

IV Brother Charles – leaving for the Hoggar, Tamanrasset

As at the Trappists and Nazareth, Br Charles had settled in Beni Abbes, declaring that he was going to stay there for ever. But as soon as he says forever, that mean means that he will soon be gone. His life can be disconcerting as it is made up of a series of different stages that are all relatively short lived. But they do in have a direction and at the end of his life his vocation comes into fullness. But for him what was essential was to live a great love with Jesus. That always came before any state of life.

After two years in Beni Abbes, a friend he had known in his youth General Laperrine, now commander of the Saharan Oases is going to ask him to join a military convoy going to the Tuaregs of the Southern Sahara. The Tuaregs were reputed for their hostility, and so long as the Sahara interested no one they were left alone. But with European powers consolidating their colonial empires, France wanted to unite its colonies in Northern and sub Saharan Africa. The Algerian part of the Sahara therefore needed to come under their control. In spite of a few valiant combats, the Tuareg were no match for the French army. They had to surrender. Laperrine however preferred to come to an understanding with these tribes rather than hold them at gun point. So he decided to organize *fraternisation tours* that basically consisted in going around to meet the people, talk with them and try to get them all to submit to an amenokol, or leader that would henceforth be named by France. In exchange they would enjoy certain benefits. Moussa, no less than other Tuareg chiefs, welcomed the French invasion, but for the good of his people he tried to make the best of a bad situation.

In this task of fraternisation, Laperrine knew that a man of God would have more



influence than guns.

He wrote to Cpt Regnault (*resp for the garrison at Beni Abbes*) about his plans for de Foucauld:

If I see that he gets on well with the Tuaregs I'll drop him off on the way. I'm dreaming of making him the first parish priest of the Hoggar, Moussa's chaplain. I prefer to have him far from us so that people get used to seeing him without being surrounded by guns.

Lt Niéger, narrated his memories:

I first met Fr de Foucauld in April 1903...my friend Laperrine had given me precise instructions: « You are to go through Beni Abbes, you'll go see Foucauld who's playing at being a mason: he's building himself a hermitage that he never leaves. He doesn't eat. He lives off public welfare and still manages to find a way to redeem slaves from Morocco. He only thinks about Morocco. He's mesmerized by his memories as a youth. Nothing will open up for him as far as Morocco goes, but he's stubborn. We have to convince him to come with us. He will be the parish priest of the Tuaregs and he will be very useful to us.

Who are the Tuaregs? They are a large but scattered group of nomadic people with an elaborate class system. Their language is of Berber origin and their culture is pre-Islamic. In Algeria there are three main tribes: Br Charles will live among the Hoggar people who number 10,000, the biggest group. They trade the produce of their flocks against the dates, cereal and cotton produced in the oases. They also made a living by transporting salt from the Saharan salt mines to Niger. They were known for attacking other caravans crossing the desert. Afterwards they would sit around the fire singing and telling poems about how it went. Even though they have been conquered by the French they looked down on them as people with a superior force of weapons and technological means but no sense of authentic values such as hospitality, freedom and courage.

Br Charles hesitated to accept Laperrine invitation. He is nearly 50. These journeys mean 1000s of kilometres in the heat and in the company of soldiers. It means abandoning the little monastery he has just built and a regular prayer life.

Br Antoine Chatelard speaks of a *call* to go to the Tuaregs. A call is something that disturbs you and yet corresponds to something that you carry deep within.

Laperrine will convince him to come by telling him the story of a Tuareg woman who saved some French soldiers that had been wounded in combat. She had protected them by keeping them in their tent. In Tuareg society the tent belongs to the woman. Br Charles finds this admirable. Here's a woman who isn't a Christian and yet has shown love of the enemy. He copies this story down and sends a copy to his Bishop. He suggests that he ask the Pope himself to write to the woman.

