

1984

Editorial: A Visit to Auteuil

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Recommended Citation

Gilbert, A. (1984). Editorial: A Visit to Auteuil. *Spiritan Papers*, 17 (17). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-papers/vol17/iss17/4>

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A VISIT TO AUTEUIL

By way of preparation for editing this issue of *Spiritan Papers* I spent a few days with my Spiritan confreres at Auteuil on the outskirts of Paris. I began with a prayer at Father Brottier's grave, my first visit to it in ten years. (On that occasion I was formally presenting a past student of Auteuil to the bishop for Ordination to the priesthood after his studies at Chevilly). People were praying at the grave and then moving to the altar and statue of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, with its relic, just to the left. They were obviously joining the two "saints" in one religious act. A lady beside me kept repeating, "Good Father Brottier, Good Father Brottier!" I had heard a similar invocation at the grave of another Holy Ghost Father, far away on the island of Mauritius, "Good Father Laval, Good Father Laval!" I felt in my heart that she was heard, God listens to the prayers of the humble. Here, as on Mauritius, the humble gather, the little ones, the distressed, the outcast, whose plight is equalled only by their trust. Evidently both Daniel Brottier and James Laval are continuing the apostolate to the most abandoned that they began on earth in different circumstances but in the one spirit. A simple basket on the grave was filled with with folded scraps of paper, some of them carefully prepared beforehand, others torn from a copy-book. In my own indiscreet way I unfolded a few. I heard later that the basket receives thousands of these! They read:

I am alone in my pain; I expect the worst; Father Brottier, help me — Father Brottier, take pity on my baby — My little daughter has had an accident, fractured skull, broken legs; Father Brottier, save her — For my birthday twelve, I got a hundred francs; here are fifty for children with no parents; is that all right? — With both legs amputated, my pain is dreadful; Father Brottier, do something for me — I feel alone, I cannot cope, I am lonely and lost, I have only you, dear Father Brottier — I cannot pray any more, help me — Father Brottier, pray for this old priest who should retire but has nowhere to

go — I love God, I want to serve God, but I am not even baptized and I have sinned; what am I to do? Help me.

I prayed along with these people, feeling their reassurance. Father Brottier himself prayed with the boldness of humility. "They reproach me for wanting too expensive a chapel, but I asked Little Thérèse herself: Do you want a simple dress or a pretty one?" She sent enough for a very pretty one. There is the added fact that I was cured myself by Father Brottier. In 1943 I was being treated unsuccessfully for an infectious wound in the foot until I found a picture (one of two million that had been printed!) of Fr. Brottier and placed it on the wound. Within a few hours the infection was gone and the skin cured. I went to report the cure to Fr. Duval, the new director of Auteuil, only to find a gentleman there with Father Brottier's breviary, which had cured his daughter of meningitis by the mere touch. These memories came back to me as I watched the people touch Father Brottier's grave. His body was found perfectly preserved when it was exhumed in 1962, 26 years after his death.

In the playground I noticed the varied nationalities of today's young people at Auteuil, many of them reminders of recent catastrophes: the boat-people of Vietnam, Laotian exiles, refugees from Cambodia, children from Uganda, Asiatics, Africans, South Americans. "Widen the domain of your charity", Pope Pius XI had said to Father Brottier. This is precisely what has happened. Auteuil is a sampling of the evils of our day. Behind each face is a family or social tragedy that weighs heavily on the young person's affective and psychological balance. Young people from France, from the third and fourth worlds, all hide sufferings behind their brave appearance.

My Spiritan confreres at Auteuil would keep repeating that the real need is for love and understanding, over and above money to receive and train these youths. At community prayer they pray Father Brottier to send educators who are sincere and deeply Christian, trained in the latest pedagogical sciences, but with a heart "as big as that", as big as Father Brottier's. I spent a night-vigil with some of these educators before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the lower chapel. Strength and love must come from above for a task like theirs. The chaplains of the Auteuil houses are full of hope and zeal. But they are aging and thinning out. In this new kind of micro-

cosm young Spiritans from other countries, young African Spiritans, might find a way of giving their life for abandoned youth. I thought of this when I remembered how many will read these pages from the new provinces and foundations.

It is with a thought for them, and for all confreres far from Paris, who do not know Father Brottier, that we have edited this issue, letting those speak who are most knowledgeable on his life, work, and spirit. His beatification is near. We are offering inspiration, documentation and bibliography for publications in other languages when the moment comes. And we have tried also to trace his Spiritan charism in the steps of Father Libermann.

St. Francis de Sales said, "the gospel is written music, the saint is sung music". Daniel Brottier, C.S.Sp., sang the gospel with his whole life! *Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis*. God is wonderful in his saints!

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