

## Letter 2026

# What are you seeking?

So many people are looking for meaning in their lives. They are searching for something greater than the easy promises that fill our screens so much of the time. Are humans not created for a real purpose? What can enable us to discover this?

When we try to live from the trusting of faith we sometimes ask ourselves: What does God want of me? We have so many desires. Which is the path I can walk with God?

During the past year, we have received visits at Taizé from young people from Ukraine, Palestine, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Myanmar and other places where war and conflict are rife. Their faith and their longing for just and lasting peace have been an inspiration to us. We have also heard the testimonies of people working in Gaza or with family living there. We can see the pain of those whose loved ones have been held hostage and hear the cries of those seeking justice under oppressive regimes.

I also spent some time with the brothers of our Taizé community who live in small fraternities in Brazil and in Cuba. Brazil is still affected by the legacy of slavery and great inequality. Yet there are people who refuse to give up; they are fighting to be at the side of the poorest. I think in particular of a community in the city of Salvador, where homeless people sleep in the church and help each other.

In Cuba, I saw a courageous people facing enormous difficulties. I met a grandmother who had given all her savings so that her grandson would have what he needed for the start of the school year. His mother, like many other Cubans, had left the country as a migrant seeking a better future.

In many places, people are wondering: How can I use the freedom that has been given to me to express solidarity with those who suffer? They are seeking ways in which their desire to love and care can become real, making their lives meaningful by helping and serving.

Our world has so much beauty, but so much injustice too. What is my place in all of that? What am I being asked to do? This is the question which I often feel in my heart, faced with the complexity of life and the choices with which I am confronted.

In John's Gospel, the first words of Jesus are "What are you seeking?" I shared this question with a group of six young volunteers in Taizé from six different countries spread over four continents. What follows is inspired by what they told me.

To them and to all the volunteers who help run the meetings in Taizé, spending time with our community in order to pray and to understand more about the call of Christ in their lives, I would like to say thank you.

Brother Matthew

## Seeking silence

After a week at Taizé, when asked what has been most important for them, many young people speak about the experience of silence. In a world which is hyperconnected and constantly on the move, this may seem surprising.

When we take time and disconnect from input that never ends, it is sometimes in silence that we truly encounter ourselves and also glimpse a greater reality.

In God's beautiful creation, the sound of the wind, the babbling brook and birdsong can embrace us and lead us towards that inner silence where communion with all that exists becomes tangible. A star-filled night can fill us with wonder.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus entered the world in silence:<sup>2</sup> "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."<sup>3</sup> The One who was with God and was God before the beginning of all things came to be with us through a humble and lowly birth in the silence of the night:<sup>4</sup> the light which shines in the darkness.

And so this silence is not empty. It becomes a place of encounter. In silence we are not alone. But we struggle with it because our mind is filled with so many things. As it says in the Rule of Taizé, "If your attention wanders, return to prayer as soon as you notice your distraction, without lamenting over it."<sup>5</sup>

Many centuries ago, someone prayed, "My heart says of you, 'Seek God's face!' Your face, God, I will seek."<sup>6</sup> In the silence of our heart, will we turn again and again to seek God?

Prayer is often first of all a desire,<sup>7</sup> a silent longing for peace in the presence of God. When we do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit is there, praying in us in sighs too deep for words.<sup>8</sup> As we listen to that deepest part of our heart, we can realize that it is there that the Holy Spirit dwells. I am confronted with myself and with God, who is breathing in me.

*Living God, teach me to seek you in the silence of my heart, in the beauty of creation, in listening to your Word, in welcoming your humble presence.*

Can we commit ourselves to spending time each day to be silent and to enter into the presence of God? Perhaps we could start with just five minutes to begin with. Begin by reading a short passage of the Bible, or give thanks for what has been received during the past day; or simply take time to be.

## Seeking a direction

Silence makes true discernment possible. When we are seeking which direction to take, silence allows us to listen to what is deepest in us. We also need an inner freedom so that we can make a responsible choice. Such freedom involves accepting our limits, but without being afraid: fear is never a good counsellor, and God never forces our hearts.