The Holy Father is the universal Father, like Jesus is the universal King. The Holy Father, like Jesus is king and father of the Tuaregs. Couldn't we ask him to send some encouragement to this woman, his subject and his daughter.

He even sends him a draft of the letter the Pope could write:

The first commandment of religion is to love God with all our heart. The second is to love all people without exception, as we love ourselves. With admiration and thanksgiving to God at seeing how well you practise love towards your fellow human beings, we write you this letter. We want you to know that among Christians, all who will hear about you will bless you and praise God for your virtues. They will ask God to grant you all blessings in this world and give you glory in heaven. We are also writing to ask you earnestly to pray for us, for we are convinced that God, who has put into your heart a will to love him and serve him, will hear the prayers you send up to him.

It's quite surprising to hear Br Charles suggest that the Pope write to a Muslim woman asking that she pray for him!

This story convinces Br Charles to ask his Bishop for permission to go with Laperrine. Mgr Guerin has a few objections, especially regarding the difficulties involved for the celebration of mass. But Br Charles feels an *inner urge*. He writes to Fr. Huvelin:

My nature recoils from it exceedingly. I shudder at the thought of leaving Beni Abbes, where it is so calm at the foot of the altar; and throwing myself into travels. I dread travelling now. Reason also comes up with drawbacks to the idea. Am I to leave the Tabernacle at Beni Abbes empty, and squander my energies on these travels which are no good for the soul? Would I not glorify God more by adoring him in solitude? Aren't solitude and the life of Nazareth my vocation?

After reason has said all that, I see before me those vast regions without a priest. I see myself the only priest able to go there, and more and more intensely I feel an urge to go. I'd like to go at least once. According to how it turns out, I'll decide whether to go back again or not.

A priest has never been in this area before. He dreams of being the first one to bring Jesus in the Eucharist there. He sets off a bit like Our Lady at the Visitation who carries Jesus in her womb. He carries him in the Eucharist.



In a letter to his Bishop Mgr Guerin :

Our life here on earth is to work for the salvation of souls. I can do no better than what Jesus « Saviour » did himself, going to as many people as possible to bring them the seeds of divine teaching – not by preaching but by conversation – and especially to go and prepare the evangelisation of the Tuaregs by living among them, learning their language, translating the Holy Gospel and establishing relationships that are as friendly as possible.

He leaves Beni Abbes on Jan 13 1904 and writes in his notebook, « *This morning I removed the Blessed Sacrament from the Holy Tabernacle and I leave at 8am for Adrar on foot with Paul the Catechumen to serve Mass for me and a donkey that carries all we need for celebrating Mass during a year.* » He takes a supply of hosts and Marie de Bondy has agreed to send him a flask of Mass wine each month as well as candles. Lt Yvart allows him to celebrate Mass in his tent each morning until he is given the gift of a tent by Captain Bricogne. It was very important to him that he set off on foot, like Jesus and the first disciples. But once he reached Adrar he immediately wrote to Marie de Bondy asking for money to buy some camels. Otherwise he can't keep up.

During his journey he writes to his cousin:

« I have received one grace that I had been asking of Jesus for a long time, that of being in like conditions to those I had been in Morocco but out of love for him.

After four months of trekking around he writes to H de Castries:

I am staying on another two or three months with a caravan that will continue to go around, trying to meet people and establish friendly relations with them...to talk, hand out medicine, alms, show ourselves to be brothers, repeat that we are all brothers in God and that we all hope to one day meet in the same heaven, to pray for the Tuaregs with all my heart...that is my life.

On arrival in a camp or village he would ask to be shown the poorest people and would distribute alms and small presents. His accounts speak for themselves.

