cit  ), a book in which Katia and Nathana  l evoke the creation of the first Village, Saint Joseph, in Ploun  vez-Quintin (C  tes d'Armor). After meeting the founding couple, the Rougevin-B  ville family visit the house in Pontch  teau. The place is located a few meters from a Calvary, erected by Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort ... the patron saint of their nephew. A clear sign for these two believers.

A HOUSE OPEN TO ALL

The couple now live with seven residents suffering from mental injuries. Add to this Nicodemus, their last 10-year-old son, the seminarian Beno  t on a one-year internship, volunteers, visiting consecrated persons ... because the house is open to everyone. Sometimes they do not even know the handicap or the fragility of each person. For the person received, usually labeled bipolar, depressed, overworked or alcoholic, it is a relief not to be reduced to a word that immediately inspires distrust. Moreover, the evocation of the past is not recommended within the house. "I was not asked for my history, or baptismal certificate, Health-card, or vaccine, otherwise I would not have stayed," says Eric. On his arrival, this tall, thin fellow weighed 150 kg and was regularly in psychiatry. Today, "back in the saddle" after several stays, this father has just moved into a shared apartment, not far from Pontch  teau. He remains very attached to the house, where he works regularly in the carpentry workshop. Eric is not the only former resident to keep ties. The Pole Arek, who arrived in France at the age of 23, arrived "alcoholic patient" at the "Village Saint Joseph" in Ploun  vez-Quintin. For eight months, this jack-of-all-trades renovates the house before being offered to become an employee. Four years later, in 2016, he set up his own building business, and hasn't touched a drop of alcohol for ten years. It is in particular he who manages the work of Sycamore. "The presence of people, prayer and work can do miracles," says the craftsman. With word of mouth and the proliferation of houses in the Village Saint Joseph in France, around twenty people per month request a room at Sycamore. But the Rougevin-B  ville refuse to set up a waiting list. The Holy Spirit does things well, according to Patrick. When a place becomes available, a week of discovery for those who wish to come to Sycamore allows the two parties to check if they can coexist.

NO GOALS ARE DISPLAYED

H  l  ne emphasizes that fraternal life sometimes exhausts them, but no meeting turns them off. By leading them to the end of themselves, it prunes them and makes them more attentive. She widens their hearts, like Zacchaeus, the biblical character who climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, before letting himself be touched. The work, devolved to the community, extends over three hours in the morning and as much in the afternoon. It consists in creating mosaics and wooden objects (at the moment, an ambon for the chapel) for the Christmas market, preparing the meal, and especially taking care of the garden which provides subsistence for the household. Louis-Marie, with his autistic disorders, participates to the extent of his means, by placing chairs

on the table to sweep, for example. No objective is displayed. "Efficiency" or "skills" are words that Patrick utters half-heartedly, as if they were undermined. Because a stay at Sycamore is not aimed at social or professional reintegration, but the deployment of a daily life in harmony with Creation, moment after moment. "John and Mary, at the foot of the cross, did no other thing", insist the two oblates of the Saint-Jean community. It is this life with no other goal than to serve God simply, in the humble watering of a garden, the peeling of apples or the work of wood, which will be able to restore confidence and joy to the residents. In the great mosaic room, when the colored fragments are chosen, broken, glued on a support and the joint placed, the budding craftsman has also rebuilt his dignity. Little by little, he trains himself to contemplate the earth according to the rhythm of the seasons. He thus lives according to "Laudato si", the deep meaning of which Patrick studies, indexed on the central place of man: "*We can live intensely with little, especially when we are able to appreciate other pleasures and finds satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service*" (no. 243). The residents also learn to live in the present moment, and thus establish their healing in the long term. Those who fail to fit into this seasonal rhythm often choose to leave. Arek is convinced that relying solely on his strength is futile. He testifies to having found work when he abandoned himself to the goodwill of God. "If you want to make the Good Lord laugh, tell Him about your projects", he blurted out by way of explanation, even if this hard worker does not neglect his part. For him, the projects belong to the world of the - in a hurry, which he looks at with a small smile and a lot of mercy. The future is no longer a concern.

"I WILL LEAVE WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT"

The Rougevin-Bâville do not know how long they are at Sycamore, their charges too. "I'll leave when the time is right," says Gaëtan, a resident, when asked. It must be said that Patrick and Hélène set an example. A few months ago, the site stopped for lack of money. They then prayed to Saint Joseph by initiating a novena. Conclusion: a walker came to ring the bell one evening, claiming asylum. "This is the saint's masterful answer! smiles Patrick. We come to ask him for money, he gives us a resident!" For the head of the house, the message is clear: take care of the poor, God will take care of the rest. The parents' check from a former member of the Village arrived shortly after. Living without worrying about the next day allows them to focus their attention on the essential: God. Or is it the opposite?

His presence here, Patrick is certain, is rooted in faithful morning prayer. The old refreshment bar transformed into a chapel, where a carefully chosen stained glass window has just been placed, is the setting for their fraternal life. Adoration, rosary, and mass also contribute to making the inhabitants the beings "rooted and grateful towards God" that Patrick calls for his wishes. The presence in the sanctuary of five Montfortian missionaries, two Brothers of Saint Gabriel and Daughters of Wisdom nuns, helps to develop the life of faith. Father Santino Brembilla passes regularly and a Daughter of Wisdom accompanies Dorothée, a resident who has requested baptism. "Everyone learns to allow themselves to be loved, then to consent to their reality, hoping one day to know how to recognize that it is even a grace", hopes Patrick. This path of acceptance is the work of a lifetime, on the pilgrimage full of ambushes that residents still must travel. The Sycamore simply hopes to be a stopover, a "pilgrim's shelter" on their way to the Kingdom.