



# **Each day**

**Brother Hervé Zamor, Superior general**  
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## INTRODUCTION

**"Each day":** a very common expression that refers neither to a Word of God or saying of our Founders, nor to our Rule of Life, but rather to a pattern, to a rhythm. Every morning the sun rises and every evening the sun sets. Each day we eat, work and rest, simple but essential activities for our life, our growth. If for some reason this routine is disrupted, we immediately feel a discomfort, an uneasiness that signals an anomaly.

This circular letter has but one purpose: to help us *"become aware, as our last General Chapter recommended, that our whole life is a process of formation, that is, that our whole life is a response to a call from Christ to conform ourselves to him as missionary disciples"* (GC 2018, no. 8). It does not intend to provide new knowledge or an introductory or continuing education course. It simply seeks to encourage us to make better use of the tools we already have so that the formation of each day may be *"a path that transforms and transfigures our whole life, at the heart of our frailties"* (GC 2018, no. 8). If, at the end of this letter, each one, whatever stage he is at in his journey in the footsteps of Christ, were to convince himself that his formation lasts a lifetime and is realized primarily in daily life, my goal would be largely achieved.

This reflection is primarily aimed at the Brothers, but Lay people are strongly invited to take note of it. Isn't forming ourselves together a wonderful way to weave bonds of brotherhood and thus strengthen our sense of belonging? This is a magnificent synodal experience that will certainly open our ears and our hearts, each one listening to the others, and all listening to the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 14:17).

**"Each day"** has three chapters that are structured according to the story of the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). In this account, the evangelist Luke presents the Risen Lord as the One who educates, forms and accompanies. The first chapter, **Let us journey with Jesus**, leads us to a better knowledge of the Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6). The second chapter, **Let us welcome the Master**, shows us a pedagogy for making our own the "attitudes of the Son" (VC, no. 66)<sup>1</sup> and for loving him ever more. The last chapter invites us to **Start afresh from Christ** each day if we intend to be missionary disciples.

I sincerely hope that this circular letter will *"allow us to be converted and evangelized personally and in community"* (GC 2018, no. 8). Thus, it can be read and worked on either personally or in a group or community. After reading each chapter or certain excerpts, a time of exchange can be organized during which each is invited to share the calls or challenges for his personal life and that of the community or group.

May the Holy Spirit help the Brothers and Lay people of the Mennaisian Family to willingly enter into this process of permanent conversion proper to the baptismal and religious consecration!

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<sup>1</sup> For details, read John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*.

## CHAPTER I

### LET'S JOURNEY WITH JESUS!

*"I have been with you for so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip!"* (Jn 14:9). Even today, Jesus could address this same reproof to many of his disciples. Indeed, to know Jesus is to accept to be with him each day as a friend, to listen to him and to learn to journey with him. Is this not the vocation of all those who want to take up their cross each day to follow him (Lk 9:23)?

Walking with Jesus is learned progressively, like a little child who lets himself be taught to walk. Stops, stumbles, accidents and improvements are part of the normal order of things. What is important at this stage is the ability to continue learning from everyday life so as to avoid repeating the same mistakes. This requires a great interior openness, that *"docibilitas"*, as Father Amedeo Cencini would say, which allows one to *"learn from every person and in every context, at every age of life"* and to *"allow oneself to be instructed and enriched by all the fragments of truth and beauty that are all around us"*<sup>2</sup>. This is learning to walk with Jesus, each day and at every stage of life. In the area of the *Sequela Christi*, the more the disciple progresses along the path with the Master, the more he discovers he doesn't yet know how to walk and that he still needs his help not to stumble and make it all the way.

Why is this companionship called to last a lifetime and to be carried out daily? The new creature that we are called to become *"goes through the pains of childbirth that still last"* (Rom 8:22). Because of human limitations, no one can claim to have already reached the fullness of Christ's stature (Eph 4:13). The Lord's call is renewed every morning and awaits our free response. Thus, the

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<sup>2</sup> Amedeo CENCINI, La formation permanente, Maison généralice de l'Ordre Cistercien, Rome, Septembre 2003, p. 40.

daily life of the consecrated person, like that of Christians, is part of a process of growth that is never finished. It is a continual ascent that will end at the gates of the new Jerusalem (Ps 121:2, Rev 21:2).

The text of the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) will be our theme for our reflection on daily life as a path, a tool and a place of formation. Father Cencini rightly states that life is permanent formation or permanent frustration. It is in this permanent state of learning that the text of Luke intends to introduce us if we want to let ourselves be shaped by life through an incessant interior openness to the calls of the Spirit. In journeying with the Master, the disciples of Emmaus teach us that the events of daily life are a permanent place where God speaks to and forms the hearts of his people.

## 1- Open Up!<sup>3</sup>

*"Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened." (Lk 24, 13-14)*

The two disciples, while walking to Emmaus, talk about the death of Jesus that took place in Jerusalem. They wonder, they want to better understand what happened to their Master. They cannot remain indifferent. Such an attitude expresses their openness: they seek to learn from what has happened. Is this not a fundamental disposition for those who wish to be educated by life each day?