— My expenses for the year 1904, for 10 months of travelling are approximately the following :

Camels (purchase, food, harness.).....	900
Paul (loans, extra).....	200
Tips (lessons of Tuareg language, etc.).....	200
Upkeep (food, shoes, clothing etc.)	250
Alms	1 200
Total.....	2 750

Alms were his biggest expense, because he thought that it was a good way of meeting people and almsgiving was deeply embedded in their traditions. But later on he will not do that. It can create dependency. His income came from his family: Marie de Bondy, her wealthy sister Catherine, his brother in law Raymond, the White Fathers. Even though he had been opposed to accepting Mass stipends he soon accepted them gratefully.

In his accounts we note Tamahaq lessons as one of his expenses. The convoy always included an interpreter and Br Charles usually walked beside him trying to learn the language. Without the language, he couldn't do good to anybody. He began by having what he called *Christian phrases* translated. It's interesting to see what were the first things he wanted to be able to say to the Tuaregs:

Know that the Kingdom of God is close (Those were Jesus' first words)

All men are brothers (Fraternity as his mission)

God has created us so that we all be brothers on earth as the angels are brothers in heaven. (a way of speaking about fraternity that Muslims could understand)

God wants us to love him above all things. He wants us to love people as we love ourselves

This heart written on my robe is to remind me of God and people in order to love them.

Those final phrases put the accent on love, that aspect of revelation which he thought specific to Christianity and most needed to Islam.

Even if he had only set off on a tour of the Tuareg territory, he will quickly think about settling. He writes to Fr. Huvelin:

There needs to be somebody in a place like this. At the moment I'm a tent-dwelling nomad, changing places constantly. It's a good thing for the beginnings because it allows me meet a lot of people and see a lot of the land, but as soon as I can settle down and stay somewhere permanently, I shall.

When he arrives in a place called Tit he will wonder if he shouldn't build his hermitage there. He sees two possible locations: One, among some boulders where he could quickly and easily build a hermitage without any great cost but the trouble it might mean having many visitors because it was so close to a crossroads. The other place was on top of a rocky outcrop. There would be just enough place for a tiny hermitage. The disadvantage was that it would probably cost a lot to built up there and it would be difficult to access and get water. The advantage however is that it would give him solitude with God. So having weighed up the pros and cons he asked the Beloved to let him know his will. And the Beloved replied!

Today and in the future, if it's possible, set up your house in this first place among these rocks which look like my house in Bethlehem and Nazareth. As far as recollection goes, it is love that should recollect you interiorly in me and not distance from my children. See me in them and like me at Nazareth, live close to them, lost in God.

In this discernment, as will often be the case throughout his life, he is caught between two instincts. One, we could call contemplative, which he names Nazareth and which pushes him to seek solitude and live in a cloister, alone with God in the universe. It's centred on Jesus physically present in the Eucharist. He will always call that his *vocation*. And it is in keeping with his temperament. The other tendency could be expressed in the world "brother", and it pushes him to go out to Jesus present in the least of his brothers and sisters. He will call that the *will of God*. At first he thinks of only *establishing* himself in Muslim lands but the will of God pushes him towards *meeting* people. He is always a bit torn between what he feels is his vocation and what he experiences as the will of God. We too often feel that. And it's precisely that tension that will lead him to sanctity. At Tit a new form of contemplation finds expression, not based on leaving the world but based on human relations.

There was to have been a meeting with Moussa ag Amastane during this first tour but it will be postponed. Without his permission, it's impossible for Br Charles to remain and so he returns to Beni Abbes. This journey will have lasted a full year from January 1904 until January 1905. He will have covered almost 6000 kms of desert track.

When he finally returns to Beni Abbes he is exhausted. His teeth ache and he has terrible migraine.