<sup>1</sup> See Psalm 8:3-4 and 19:1-4

<sup>2</sup> See the homily of Pope Francis at the ecumenical prayer vigil "Together" on 30 September, 2023, in Rome. [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2023/documents/20230930-vegliaecumenica.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2023/documents/20230930-vegliaecumenica.html)

<sup>3</sup> John 1:14

<sup>4</sup> "When peaceful silence lay over all, and night had run the half of her swift course, down from the heavens, from the royal throne, leapt your all-powerful Word..." (Wisdom 18:14-15)

<sup>5</sup> The Rule of Taizé, in French and English, (SPCK, London, 2012) p. 23

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 27:8

<sup>7</sup> St Augustine writes: "Your desire is your prayer; and if your desire is continual, your prayer is continual also. Not without reason did the Apostle say, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Do you wish never to cease praying? Then never cease desiring. Your continual desire is your continual voice." Exposition on Psalm 37 (38), §14 (from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 8)

<sup>8</sup> See Romans 8:26-27

<sup>9</sup> John 1:38-39

<sup>10</sup> This prayer of St Bridget of Sweden who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century is like a light on our path with Christ. We can pray it at times when we need to decide on something.

<sup>11</sup> see John 2:1-12

<sup>12</sup> "In Cana, the evangelist John does not tell us what is humanly possible; he takes us to another level and brings us into the mysterious power of relationships, the place where knowledge ceases, where another dimension comes into play, that of trust. It is not the level of objects and evidence, but of subjects and signs. Moreover, the words that are often translated as 'miracles' in the other three Gospels are never used by John: everywhere he has chosen the word 'sign' - semeion - 'meaning' rather than 'power'. Here, Jesus gives a sign. A sign is a meaningful gesture made by one person to another." Marie Balmory, *Ce lieu en nous que nous ne connaissons pas* (Albin Michel 2024), p. 21

Everyone is seeking both a sense of belonging and some form of security. And as we seek an authentic way of living, sometimes it is other people who can help us find who we really are. Through others we may be surprised to discover something that we could not have found alone.

In John's Gospel, two young people are staying in the Jordan valley with their teacher, John the Baptist, whom they trust. Not wanting to keep them for himself, he points them towards another, to Jesus. And they leave to go after him.

When Jesus sees them, he asks, "What are you seeking?" When they reply, "Master, where do you live?" he tells them, "Come and you will see".<sup>9</sup>

Those two questions sum up the process of seeking and discovering a direction for a life with Christ. Starting with our own desires, with expressions of our longing for greater life – "What are you seeking?" – we go on to confront them with the person of Jesus – "Master, where do you live?"

The Jesus who invites us to "Come and see" is gentle and humble of heart, and he loves us with a love that is unconditional, secure and unfailing. Will I dare to respond to his invitation despite my hesitations and even my doubts?

*Christ Jesus, show me the way and make me ready to follow it.*<sup>10</sup>

Who are the people who point me towards Christ? Spend a moment giving thanks for them.
--

## Seeking joy

One of the volunteers at Taizé told me, "In my country, young people try to survive in a world that offers everything; but deep within, it is fear, anxiety and depression that dominate."

We are faced with promises of joy all around us. But so many of these fail to lead to a lasting joy, and give just a short moment of pleasure.

Joy bubbles up from deep within when we realise that we are loved for who we are. When we understand that joy is a gift and not something we can claim, we can find we are ready to welcome it. Then we are no longer trying to produce it by force, and we are borne lightly forward.

Jesus was invited with his friends to a wedding feast,<sup>11</sup> and after a while the wine ran out. At that moment, something is lacking: Jesus is among the poor. Meeting them in their poverty, he gives them what is beyond their expectations. What he wants for them is joy, and he does everything to make it possible.<sup>12</sup>

I remember many years ago being in Kolkata at the mother house of the Missionaries of Charity. On the wall was a saying of Mother Teresa which reminded me that God accepts us with our frailty and does not ask us to be perfect. We do not need to be always strong.