Openness requires going out of oneself, an exodus that is often difficult and laborious, but how enriching and beneficial it is for whomever succeeds! Is this not the condition for growing and learning from life? It often happens that a teacher points out to parents that their child is making good progress in school because he is alert and open to his environment. He wants to understand, he asks questions and he is interested in everything around him. This is the grace that the Church recommends we ask for every morning

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<sup>3</sup> This command applies equally to Brothers and Lay people.

when the Lord, through the voice of the psalmist, invites us not to close our hearts as our fathers did in the desert (Ps 94:8). The strong and urgent appeal of Pope John Paul II at the opening of the solemn Mass on his accession to the Chair of St. Peter on October 22, 1978, still rings in our ears: *"Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ!"*

In the field of formation, the more a young person opens up to the action of God's grace in his life, to his brothers and to his own reality, the more he learns to know himself and to be true to himself. This is a true work of education which is above all a craft, built each day from ordinary life. Following Jacob, after long nights of struggle and combat, he will be blessed by his competitor (Gn 32, 30). Thus, after twelve years in the houses of formation, I can testify to the importance of openness for growth. After a normal period of adaptation, young people who managed to open up and share their joys and sorrows, their failures and successes, their descent into the abyss and their ascent, were happy because they realized that the inner man was gradually being strengthened (Eph 3:16). They were able to accomplish what was impossible before: letting go of a bad habit that was not in line with their choice of life, better managing their life, identifying their slavery in Egypt or their progress... On the other hand, those who resisted and who evoked pretenses to withdraw into themselves turned in circles and repeated the same things at every meeting. For them, training was a real burden.

Open-mindedness is one of the criteria for admission to the Congregation (C 54) and for persevering (D 24)! This quality that our Rule of Life emphasizes may seem of little importance, but it is crucial for our consecrated life. It allows the disciple to walk with Jesus each day and to develop that "Catholic heart" fitting to our Congregation. It keeps us in a permanent state of learning. Commenting on this call to openness from our Founder, Brother Yvon Deniaud notes that *"this implies going beyond the individual 'me' to take others into consideration."*<sup>4</sup> To make progress on such a journey, Jean-Marie de la Mennais invites us to imitate the

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<sup>4</sup> Br. Yvon Deniaud, *Prier 15 jours avec Jean-Marie de la Mennais*, p. 68.

willingness of the shepherds who readily left their flocks in the night in search of the Savior who had just been born in Bethlehem (Lk 2:15). This is the way he shows us if we are to be "*led even in the smallest things*" of daily life by the Lord and "*walk always in the light of his face*" (S I, 111)<sup>5</sup>. This is what it means to allow ourselves to be educated by the Master from all the events of ordinary life.

This invitation to openness as a formative process is valid for the postulant as well as for the Brother who has already celebrated seventy-five years of religious life. Who can assert that he is totally open to his brothers, to his environment, to the events of ordinary life, of the world and of the Church, and to the grace of the Lord? Whatever our degree of holiness, there are still corners of our lives that are not yet brightened by the light of Truth (Jn 14:6). Since September 2021, the Church has invited us to participate actively in the preparation of the next synod on synodality. Have we responded to her invitation with boldness and creativity? This is God's call for us today. It is "*the path that God expects of the Church of the third millennium*"<sup>6</sup>. It is a wonderful opportunity to train ourselves together in the Church where each one has something to learn: listening to each others, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17).

The Congregation has sought the participation of every member of the Institute in updating the Rule of Life. We were even advised to take advantage of this opportunity to reread it personally and in community. Did we welcome this wonderful opportunity of formation? Have we taken the time to listen together to our fundamental Charter? Each year, a theme is proposed to our study. What is our commitment to make it a tool of formation? I

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<sup>5</sup> For details, read: Jean-Marie de la Mennais, S: Sermons, GC: Correspondance générale, I-VII : volume number, followed by the page number. The presentation was by Brother Philippe FRIOT.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Address on the occasion of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, October 17, 2015.



could multiply the examples and questions, but I leave this work of revision to each and everyone. To do so is to express our willingness to let ourselves be educated and formed **each day**. To ignore it is to choose deformation and permanent frustration.

In the French version of the religious calendar, a method is proposed for the revision of the day (*Lectio vitae*) and even the time is specified: the last minutes of adoration, before praying Vespers. It is suggested that this moment be divided into three steps: thanksgiving, asking for forgiveness and renewing one's commitment to do better the next day. If we practice revision of life daily, we have an effective tool to continue strengthening the inner man (Eph 3:16), so as to continue growing in grace and wisdom before God and men (Lk 2:52). In so doing, we will gradually learn to discover our life as a holy story in which everything contributes to the good of those who walk with the Master (Rom 8:28) who is the Truth of our existence (Jn 14:6).

## **2- Allow Yourself to be Moved!**

*"As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him." (Lk 24: 15-16)*

Jesus takes the initiative to draw near the two disciples of Emmaus, but without revealing his identity. He approaches them and walks with them. This is the beginning of a long companionship. Not everything is clear from the start: *"Their eyes were unable to recognize him"* (Lk 24:16). In fact, it is as if they are groping for answers. The important thing is that they allow themselves to be reached so that the Master can walk with them.