He has hardly settled back into life in Beni Abbes that he again receives a letter from Laperrine who offers him a place in a caravan going south for another fraternisation tour. Br Charles wants to refuse but still he consults Abbé Huvelin and Bishop Guérin who both happen to be in Paris. Bishop Guerin thinks that maybe he ought to stay but then it's Fr Huvelin who asks what would be more beneficial to the mission. Mgr Guerin has to admit that Br Charles is indeed the only one who's able to go there. And so they send him a telegram on Good Friday: *Suggest you accept.*

Br. Charles receives the news on Holy Saturday. That night he writes in his meditations:

... Lord, you who gave yourself for me... I give myself to you, I give myself to you, I give myself to you, at the foot of your cross and sepulchre, along with Mary Magdalen, like her breaking the jar and pouring out the perfume...Behold I come to do your will" I give myself to you in order to imitate you with all my strength.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, how good you are to give me today by the very voice of the those of whom you have said, "Who listens to you listens to me", an unexpected order that unsettles my spirit and throws me into difficulties, trials and tiredness...

My God may it not be I who live but you who live in me. May I be and do at every instant that which is most pleasing to you. May it be the same in all your children.

ut it's not just obedience that causes him to accept because in fact this order resonates with something deep within. He is very attracted by the idea of bringing Jesus there. The telegram sets him free.

He leaves Beni Abbes on May 3, 1905 but this time he will not come back except for a very brief passage.

Captain Dinaux who was head of the expedition wrote some notes about their journey:

We would usually cover 40 kms a day, the distance a camel carrying baggage will do in a day, covering between 6 and 7 kms per hour.

In the morning after we had walked for 2 hours everyone would climb onto their camel but Fr would continue to follow on foot. He was reciting his Rosary or his litanies. By 5am the sun began to show its rays and the temperature would shoot up to 40 or 50 degrees. We

would drink 8-10 litres of water a day, not always very nice tasting. Fr would continue to walk on foot until one of us would tell him that if he didn't get up onto his camel we would get down to walk beside him. Then he would give us a big smile and chat with us until we reached our campsite.



He carried the strict minimum in his baggage: a light canvas tent for celebrating mass, those objects he needed for Mass, a flask of Mass wine which he poured out drop by drop, a folding table for an altar.

As for his material needs, he had a small reserve of dried dates and roasted wheat, two goat skins for his water and a folding tripod to hang them at the campsite. His blankets were camels covers; and among his modest baggage he still had room for a satchel of medicine and a supply of small presents that he would distribute to Tuareg women: mirrors, needle and thread, scissors. Finally, there was his metal plate, a metal goblet and a portable writing table whose ink was soon to be replaced by a mixture of charcoal and camel urine that was in common use in the Sahara.

The evening meal would gather officers and the French around a pot of couscous or pasta. Father de Foucauld was always present, smiling but silent and quiet. Our campsites were organized into square. We slept without tents, with our fully loaded guns by our head. I had placed Fr at a corner so that he could go off and pray alone. Whenever the schedule allowed it, he would ask to be woken up before the others. He would quickly raise his tent and celebrate Mass. One of us was always present at his Mass. They were always a surprise and a revelation. Fr always manifested an extraordinary fervour and seemed to be in ecstasy.

When we had our solemn meetings with the Tuaregs. Fr was never absent. I would speak to the them about France's policy towards the natives, about the benefits of peace, the question of taxes, the need to stop banditry, submission to the amenokol. Fr always squatted at my feet, silent, refusing a chair. He followed everything with lively interest. He was perfecting his knowledge of the Tuareg language.

When Tuareg campsites were nearby he would always get someone to accompany him and he would distribute medicine and other useful objects.

If the day had been particularly difficult he would go around the camp, visiting the soldiers as they lay on their sleeping bags. He would hand out malaria pills to those who

needed it, offer some words of comfort or give a drop of his Mass wine to the weak. He would also go see the Arab soldiers, see if they needed anything. Everyone loved him.

While everyone is full of admiration for Br Charles, he himself writes to Fr. Huvelin:

The trip is going well, very well. I am meeting a lot of native people...there's only one thing I'm missing and that's myself.