Our inner poverty can make us worry that we are not good enough. This often leads us to disguise who we really are, deep down. But if we allow ourselves to stand with empty hands before Christ, he comes to fill them, transforming that poverty little by little.

Even at times when we feel sorrow, and joy seems far off, it is possible to remember how Jesus spoke of a joy that no-one will be able to take away.<sup>13</sup>

*Merciful God, we would like to welcome your joy whatever situation we may be in. When we understand that you love us and open for us the way to a life that will never end, joy springs forth from deep within us.*

Reflect on what we can do to bring joy to other people. Meet with someone in person rather than only virtually. Sometimes in a humble service given freely to others I receive far more in return than I had expected, especially when I see the joy on the face of those I am serving.

## Seeking meaning

In each one of us there is a thirst for meaning. Where can we quench this thirst? In our busy lives, somewhere within us there is a quiet voice which whispers that we are loved.

A leader called Nicodemus, who was seeking true meaning in his life, heard of Jesus.<sup>14</sup> He came by night to meet him and to find a way to put his thoughts into words.

Our deepest questions about faith, life and death, meaning and purpose often remain unspoken. But until they are expressed, something in us is not satisfied, as was the case for Nicodemus.

As we seek, will we follow our questions until they bring us to the source of life? We may not find all the answers to our questions; but when we dare to follow Christ, we can come to a point where we have to entrust ourselves to God with a lucid trust.<sup>15</sup> Then we discover God's enfolding love and goodness.

The meaning of Jesus' life was not to judge humanity but to enable every human being to understand that they are loved by God. He comes to show us the path of an ever-greater love. That is his secret.

Nicodemus approached the light step by step. A year or two after meeting Jesus by night, he openly took his defence with the authorities in Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> A few months later, when Jesus was hung on a cross, he showed great courage.<sup>17</sup> He dared to belong to the group of Jesus' friends. His courage led him into community.

*Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on.... I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> see John 16:22

<sup>14</sup> see John 3:1-21

<sup>15</sup> "Lucid trust" is described by Chilean philosopher José Andrés Murillo as a "trust that is active and committed to the conditions that make it possible". Murillo, José Andrés. 2012. *Confianza lúcida*. Santiago, Chile: Uqbar Editores. p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> see John 7:50-52

<sup>17</sup> see John 19:38-42

<sup>18</sup> These words come from a poem written by St John Henry Newman, a doctor of the Catholic Church, but loved also by Anglicans, the Church from which he first received faith.

<sup>19</sup> "When we see values such as gratitude or love for the environment being violated or ignored, we become angry. In some ways, emotions such as anger and frustration are useful (...) They can sometimes produce the energy that makes it possible to take action to alter unacceptable behaviour – or staunch one of the earth's wounds – even though we may have to explain to others what we're so upset about. It is in such spirit that Jesus threw the moneychangers out of the Temple." Wangari Maathai in *Replenishing the Earth* (Doubleday Religion, New York 2010)

<sup>20</sup> “Any fight against injustice can in turn mask or even generate another injustice. Injustice is complex and plays out on many different levels. There is certainly room for progress towards justice, and this must remain a constant focus, but it remains limited.”

Olivier Abel, *De l’humiliation – le nouveau poison de notre société* (Les Liens qui libèrent 2022)

<sup>21</sup> A rabbi friend wrote to us in February 2024: “I love the Jewish people wherever they dwell on this earth. But I also stand for justice, human rights and peace. So, while I stand with Israel, I also stand with the people of Gaza and of Palestine, as I do with all innocent bystanders of war around the world. It’s not easy to hold those multiple, and sometimes opposing, truths, all at once. But it’s something I feel I must do. Study and prayer have taught me not to deny, put off or deflect the brokenness in this world. But to embrace it, stand with it, and try to be present wherever and whenever it is found. May it be God’s will that we human beings learn to recognize and hold the pain of others and to stand with those in need, Amen.”