To let oneself be reached is the experience of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42). It triggers a conversion in her relationship with God and with others. Thanks to the dialogue with Jesus, she begins to wonder about the identity of the man who speaks with her. Is he greater than her father Jacob (Jn 4:12)? She also discovers her expectations: the Messiah, the one who is called the Christ (Jn 4:25). Thus, the Samaritan woman gradually recognizes in this tired Jesus

sitting by the well, first the prophet (Jn 4:19), then the One her heart was looking for: the Living Water, the Messiah, the Savior of the world (Jn 4:42). By allowing herself to be reached by Jesus, she also manages to identify the obstacles that have kept her from meeting her Savior. In fact, Jesus asks her to go and get her husband. Faced with this request, the Samaritan woman tries to hide or deny her basic vulnerability: *"I do not have a husband"* (Jn 4:17a). But her conversation helps her move forward by reaching her where she is: *"You did well to say, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband; in this you speak the truth"* (Jn 4:17b-18). In fact, the frailty of this woman is nothing other than the fact that she has given priority in her heart to created beings. In other words, she is an idolater. The recognition and acceptance of this inconsistency helped her to discover in Jesus the prophet (Jn 4:19), the Christ (Jn 4:29), the Savior of the world (Jn 4:42). In this way, Jesus purified, evangelized, and freed<sup>7</sup> her heart: she leaves her pitcher there and runs to the city to share this Good News. She is now a missionary disciple: *"Come and see a man who has told me everything I have done. Is he not the Christ?"* (Jn 4:29). Her centripetal affective force - she had had six husbands - becomes a centrifugal force: she no longer attracts people to her, especially men, but directs them to Christ: *"Come and see a man..."* (Jn 4:29).

In everyday life, we often encounter people who are inaccessible and complicated. We don't know how to reach them. We play the flute to them and they do not dance. We sing songs of mourning and they do not weep (Mt 11:17). Thus, they no longer seem able to weep with those who are in sorrow or to rejoice with those who are in joy. For Pope Francis, these people suffer from the disease of mental and spiritual "petrification"<sup>8</sup>. Their hearts have become hardened and have lost their liveliness and boldness. They are incapable of loving God and neighbor unconditionally (Mt 22:34-40).

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<sup>7</sup> Amedeo CENCINI, A., *Formarse un corazón libre*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, *The Roman Curia and the Body of Christ*, December 24, 2014.

During my studies in psychology at the Gregorian to become a formator in my Congregation, I was confronted in counseling with a young religious who had difficulty letting himself be reached in his everyday life. When he learned that I was an intern counsellor, he began questioning my competence. When he came to counselling sessions, he would bring a book in psychology. He would read a passage and ask my opinion. Distraught, I consulted my supervisor who advised me to confront him with his responsibilities. At the next session, when he asked for my opinion on what he had just read, I told him that I would rather go through the book of his life with him. At that point, in a rather aggressive tone, he replied that his life was no concern of mine and that these sessions were more frustration than formation. Obviously, he decided to put an end, in his words, "*to these sessions of deformation*". Since this young religious did not want to let himself be reached in his everyday life, it was impossible for me to help him.

Letting ourselves be reached is a condition for making the journey with Jesus and being educated by Him throughout our lives. This implies trusting those whom the Lord puts on our journey, and it is the necessary path to take if we are to be led by him like a little child (GC I, 174), to abandon ourselves gently into his arms (GC I, 149) and to be devoured by his Providence (GC VI, 30). All these attitudes could imply a certain passivity on our part. However, according to Jean-Marie de la Mennais, it is quite the opposite. The Lord can do nothing without our cooperation. It takes a personal decision to allow ourselves to be involved, to be reached, to be educated, to be formed and to be accompanied. Without this, we risk being the fig tree that drains the soil but bears no fruit (Lk 13:6-7).

Letting ourselves be reached concerns us all. **Each day**, the Pilgrim of Emmaus draws near and wants to walk with us wherever we are, whatever our stage of the journey: novice, scholastic, young Brother, lay Mennaisian, Brother with perpetual vows... "*Guided by the Holy Spirit, accompanied by a knowledgeable spiritual director or by his usual confessor, the Brother discovers little by little the path of God*" (D 91). This is the path that our fundamental Charter indicates

to us for growing in our human, spiritual and religious life. How do we respond to this invitation? What conversion do we need to recognize the presence of the Pilgrim of Emmaus on the road of our lives?

Since the General Chapter of 1994, each Brother has been regularly invited by the various Superiors to draw up a personal life plan in order to commit himself resolutely to *"the path of a man whom the person of Jesus has captivated"* (D 23). Have we responded to this call? Have we allowed ourselves to be motivated by this accompanying process proposed by the Congregation? What if the Lord was waiting for us on this very route to walk with us and lead us to the truth of our being?

**Each day**, the Lord reaches out to us and walks with us, unnoticed! He listens to us and spends time with us. He walks with us on condition that we allow ourselves to be reached, of course, for he deeply respects our freedom. This is a magnificent path of formation where the Master educates his disciple from the experience of his daily life!

### 3- Welcome Confrontation!

*"He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (Lk 24: 17-18)*

Luke reports the first words of the Pilgrim of Emmaus who asks the two disciples about the subject of their discussions. His question shocks them: *"They stood still, with sad faces."* In a rather aggressive tone, Cleophas makes Jesus understand that he must be the only foreigner who *"does not know the events of these days"*. This very simple statement is interpreted as a confrontation, but it will trigger a new beginning.