Thanks to JESUS I've been able to celebrate Mass almost each day – but since leaving Beni Abbes I have almost always replaced the breviary with the Rosary – and sometimes the Rosary which I've put off until the evening doesn't get finished – as I walk I try to think of Jesus the most I can, but it's so pitiable! The time I don't spend walking or resting I use to prepare the way. I try to make friends with the Tuaregs, and I make lexicons and translations that those



who come here to bring Jesus will absolutely need.

If I'm wrong to do this let me know, speak and I will obey...

Right now I'm trying to prepare an establishment among the Tuaregs: not the beginning of a Fraternity of the Sacred Heart like at Beni Abbes, but a simple hut where, without big lands or plantations, I can live in prayer earning my living by making ropes and wooden plates.

Night is fast approaching. Good night beloved Father.

During this second journey he met Moussa who gave him permission to settle in Tamanrasset. It's a village of 20 grass huts with many nomads all around. Those who live there on a permanent basis are the Harratin cultivators (a mixed tribe which includes many descendants of slaves). Water could be found at a depth of 1.52 metres and foggaras allowed a system of irrigation so that millet, wheat, tomatoes, onions and pumpkin could be grown.

He was 46 when he settled in Tamanrasset. It was the feast of his dear St Mary Magdeleine when he arrives there. He had named her the patron saint of the desert. He imagines her telling him how to go about his new establishment. She encourages him to take some distance from his Rule.

In everything and for everything take the life of Nazareth as your object... Let Nazareth be your model, in all its simplicity and breadth, using your rule only as a guidebook which helps you enter into the life of Nazareth for certain things. For example, until the little brothers and sisters are properly established no habit like Jesus at Nazareth – no cloister – like Jesus in Nazareth – not a home that's far from a village but close to people – like Jesus in Nazareth – not less than 8 hours of work a day (hopefully manual) like Jesus in Nazareth.

We see him moving towards a broader understanding of Nazareth.

His new residence is built in a few days: two rooms each 1.75 metres wide and 2.75 metres long, about 2 metres high. The walls are earth and stone. Afterwards he will build a

reed hut that he calls parlour, dining room, kitchen, bedroom for Paul, guest rooms. *For the security of the Blessed Sacrament I'll sleep beside it.*

The beginnings were difficult. The villagers were not very enthusiastic about this stranger in their midst. Not only was he French but they were going to have to share the water with him. One can just imagine his loneliness as the last French soldiers went off leaving him behind, promising that they would see what could be done about getting established a postal relay to Tamanrasset. He didn't know the language. He had no other protection than Moussa's word.

He wrote to his Bishop that with Paul they had benediction each evening to strengthen them in their extreme solitude.

He immediately sets about studying their language. He will quickly discover that the quick translation of the Gospel written as he walked beside the army translator was of no use.

He began this work with the intention of preparing an instrument for future missionaries. His idea wasn't to impose the Gospel with a foreign culture but to learn the other's language and culture.

As he discovered the complexity of the language Brother Charles realized that he lacked a grasp on the basic linguistic structure of the language. He asked for help from one of his friends called Motylinski, who was an expert in Berber languages. He came to spend 4 months with him in 1906.

Motylinski's stay will mark an important change with respect to his way of studying their language. He gets Br. Charles to understand that you don't learn a language by translating what you want to tell people. You must first begin by first listening to people, gathering their songs and poems and whatever else they talk about. And that collection would become the basis for studying their language.

Laperrine remembers that Fr de Foucauld was always very happy when he could get a hold of some old ladies from the Tuareg nobility, because they are the ones who knew the traditions, legends, genealogies and poems best. *There's nothing so funny as the sight of him sitting, pencil in hand, in the midst of a group of old Tuareg ladies all talking as they drink their tea and smoke their pipe.*

But Motylinski dies in 1907 and Brother Charles will find himself alone to go about a job which has only been started. He tries to get various linguistic experts to come and continue the job. No one responds to his appeal. And since he considers this job a pressing duty in order to prepare the way for others...he begins to devote all his time to language study in the hope that it will not take too long to complete.

