



**2025**

# Christmas Letter

**IN JESUS CHRIST, POOR, CRUCIFIED AND EATEN**



**Prado**

# MEETING JESUS IN A COMMUNITY OF THE POOR

« *They hurried and found Mary and Joseph, with the newborn lying in the manger* » (Lc 2,16)

As we celebrate the mystery of Christmas, I invite you to meditate on this verse from the Gospel, which tells us how a group of shepherds, marginalised people of dubious morality, encountered a small community of poor people who would change their lives forever. I also invite you to look at our own Pradosian family in its various institutions, communities and teams. Today we are called to be like that community gathered in the stable, with its doors open "to the four winds", to welcome the poor whom God places on our path and to build the Kingdom with them.

This small community of poor people is made up of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and a small, indeterminate group of people who, according to the Gospel account, marvelled at what the shepherds said. Luke is a narrator who seeks to interact with the reader, and it is undoubtedly for this reason that he places these newcomers, whose existence we are only aware of, alongside the Holy Family. Each of us can be one of those who stand in the stable before Jesus, the Incarnate Word, as part of this first community. Father Chevrier also desired to occupy one of these places of honour in the stable. After celebrating Epiphany in the Sistine Chapel, he tells us what his heart truly desired: "*I would have preferred to see the manger of the good Jesus and be a shepherd, to have the happiness of being in the stable of the good Saviour*" (Letter 15).

This small community of poor people gathers around Jesus. He is the centre and the reason why this brotherhood of the stable has come together. Jesus is a kind of magnet that attracts everyone. The fragility of a small, dependent child, radically and "ontologically" poor, in the words of Fr. Ancel, attracts the presence of other poor people who discover in him the riches of the Father's incarnate Word: his immense and irrevocable love for humanity. "*O ineffable mystery! God is with us, God has come to speak to us, he has come to live with us to speak to us and teach us*" (VD 62). This is the first task of the team, of the Pradosian community: to allow Jesus Christ to occupy the centre of our lives so that the poor whom the Lord sends us may also discover him in us.

This small community of poor people is enriched by other members who have been chosen and sent by the Father. The shepherds go to the stable because God, through his angel, has revealed to them the event that has taken place. Obedient to the Word, they left their flocks in the fields and hurried to Bethlehem. They did not take the initiative; they simply listened and obeyed what they were told. In them is fulfilled the Word that Jesus will proclaim in Capernaum: "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*" (Jn 6:44). The Father continues to send poor people into the communities of his Church, among which is Prado. He places the poor close to us so that we may show them his Son. Everyone knows who these people in precarious situations are. In the city of Lyon, the presence of immigrants who survive with a minimum of dignity in tents is becoming more visible every day. Less than two hundred metres from the Prado chapel, we have two such camps for the poor. We find them in every village and every city, for the poor will always be among us. This community in Bethlehem encourages the whole Prado to not turn our gaze away from the poor and to discover that it is God himself who brings them into our Church.

This small community of poor people lives in poverty of spirit and humility, which leads them to recognise the presence of the Word of God and to worship him in silence. Luke's account does not convey any words spoken by the people who gathered in the stable. Before the definitive Word of the Father made flesh, any other words are superfluous and disturbing. Before the mystery that presents itself to their eyes, only adoring silence is possible. Such was the experience that transformed Father Chevrier's life. Silent contemplation of the one who is the incarnate Word led him to let it become incarnate in his life and to place himself among the poor to build with them the new family of Jesus: "*A God becomes a child. God, out of*



love, makes himself livable. He belongs to us. He is given to us. He comes to form a new people of true worshippers, of brothers" (Christmas Sermon 1857).

This small community meets in a stable rather than in the town inn. The Father chose this place for the birth of his Son. The Poor One is born into poverty, and those who are with him share in these conditions. The place where the community meets and the means at its disposal can speak of the poverty we are called to live and facilitate the welcome of the poor who arrive: *"We must carry this spirit of poverty and simplicity and be content with what is necessary, even in our churches and in the objects of worship. There should be nothing in our churches and in our vestments that arouses the curiosity or jealousy of the faithful. [...] Put a holy priest in a wooden church, open to the winds, and he will attract and convert more people in his wooden church than another priest in a golden church"* (VD 297). Pope Leo XIV emphasises this idea, quoting St John Chrysostom, in his recent apostolic exhortation: *"God does not need objects of gold, but souls of gold"* (Dilexi Te, 41).

This small, poor community allows itself to be taught by the poor who come to it. The shepherds shiver as they enter the stable and find Jesus in the centre, the people gathered in adoration and the conditions of poverty that are not unfamiliar to them. They feel at home and that is why, with complete confidence, they are the ones who speak. Their experience confirms what the angel had told them about the child, and they feel the need to share it. They are the ones who evangelise those who welcome them. Their words arouse the admiration of all who listen to them, especially Mary, who was able to listen with her heart. How important it is today to listen with admiration and acceptance to the words of the poor! The poor speak to us of Jesus through their own lives; in them we find the Gospel lived out. They are witnesses and teachers of the faith for us: *"We are witnesses to their capacity to take on responsibilities in the world and in the Church. Together, we nourish our hope with the signs of the Spirit that we perceive in their lives. This is the Gospel we want to share with them"* (Constitutions 44).

My friends, our Pradosian family is called today to be like this fraternity gathered in the stable. We are about to begin the celebration of the bicentenary of Father Chevrier's birth, and in order to celebrate it in the same evangelical spirit as the Apostle of La Guillotière, we must renew the charism we have received and open our hearts and the doors of our homes to Jesus who comes to us in the lives of the poor. May the Lord grant us to be the channel of his grace so that, among us, the poor and those who suffer may live the same human and believing process that the shepherds lived in that small and poor community of Bethlehem.

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