<sup>22</sup> “The violence of the peacemakers! It is creative!” From *La violence des pacifiques*, in *Dynamique du provisoire – À l’écoute des nouvelles générations*, *Les écrits de frère Roger vol. 4* (Les Presses de Taizé 2014) p. 277. This was Brother Roger’s way of expressing how he believed the violence in us can be channelled in a positive way.

<sup>23</sup> see John 2:13-22

<sup>24</sup> see Luke 7:37; 11:37

<sup>25</sup> see Matthew 15:24

<sup>26</sup> see Matthew 8:5-13

Try to organise a gathering where each person speaks about how they find meaning in their lives. For some it may be from their faith, for others it may be through some kind of action, still others may have more questions than answers. Such sharing and attentive listening can be way of encouraging each other. If it seems appropriate, the gathering could begin with a song invoking the Holy Spirit and finish with a song of thanksgiving.

## Seeking a just world

Injustice – whether it involves ecological devastation,<sup>19</sup> inequalities, violence, oppression or war – stirs up a whole range of emotions: indignation, anger, sadness, sometimes despair. But as we rightly decide to fight against it, is there not a danger of becoming so locked in our own opinions that we no longer see beyond them?<sup>20</sup> There is even the risk of becoming prisoners of our own algorithm and being caught up in the polarisation that threatens our societies.

Let us step outside our own box and allow viewpoints different from ours to challenge us, even when it is impossible to agree.

Sometimes we need to be ready to hold complex realities together, where no solution seems possible.<sup>21</sup> Listening to the stories from different sides can be overwhelming, but not to hear them would be unjust.

After evening prayer in the church in Taizé, a young woman said to me: “I have to recognise the violence that exists in me, but also to hold it alongside my need for contemplation.” I found this very liberating. Instead of suppressing that feeling, or pretending it didn’t exist, she placed it alongside her thirst for God.

There is a danger that the destructive forces which are in each one of us can take hold of us. It is so easy to demonise people, even whole nations. Then we risk being sucked into a spiral of violence and perpetuating it. Contemplation – prayer – opens us to another dimension, leading us to be reconciled with what we carry within us and to find ways of building bridges.

The Holy Spirit is there to lead us on the path where we can make courageous decisions. Brother Roger, who began our community life in Taizé, spoke of a creative violence of the peacemakers<sup>22</sup> which enables them not to give in to the temptation to leave the path of the Gospel.

Jesus embodies the world of justice and right relationships which the Gospels call the Kingdom of God. But he got angry and overturned the tables of the sellers and money-changers in the Temple to make room for God.<sup>23</sup> Jesus spoke vehemently against religious hypocrisy, but he was also able to welcome a religious leader like Nicodemus. He was familiar with the Pharisees and accepted their hospitality,<sup>24</sup> but he also shared meals with people excluded from society. He had an unfailing love for the lost sheep of his people Israel,<sup>25</sup> but he admired the faith of a Roman officer and healed his child;<sup>26</sup> and he

allowed himself to be challenged by the faith of a pagan woman he met on a journey abroad.<sup>27</sup>

Taking the risk of establishing relationships with people who were different,<sup>28</sup> Jesus fostered trust and incarnated God's reconciling power.

If we know that the light shines in the darkness and that, through simple gestures of human goodness, the love of God can win, then we are set free to act.

*Christ Jesus, in your life on earth, you did not hesitate to denounce injustice, but you sought to build bridges with those you met on your path. Increase our thirst to bridge the separations which divide people and nations so that justice may flourish on earth.*

Which concrete steps can we take to build bridges where there is division? It is difficult for one person to act on their own. Reflect with others; put ideas together; reach out as a group to those on the margins of society. What does it mean to listen to people with different opinions from ours, to understand their fears, whilst holding on to our own Gospel values?

## Seeking community

One of the volunteers at Taizé told me, "I want to live in accordance with my values and Gospel values. When I make a decision, I ask myself, is this acceptable for others, for the planet and also for me? We want to build a better world."

Community with each other, with creation, with God – after the isolation of the pandemic, are we ready to rebuild a world of community,<sup>29</sup> a caring world?<sup>30</sup> Everything is linked; we all belong to each other in our common home, the creation which has been gifted to us.