As of 1908 his helper to learn the language is called Ba Hammou, Moussa's secretary.



They work from 5am until noon, 3 to 7pm Monday to Saturday. For 10 years he will spend 11 hours a day studying the language. It was a huge undertaking, “written on the edge of a crate and by candlelight.” He finished it 2 months before his death. It has 2028 handwritten pages ready for publication.

The work also helped him to find a psychological balance. He writes to Fr Huvelin:

I'm not pleased with myself. I'm lax and cold. My prayers are extremely lukewarm. I've no mortification, my life is banal, passionless and empty. Prayer is difficult for me. As soon as I start, I'm attacked by sleep or by unbearable thoughts. This difficulty comes no matter what time I try to pray. Am I wrong to distract myself like this? Would it be better to go on with my exercises of piety and not cut a minute off them, just asking God to help me?

But this interest for their language and culture will create a deep friendship. Pope Paul VI speaks of it in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*:

many missionaries pioneered in promoting the country's material and cultural progress. We need only mention the efforts of Pere Charles de Foucauld: he compiled a valuable dictionary of the Tuareg language, and his charity won him the title, "the universal brother".

His interest in their culture will deepen his friendship with them. Dassine, one of those noble Tuareg women will say, “He knows our language better than we do”.

Some Tuareg proverbs :

Part your tents, bring your hearts together.

The viper takes the colour of the country it lives in.

Kiss the hand you cannot cut off.

Whoever loves thee, even a dog, thou wilt also love.

A single hand without a fellow will not untie a double knot, whatever it may do.

The beetle, in its mother's eyes, is a gazelle.

He finished his collection of poems two days before his death. Today his dictionary and book of poems preserve the memory of a culture that is fast disappearing among the Tuaregs of southern Algeria as Arabic takes over.

After his first year in Tamanrasset he set off for Algiers because the White Fathers had a young candidate for him. Michel had entered the White Fathers but seemed more cut out for the contemplative life.

He left an account of his 3 months as Br Charles' one and only postulant. Here are a few fragments. He tells about their meals at Beni Abbes where they went for three weeks:

At 11 o'clock we had our meal, preceded by the reading of a chapter of the New Testament and examination of conscience. After saying grace, the Father stood up and read aloud two or three passages from a chapter of the Imitation; then we all sat on our mats around the saucepan placed on the ground, just off the fire, the Father, our negro servant and myself, and we ate in the greatest silence, fishing food out of the dish with a spoon, and drinking water out of the same vessel. The menu varied very little; it was composed now of a dish of rice cooked in water and, very exceptionally, with condensed milk, sometimes mixed with carrots and turnips which grow in the desert sand, sometimes with a sort of marmalade of a fairly pleasant flavour made with wheat flour, crushed dates, and water. There were no napkins, table cloth, plates, or knives or forks with which to eat this slight collation. We stood up at the end of a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, and after thanksgiving and grace, both went to the chapel chanting the Miserere. the hymn Veni Creator. Bedtime was regularly fixed by twilight, but it was always dark when we went to rest.

After Christmas at Beni Abbes they set off for the South

During the whole crossing of the desert, which took place in winter, the day temperature was from 59° to 68°, that of night from four or five degrees below freezing point. In the morning we sometimes found frozen water in the cruet, and the ground covered with a thin coat of ice. From time to time a violent wind blew and made thick clouds of dust, driving sand into our eyes and small pebbles into our faces. When we arrived in a village at night, we were always offered hospitality, and we passed the night in a house. More often we slept under the canopy of heaven without any fire, in a hole large enough to lodge a man's body, which we ourselves hollowed out with our hands in the sand, and which served us as a bed. Benumbed with cold, rolled up in our camp blankets, we turned and turned again and again on our mats all night, to warm ourselves and induce sleep, but without succeeding. Towards noon we used to halt for a good hour, which enabled us to light a fire for cooking our dinner; a little before sunset at the place where we were to camp, we had supper. The menu of these two meals was that of the hermitage, to which a cup of coffee was added.