Confrontation makes one grow and mature if it is received in a constructive way. To the disciples who were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest, Jesus proposed the path of

service and humility (Mk 9:32-34). Faced with murmurs, after the discourse on the Bread of Life and following the departure of several of them, he asks the disciples to choose: to leave or to stay (Jn 6:60-68). In the community of Antioch, the Judeo-Christians wanted to impose circumcision on the new converts. This provokes a confrontation and a lively discussion between Paul, Barnabas and these people (Acts 15:1-2). A wise solution is found at the Council of Jerusalem: to be a Christian, circumcision is no longer necessary; it is enough to abstain from idolatry, blood, strangled animal meat and illegitimate unions (Acts 15:29).

Welcoming confrontation in daily life is a path of education and formation for those who know how to assume it with courage, humility, commitment and openness. To achieve this, we must use the path of dialogue which teaches us to respect opposing views while honestly seeking a way out of the conflict. In the exchange, sparks of truth will certainly emerge that will set us free. This is only possible if dialogue leads us to discovering what each one holds in his heart and to listening to others with sympathy.

In everyday life, confrontation frightens people. For convenience, some people try to avoid or ignore it, but this is not the solution. Others face it with the will to crush and eliminate the opponent. This turns the relationship between the partners into a battlefield. The victory, which is always short-lived, is at the expense of others. Obviously, this is not the best approach either. So what to do? Growing through conflict implies moving beyond it. What does this mean? It means recognizing the obstacle that stands in the way, anticipating how to get around it and, finally, making the necessary effort to achieve success. In concrete terms, this is what Jesus teaches us when he invites us to be that king who, going to war, first sits down to see if he can, with ten thousand men, confront the adversary who marches against him with twenty thousand. If he cannot, he sends a delegation to make peace while his opponent is still far away (Lk 14:31-32).

Two anecdotes to illustrate my point. The first is taken from the "*fioretti*" or little stories of Saint John XXIII. On his way to the conclave, a woman passing by said to her friend, "*This one is too fat*

to become Pope!" Hearing these words, John XXIII turned around and replied, *"Madam, I hope you understand that the conclave is not quite a beauty contest."* The second is an experience in a community. At the table, my neighbor often helped himself and forgot to pass the dish to his colleague. This annoyed me somewhat. One day, wanting to point out to him that the salad was stuck next to him, I asked him if the lettuce was good. He answered that it was very good and passed it to me. From that day on, he paid a little more attention to his colleagues.

Making peace with each other through humor is good pedagogy to help each other learn from life. Such a strategy transforms a possible crisis into a learning and growing situation. It helps to find truth together in dialogue, in a calm conversation or in a passionate discussion. *"It is a journey that requires perseverance, that is also made up of silences and sufferings, capable of gathering the long experience"*<sup>9</sup> of others.

Jean-Marie de la Mennais describes the climate in which confrontation must take place if it is to be a tool of formation in daily life. It must be above all an act of mercy, of charity and of kindness. He encourages the Brothers to *"pour more oil and balm rather than vinegar on the wounds they wish to heal"* (GC IV, 471). He also invites them not to *"break the reed that is already broken"*, nor to *"extinguish the wick that is still smoking"*. He also recommends the pedagogy of gentleness and firmness when they try to help a confrere who needs to be accompanied on his journey to growth. Thus, this mixture of oil and vinegar - gentleness and firmness - is the remedy that heals wounds and allows one to walk with a firm and determined step when following Christ.

Within the context of mutual aid, fraternal correction is a tool that can help everyone to further grow in his human and spiritual maturity. As Jesus reminds us in the Gospel, this support will be effective to the extent that each one begins by first removing the beam in his own eye before helping his brother to get rid of the mote in his own (Mt 7:5-7). In many of our communities, we tend to leave

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<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, no. 50.

this work to the Superiors, Provincials and Visitors. And yet, this formation process should involve everyone, from the youngest to the oldest. Why shouldn't a novice help a fellow novice grow in some aspect of his life? Why should a young Brother not dare to challenge an elder confrere to help him correct a bad habit? This fraternal correction, which may seem practically impossible, becomes feasible under three conditions: have proper self-understanding, demonstrate inner freedom and know how to use the "oil of charity". It is a wonderful training tool to be used each day if we want to join hands to continue strengthening the inner man (Eph 3, 16).

#### 4- Recall!

*"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him." (Lk 24: 19-20)*

Jesus initiates a dialogue with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. His purpose is to help them *recall* the identity of the person in whom they had placed all their hope and who was crucified by the chief priests and political leaders. He is "*Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, powerful in deed and word before God and all the people*". After such an introduction, the reader can only sympathize with their grief and better understand their despair. They had lost a truly important person: they had left everything to follow the Master.

To remember, *zakar* in Hebrew, means to make present in the sense of *anamnesis* and refers to the triple aspect of time: past, present and future. In other words, these two disciples of Emmaus are still marked today by the identity of this "*Jesus of Nazareth, this powerful prophet*" with whom they have lived three wonderful years which they'd like to live on.