At the Cross, Jesus' community had disintegrated. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. Most of his friends ran away. All Jesus' work to build a life of loving communion, of being welcoming to all, seemed to have ended. He had taken the risk of being ready to give his life even for those who were to reject him. But at the darkest moment, community is reborn at the foot of the Cross.<sup>31</sup>

According to John's Gospel, four women and one man remain with Jesus right until the end. Without words, they are simply there. They become witnesses to the communion that Jesus continues creating even when nothing seems possible any longer.

Hostility and rejection break human communion. On the Cross, Jesus takes this hostility and rejection on himself, rebuilding communion even at the moment of greatest suffering.<sup>32</sup>

At the Cross, Jesus gives his beloved disciple to his mother as another son, and he, representing all the future disciples whom Jesus loves, takes her into his

<sup>27</sup> see Matthew 15:21-28

<sup>28</sup> See for example the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-26

<sup>29</sup> "Imagine a circle drawn on the earth. (...) Imagine that this circle is the world and the centre is God; and the radii are people's different paths or ways of life. When good people, desiring to draw closer to God, walk towards the centre of the circle, as they penetrate further inside, they draw closer to each other at the same time as they draw closer to God. The closer they get to God, the closer they get to each other; the closer they get to each other, the closer they get to God." Dorotheos of Gaza, 6<sup>th</sup> century, Soyons l'âme du monde, Les Presses de Taizé 2025, p. 166

<sup>30</sup> How can we bring to light the caring qualities that exist in every culture? The spirit of the Japanese tea ceremony, Chanoyu, is summed up in four words. "Wa" or harmony: the ceremony takes part in a harmonious atmosphere; "Kei" or respect, which should be there between host and guests; "Sei" or purity, in appearance as well as in heart; "Jaku" or solitude, a calm mind that remains present at all times during the ceremony.

<sup>31</sup> see John 19:25-27

<sup>32</sup> (On the killing of a Catholic priest during the dictatorship in Chile.) "The image of the priest lying dead on his Bible open at the Psalms had an equal impact on Catholics, Evangelicals and non-believers, who joined en masse in the impressive funeral procession to the Cathedral. (...) Walking in the light of those candles seemed safer than ever. I heard different people, Catholics and Evangelicals, say that they had initiated the gesture. In reality, it did not matter who started it; the fact is that it expressed a unanimity of spirit that is rarely seen in life. (...) Can sincere ecumenism only flourish in difficult times, when life is threatened on a daily basis?" Juan Sepúlveda, Chilean Pentecostal pastor « La defensa de los derechos humanos como experiencia ecuménica », in Sandra Arenas and

Rodrigo Polanco (dir.),  
Ecumenismo: Un panorama  
latinoamericano (Editions  
Universidad Alberto Hurtado /  
Centro Teológico Manuel Larraín,  
Santiago, 2021) p. 270-271

<sup>33</sup> "God's love for humankind is so abundant, so vast, so deep, and so universal. So much so that no measure or scale can describe even a fraction of it." Attributed to the Maronite Patriarch Estephan (Etienne) Douaihy (1630-1704)

<sup>34</sup> "By her very nature the Church is in solidarity with the poor, the excluded, the marginalized and all those considered the outcast of society. The poor are at the heart of the Church because 'our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members.' In our hearts, we encounter 'the need to heed this plea, born of the liberating action of grace within each of us, and so it is not a matter of a mission reserved only to a few.'" Pope Leo XIV Apostolic exhortation *Dilexi te*, 111

<sup>35</sup> see John 19:31

<sup>36</sup> see Genesis 1:31-2:2

<sup>37</sup> John 7:38

<sup>38</sup> see John 19:34

<sup>39</sup> see John 19:38-42

<sup>40</sup> St Ambrose of Milan, Treaty on Luke's Gospel, V, 58. Soyons l'âme du monde, (Les Presses de Taizé, 2025) p. 108

<sup>41</sup> John 20:15. The whole of John's Gospel moves from the first question Jesus asks those who wish to follow him – "What are you seeking?" – to his final question to Mary of Magdala after the Resurrection – "Whom are you seeking?" We could see this as a fulfilment of what Jesus said in John 12:32: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Does not all our seeking ultimately find its meaning in letting ourselves be met by the Risen Christ?