Br Charles had an iron constitution but after 3 months Br Michael fell sick and had to be sent back. He finished his life as a Carthusian.

He returned to Tamanrasset alone and found the village in a deplorable state because of drought. Only the poorest, those who didn't own camels were still in the village. He wrote to his cousin M de Bondy,

This year has been hard for the country. It hasn't rained for 17 months. That means raging famine in a country that lives on its milk, and where the poor have almost nothing else than milk to live on. The goats are as dry as the earth, and the people as dry as the goats.

The return to Tamanrasset meant that he might not be able to celebrate Mass. The liturgical requirements of the day required the presence of at least 2 Christians. His Bishop had spoken to him of this and he had replied:

You ask me if it's better to live in the Hoggar without being able to celebrate the Holy Mass or to celebrate Mass but not live there. I've often asked myself the same thing. I used to incline always to sacrifice everything else to the celebration of Holy Mass. But there must be

something wrong with this line of reasoning. Since the Apostles the greatest saints have sometimes sacrificed their possibility of celebrating Mass to works of spiritual charity.

Living alone in a place is a good thing. You achieve something even if you don't do much, because you start to belong to the country. You're approachable and unimposing there: it gives you such "littleness"

But it will be easier said than done. He will have no Mass from July 1907 until Jan 1908. At this time one often finds in his notebook, « *My God aren't you forgetting me ?* »

He sometimes feels that his life is a failure. He writes to Fr Huvelin:

You know my wretchedness. You know how much I need you to pray for me. Over 21 years ago you brought me back to Jesus. What a harvest I should have by now, for myself and for others. And instead of that, I have wretchedness, and bankruptcy for myself, and not the least good for others. A tree can be told by its fruits, and mine shows what I am.

One can find many passages like that. Moussa encourages his people to a deeper Islamisation and builds a Koranic school. Br Charles receives very few letters (20 months without a letter from Abbé Huvelin). He feels that his life is useless. But he stays because he believes that the Blessed Sacrament shines forth and does good.

My presence here seems to bring about very little good : but I have faith that the presence of the Divine Master in the Tabernacle does a lot of good.



Christmas, 1907 will be a moment of great distress. « *No Mass because I am alone* » He eats too little and works too much and becomes sick. He writes to his cousin:

I've been sick these past few days. I don't know what it is, something wrong with my heart., I think. I'm not coughing, no chest pains, but the slightest movement leaves me so out of breath I could almost faint. One or two days I thought I might be going to die.

In fact he had scurvy.

Moussa became worried because Br. Charles had long fainting spells. It was his turn to be the poor one and the Tuaregs will save him by offering him what was most precious to them in this time of famine. He will write to his cousin:

The people went around to all the goats for a radius of 4 km to get me a little milk.

Sensing that something was wrong Laperrine went to check on him. He wrote to Mgr Guerin

Your Excellency, a few quick lines to give you news of de Foucauld. He has postponed his trip until October. He has been sicker than he admitted. He had fainting spells and the Tuaregs who looked after him very well were quite worried. He is better now. I sent him some

medicine, because I suspect that his excessive penances are behind his weakness and the excess of work at his dictionary did the rest.

Since the medicine cannot do everything we added 3 camels laden with food, condensed milk, sugar, tea, tins. Besides I think that he has understood that he needs to eat more than just boiled barley since he's asking us for milk...In any case, I think that it's necessary that when he returns north you feed him well and keep him for a month or two. »



At the same time that the Tuaregs were giving him milk, Laperrine handed him a letter that informed him that he had been accorded permission to celebrate Mass alone. During an audience, the Superior of the White Fathers had presented his case to the Pope. A Eucharistic grace to meet him as the new year began, one that was to bind him in ever closer communion with his people. Maybe he wasn't so alone in celebrating his Mass.