In the biblical tradition, God has often been seen as taking the necessary time to teach his people to remember. Without this

education, they would not be faithful, happy and fruitful. Like an excellent pedagogue, to educate Israel to love God with all their heart, soul and strength, he invites them to engrave this commandment in their hearts. Then he encourages them to pass it on to their sons by repeating it constantly, at home or on their travels, whether they are sleeping or awake (Deut 6:5-6). He also warns them against forgetting, which leads to unfaithfulness (Dt 4:9). Thus, the psalmist gives thanks to the Lord by recalling all the wonders he has done in the life of the people, from the creation of the world to their liberation from the slavery of Egypt (Ps 135:1-16). Why must Israel learn to remember? It is a commitment each day to live in trust. If the Lord has already come to our rescue, he will never let us down (Mk 8:14-21).

In pedagogy, in education, we know how important memory is for learning. A child who does not have this capacity is handicapped in his ability to learn and acquire new knowledge. In sociology, a people without memory is condemned to repeat the same mistakes. Doesn't Russia's invasion of Ukraine confirm that we have already forgotten the tragedies of the past century, the sacrifice of millions of deaths in world wars?

For Pope Francis, whoever wants to learn to grow in daily life is invited to recall his history before God. What the Lord does for his people Israel, he does for each of us daily. It is important not to forget this reality: our history is marked by grace but also by sin. Reminiscing means giving glory to God for his benefits and his infinite mercy. Once we have assumed and embraced our history, we can be faithful to the Lord by relying on his own faithfulness.

In my experience of accompanying young people, I realized the importance of helping them remember. To achieve this, at the end of each counselling session, I always wrote a few lines in a notebook to record the experience. I wrote down what had impressed me: words, a story, an attitude, an inner feeling, a question. As time went by, I would reread my notes and gradually build up the story of the person's journey. Every four months, I helped the young man remember his journey. This revision process was a real discovery for him. He realized that I was giving him



attention and time. This steadily strengthened our mutual trust. Thus, he more easily opened other doors that were closed until then. In this way, he was learning to recall his own history.

Jean-Marie de la Mennais invites Brothers to develop an existential memory of the Son of God's being and action if they wish to be faithful to their mission of giving their lives like Jesus Christ for the salvation of children (GC VI, 222), and "*of spreading his knowledge and his love*" (GC IV, 465). Being merciful to themselves, children and young people can only be learned with reference to the merciful Master (GC VI, 385-386).

Remembering is the way of committing ourselves to faithfully follow the Master. Forgetting him is gradually distancing ourselves from him. Without him, we can do nothing. But how do we learn to remember him **each day**? We have a model for this. The Virgin Mary, the Mother who never forgot her Son and who was faithful even at the foot of the cross. She is the perfect teacher who can help us keep alive the memory of Jesus in our hearts (Lk 2:19). The faithful praying of the rosary makes us relive the joyful, luminous, sorrowful and glorious mysteries of her Son Jesus. This prayer of the poor through the intercession of the humble Handmaid of Nazareth will progressively make of our life a living memory of Jesus who calls us to follow him faithfully. Knowing this, happy are we if we do so (Jn 13:17)! A wonderful education obtained at Mary's school!

## 5- Purify your Motivation!

*"But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place."* (Lk 24: 21)

For Luke, the shock of Jesus' death is beneficial. It allows the disciples of Emmaus to identify what motivated their following Jesus. He was the liberator of Israel of their expectation. They have been deceived: he has been dead for three days. If they wish to journey with the Master, they must *purify their motivation*.

The Gospels catalogue several reasons that can motivate people to follow Christ. The crowds want bread (Jn 6: 25-27) or healings (Mk 1:31-34). The sons of Zebedee seek power (Mt 20:21). Zacchaeus seeks to see who this man is who is so much talked about in the region (Lk 19:5). The rich young man desires perfection (Mt 19:20-21). In short, every decision to follow Jesus, to seek him out or to welcome him is underpinned by a motivation. No one follows him in a totally disinterested way. What is important is that we come to terms with ourselves and ask the Lord to purify our motivation, to educate and evangelize us so that we, like him, may seek the will of the Father in everything, or so that we may, like Mary, enter God's plan, or like Joseph, strengthen our faithful obedience to God.

Thanks to meticulous research confirmed by statistical data, Father Luigi Maria Rulla has managed to identify two main categories of motivations that can induce one to opt for a vocation to the priestly or religious life. The first category refers to the need to be more concerned with personal fulfillment. A typical example is the attitude of the crowds who follow Jesus to get bread and to be healed. The second refers to the values that are an "*innate tendency to respond to things that are important in themselves*"<sup>10</sup>. These give meaning to human life. They encapsulate the ideal that one intends to place at the center of his life. Consecrated life offers to those who choose this path five values: union with God, imitation of Christ, poverty, chastity and obedience. The consecrated person who wishes to place these values at the center of his life is ready to sell everything he owns to acquire these rare pearls (Mt 13:45-46).