<sup>42</sup> John 20:21

home. A new family is born: the community of believers in Jesus, the Church – born not in a human way out of triumph and victory, but out of a love which is greater than the mute silence of suffering. Who could be excluded from such a communion?<sup>33</sup>

In the Church, we are called to stand together with those who suffer, with the victims of injustice.<sup>34</sup> We are all humans, called to welcome one another in fairness and uprightness, where the freedom and integrity of each person is respected.

Jesus finishes his work when he dies on the eve of the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week,<sup>35</sup> just as God finished the work of creation on the seventh day, having seen that all "was very good".<sup>36</sup> The gift Jesus makes of his life on the Cross is the beginning of a new creation. He dies a violent death – but "streams of living water"<sup>37</sup> flow from his body,<sup>38</sup> water which is nothing other than the Holy Spirit renewing the face of the earth.

The body of Jesus is placed in a new tomb in a garden, the garden which our earth is meant to become.<sup>39</sup> And in the silence of the seventh day that follows, the wounded creation, of which we are part and which is entrusted to our care, begins its secret transfiguration.

*Christ Jesus, you gave your life for each person, and you show us how far you are willing to commit yourself to us. May we stand at the foot of your Cross with your mother Mary and your beloved disciple, and welcome what you tell us.*

With whom are we asked to stand? How do we experience community? Students can share a house together, pray and share meals, especially with overseas students; others meet weekly in somebody's home. Make those who feel they are on the outside welcome, overcoming the feeling of injustice in a simple way.

## Seeking peace

We long for peace – inner peace and peace in this world which God loves so much. "Begin the work of peace within yourself, so that, once you are at peace, you can bring peace to others,"<sup>40</sup> said a believer of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

When Jesus meets with Mary of Magdala in the garden on Easter morning, he asks her, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"<sup>41</sup> Her tears turn to joy as she realises that the one she longed for has not been overcome by death. And Jesus then sends her to share what she has seen and heard with his other friends.

Shortly afterwards, when Jesus meets them and they are still full of fear, his first words are "Peace be with you!"<sup>42</sup> Entering into their fear, he opens them to the peace of his presence. Breathing upon them the Holy Spirit, he gives them the responsibility for continuing his work of reconciliation.

The peace Jesus had promised them before his death, a “peace which the world cannot give”,<sup>43</sup> is much more than an absence of conflict. The biblical word *shalom* includes the sense of restoration and wholeness. This is the peace of God entrusted to us so that we can foster and develop it.

When we help others discover the freedom and the peace that they are offered, when we do what we can to break down barriers of hostility or the walls that keep them confined, then we are taking part in the very life of God. And when we look at creation with wonder and gratitude and show care for it, are we not walking on the same path?

All of us have a need to let ourselves be bathed in the peace that the Risen Christ promises each one of us. In this way we can journey together and accompany each other, sowing hope<sup>44</sup> step by step. Even through the simplest gestures, will we seek to become signs of reconciliation, pilgrims of peace, each in our own way, wherever God has placed us?

Listen to the voices of those who suffer from deadly conflicts or from the violence that we have to face in our societies. Maintaining contact with people who live in war zones can be a way of doing this. Support those striving for justice in countries with oppressive regimes or with governments that promote war. Would some of these people be ready to share their testimony? Prepare a prayer vigil for peace and share some of these testimonies. Listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today.

*Bless us, God of love. Through the Holy Spirit, always guide our steps as we walk with the Risen Christ. May we seek to become pilgrims of hope, pilgrims of peace.*

<sup>43</sup> John 14:27

<sup>44</sup> Cf John 12:24. “Jesus said, Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” The single grain – though something very small – contains within it everything needed to produce something far greater. Though we often think what we do does not count so much, we should not underestimate the positive effect it can have for others and for the planet.