On February 2, 2022, the feast of consecrated life, Pope Francis, in his homily, asked us to identify our deepest motivations for following Christ. To do this, he invites us to discern what drives us to action: the Holy Spirit or the spirit of the world or the passion of the moment. Society advocates the pursuit of results, success, visibility and power, while the Holy Spirit makes us recognize God

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<sup>10</sup> Luigi Maria RULLA, *Anthropologie de la vocation chrétienne*, I- Bases interdisciplinaires, p. 122-123.

in what is fragile and small. In this area, all that glitters is not necessarily gold. "*Sometimes*," the Pope points out, "*even behind the appearance of good works, the worm of narcissism or the frenzy of protagonism can hide.*" Without a purification of our motives, we run the risk of being animated by mechanical repetition rather than by the enthusiasm of adhering to the motions of the Spirit.

In the houses of formation, I sometimes organized Sunday walks with the young people under my care. Sometimes they liked to tease each other. One day, while visiting one of our schools, a young man told one of his companions he could see him as director of that school in a few years' time. The young man took this comment as a recognition of his abilities and was very flattered. That evening, at dinner, we recalled this joke and it created a joyful atmosphere in the community. Under guise of teasing, this young man had made a wise remark to his fellow student who did indeed carry a desire for greatness. But purifying his motivation by learning to serve and not to be served proved too demanding. As a result, he abandoned the consecrated life he loved so much.

Jean-Marie de la Mennais points to at least two avenues if we seek to purify our motives when following Christ. The first consists in training ourselves each day to act for God alone (GC II, 254). This means seeking to do everything for his greater glory (S II, 615-616). This is the way to sanctify ourselves by "*fulfilling all the duties of our holy state*" (GC VI, 393). The second journey exhorts us to carry our cross each day. If we learn to "*embrace with love*" (GC V, 496) our daily sufferings and to "*suffer everything for the sake of God*" (GC VI, 392), then we will make of our life a "*pleasing offering*" to the Lord (GC V, 559). In this way, the cross "*crushes ... all earthly affections, all feelings of vainglory, curiosity, worldliness, which constantly creep up in spite of ourselves*" in the depths of our hearts (S II, 655).

Journeying with the Master introduces us into a dynamic of permanent purification. To conform to this, our Rule of Life proposes the path of asceticism. There are several reasons for this choice. First of all, asceticism favors the constant conversion of the heart and frees us to be more attentive to the voice of the Lord (D 96). Secondly, the vows, lived with joy and generosity, purify us to

be like Christ: chaste, poor and obedient (D 97). Finally, personal discipline, community life, mission and sickness (D 98-102), to the extent that these realities are assumed in faith, make our life a spiritual offering pleasing to God. Thus, acting for God alone and carrying our cross make up the ascetic journey that purifies our motives **each day** in the footsteps of Jesus who walks with us. It is a true school of permanent formation that helps us to be more like Christ. Such work is never finished. Are we really convinced that there is no other way?

## 6- Await the Dawn!

*“In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” (Lk 24: 22-24)*

The women waited for dawn to come to the tomb of Jesus. A long wait that leads to a surprise: they did not find the body of Jesus and angels say that he has risen. But no one has seen him yet.

*To wait for the dawn* is to be ready to go looking for Jesus as soon as possible. It means learning to be open to the unexpected, to the surprises of the Lord. It means setting out on a journey like the women and the disciples who went to the tomb.

In the biblical tradition, the dawn is often associated with a new beginning where God has the initiative. It is at dawn that Moses stretches out his staff over the sea and the sea returns to its place (Ex 14:27). King Darius rises very early to see that the lions have not harmed Daniel (Dan 6:23). At daybreak, God orders a worm to prick the castor-oil tree that protected Jonah's head from the heat of the sun (Jon 4:7). After a night of fruitless fishing, at dawn, Jesus stands on the shore and asks Peter to cast the net to the right of the boat (Jn 21:4-6).

For Pope Francis, the dawn always contains a promise: the longest and darkest night cannot make us forget the joy of the day,

of the sun. Only trust in God can transform our darkness into light. Thus, the consecrated person, like every Christian family, is called to be that watchman who stands vigil during the night and knows when the dawn comes (Is 21:11-12). In this sense, the consecrated person is dedicated to be the endless dawn of the Church, knowing when to meet the risen Christ and announce him without delay to the brothers and sisters, his eyes sparkling with great joy.

In education as in psychology, hope is an important element for the educator or psychologist whose goal is to help others to grow. Indeed, for Marguerite Léna, to educate is to hope. It is always to expect something good, but most often that something is undefined. A good educator is above all a dowsers of hope: he manages to make water spring up and flowers grow in an apparently sterile soil. Much psychological research has shown that the prisoner who manages to avoid despair often benefits the most from his imprisonment. Thus, hope gives strength and energy to face adversity.

In houses of formation, at the beginning of the journey, I liked to ask some of the youth to write down their expectations and share them with me if they so desired. Some did, some did not. As a result, I could identify three categories of youths. The first category consists of those who do not have expectations because they do not want to be disappointed. They are followers. The second category includes those with unrealistic expectations. They are strong-willed but quickly become discouraged. Their growth is rather limited. The last category is made up of those who have realistic expectations. They are successful and happy in their formation. Unless you are waiting for the dawn, you will not be that watchman who scans the horizon in the middle of the night.

When all seems lost, when failure looms on the horizon and misunderstandings and disappointments proliferate, Jean-Marie de la Mennais exhorts us to hope. This makes us walk at the same rate as God who never despairs of anyone (GC III, 312). For him, hope is the dawn that announces the promise of growth concealed in each brother or sister.

How can we be on standby for the dawn in our lives each day? Who will educate us? To this end, the prayer of the psalms is an excellent tool: it helps us to remember the promises of God that have already been fulfilled and it prepares us to welcome the Messiah who will definitively fulfill them. Word of God and the prayer of the Church, each morning the psalms awaken our ears to listen as disciples (Is 50:4) and sharpen our thirst and quest for the Lord (Ps 62:2). Every evening they lift up our praises to the Lord like sweet-smelling perfume (Ps 140:2). They are the light of our steps, the lamp for our journey (Ps 118:105). In adversity, they nourish our hope and confidence (Ps 26:1-14). As a result, when each day we join heart and lips together, the psalms gradually train us to watch for the dawn, readying us to meet the Risen Lord.

# TO GO FURTHER

## AT THE END OF EACH CHAPTER

### 1- For a personal halt

#### In the light of the five or six orientations:

- 1.1- What convictions am I invited to strengthen? to rediscover?
- 1.2- What lifestyle am I invited to intensify? to correct?
- 1.3- How can I renew my personal project?
- 1.4- How can I continue to grow with those whom the Lord places on my journey?

### 2- For sharing in community or in fraternity

- 2.1- Share the fruit of your reading, emphasizing the discoveries that have an impact on the life of the community or fraternity as a formation team.
- 2.2-How can we readjust the community project based on these discoveries?
- 2.3-How can we make the title of each chapter our own in our community or fraternity?
- 2.4- What challenges our community or fraternity?

### 3- For further study

After sharing on the circular, **possible follow-up** with the reading of *Christus vivit*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Youth and All the People of God, Chapter 5: Youth Journey, in particular numbers 150 to 157 (friendship with Christ) and 158 to 162 (growth and maturation).





## CHAPTER II

### LET'S WELCOME THE MASTER!

Consecrated life is on-going formation: it aims at making our own the "attitudes of the Son" (VC, no. 66). Two years of postulate, one year of novitiate and three years of scholasticate are not enough. These are but the first steps leading to formation that encompasses our whole life (VC, no. 69). When can we say with Paul: "I live, not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2, 20)? There is a long way still. Who better than Jesus can accompany us on this progressive and permanent identification? On one condition: welcoming him each day of our life.

#### 1- Accept your Ignorance!

*"He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Lk 24: 25-26)*

Jesus begins by denouncing the ignorance of the disciples of Emmaus: their minds are without understanding and their hearts slow to believe the words of the prophets. They have not yet understood that Jesus had to suffer and die in order to enter his glory. For Jean-Louis Chrétien, it is a matter of "*learned ignorance*" which "*does not consist in making ourselves amnesiac and stupid in order to listen better, but in silencing the rumor of what has already been said in order to **let ourselves be told***,"<sup>11</sup> according to the

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Louis CHRÉTIEN, L'inouï, in : L'écoute, un travail intérieur, p. 133.

beautiful expression of Heidegger. Thus, recognizing and accepting our ignorance - non-knowledge and ill-knowledge - and our frailties allows us to welcome Jesus who gives breath and meaning to our life.

It is because he accepts his ignorance and his frailties that the Publican finds favour with the Lord (Lk 18:13-14). It is by recognizing his unworthiness that the Centurion obtains the healing of his servant (Lk 7:5-7) and the Syro-Phoenician woman, that of her daughter (Mt 15:26-28). Jesus reminds us that he did not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Mk 2:27), and that he reveals the secrets of his Kingdom to the little ones (Lk 10:21-24).

Meditating on Levi's vocation, Pope Francis points out that Jesus calls a Publican to follow him, a person of ill repute for the people of his time. Following Matthew's example, everyone is invited to trust in the Lord's grace despite their sins. Thus, a new future is offered to those who respond to his invitation with a humble and sincere heart. Such a call cannot be understood or accepted by those who think they are righteous and better than others. Consequently, pride and vanity keep us from recognizing and accepting our ignorance and need for salvation. These dispositions are like a shield that makes us inflexible in the hands of the Lord, or like a barrier to his merciful gaze. But only he can open our minds, warm our hearts and mobilize our wills so that we can follow him despite our frailties.

Everyday life abounds with examples of people who have turned their disabilities into opportunities. People have overcome cancer through tenacity. Athletes with mobility difficulties win trophies by being consistent and persistent in their training. Average students become laureates in their graduating class. People who suffer from vertigo become great acrobats or gymnasts. Short people become great runners or excellent basketball players. The common factor in all these people is their acceptance of their initial reality. In psychology and in ordinary life, isn't it said that a problem that is acknowledged and accepted is already half solved?

I have received young people with favourable recommendations about some and poor references about others. So-and-so has a good character: he has many assets, he comes from a good family and he should be able to help others. For that other one, things will not be

easy: he is limited and slow or his father has abandoned his mother. However, it was not uncommon for the rather limited candidate to surprise everyone by making faster progress than the seemingly more gifted one. In most cases, what was decisive in the progress of the first one was, on the one hand, his ability to come to terms with himself and to accept himself as he was, and on the other hand, his humility and his simplicity were determining.

In order to grow in self-acceptance, Jean-Marie de la Mennais recommends the practice of humility which is the characteristic of a true disciple of the Master (S II, 387). Without this virtue, the Brother *"can have no resemblance to Jesus Christ, whose birth, life and death were, so to speak, but a great act of humility"* (S II, 649). This is the path that the Virgin Mary took to prepare herself to receive her Son (S II, 437). Our Founder exhorts us to the practice of humility to know ourselves better (S II, 537) and to correct our faults (S II, 647). In so doing, we will become saints (S II, 581), we will be truly happy in following the Master (S II, 438), faithful to our vocation (S II, 600), and we will live in peace (S II, 649).

Recognizing and accepting our ignorance is to remain a novice for the whole of our lives, a little like Saint Therese of Lisieux who wanted to live in the novitiate for the rest of her days. It is welcoming our condition of permanent beginner in the footsteps of Christ. In this area, the further we journey, the more we realize there is still a long way to go. The sacrament of reconciliation provides us with a place to accept in all humility and truth our fundamental ignorance as sinners. Are we faithful to this appointment of grace, of reconciliation with God, with ourselves and with others?

When praying the Our Father, we ask the Lord to forgive us as we forgive our brothers and sisters. How many times do we need to commit ourselves to do this? *"Up to seventy times seven times"* (Mt 18:22), that is, always. This is the way to imitate our Father's mercy towards us (Lk 6:36).

The sacrament of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness are two theological encounters where we can progressively make our own the "attitudes of the Son", beginning by recognizing and accepting our frailties!

## 2- Allow Yourself to Be Taught!

*"Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." (Lk 24: 27)*

Luke presents Jesus as a teacher of the Scriptures: "*Starting from Moses and all the Prophets*", he explains to the disciples on the road to Emmaus "*everything about him*". The disciples, like docile and studious pupils, let themselves be taught by listening to their Master. This is how Jesus gradually introduces them into his intimacy.

Through the witness of his life and through his words, Jesus teaches his disciples filial prayer (Lk 11:1-4), interiority and contemplation (Mt 17:1-9). He teaches them to live the beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12). He exhorts them to imitate the perfection of his Father by practicing mercy and love of enemies (Mt 5:48). He initiates them to trust in Providence by sending them on a mission stripped of everything (Mt 10, 9-10). He teaches them to be vigilant servants (Mt 24:37-44), faithful (Mt 24:45-51), patient (Mt 25:1-14), daring (Mt 25:14-30), attentive to the poorest (Mt 25:31-46). Thus, by allowing themselves to be taught and formed, the disciples become attached to the Master and discover he has the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68).

After Christ, from the very beginning, the Church has given priority to the Word of God as a source of formation for Christians. This is not so much an intellectual formation as an encounter with the person of Christ. Indeed, we are familiar with the beautiful and powerful statement of Saint Jerome: "*To ignore the Scriptures is to ignore Christ.*"<sup>12</sup> For Saint Ephrem, the treasures of the Word of God are revealed to those who scrutinize and meditate on it<sup>13</sup>. Thanks to this regular contact, Saint Augustine affirms that man is recreated daily. Wishing to put the Word of God back at the center of Christian formation, Benedict XVI convened a synod on this

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<sup>12</sup> Saint Jerome, Prologue: PL24, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Saint Ephrem, Commentary on the Diatessaron, 1, 18.

theme in 2008. In the post-synodal exhortation "*Verbum Domini*", the Pope recalls that the radical transformation of Christians begins with their openness to an encounter with Christ. "*To welcome the Word means to allow oneself to be molded by Him in order to be conformed to Christ, to the only Son who comes from the Father.*"<sup>14</sup> This is the way to belong to the community of those who listen to the Word of God and keep it, following the example of Mary (Lk 11:28). We have been living this experience for three years with the Sunday of the Word instituted by Pope Francis.

Allowing yourself to be taught requires the development of an important quality, that of listening. Today, this is a real emergency. Many failures in society, in families and in schools come from this inability to listen. This is the observation of Pope Francis who, at the same time, proposes a model of listening if we wish to overcome this handicap.

*The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives. Yet today's world is largely a deaf world... At times, the frantic pace of the modern world prevents us from listening attentively to what another person is saying. Halfway through, we interrupt him and want to contradict what he has not even finished saying. We must not lose our ability to listen. Saint Francis heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and he heard the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life. My desire is that the seed that Saint Francis planted may grow in the hearts of many<sup>15</sup>.*

In my experience as a trainer, I have spent hours listening to young people. Where listening is concerned, I have encountered

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<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, n° 50.

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter: *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 48.

diametrically opposed reactions. When people are afraid of listening, they either wish to fill all the silences or take refuge in silence. When they have never experienced being listened to, they may interpret the silence as a desire to dominate or even manipulate them, or they may be amazed by the attention they receive. In all cases, true listening requires mutual respect, patience and humility. Only those who manage to listen to others on their knees can help them grow and allow themselves to be taught.

In order to allow ourselves to be educated, formed and accompanied by the Word of God, Jean-Marie invites us to welcome it in the depths of our hearts like a "*sweet dew*" and to listen to it attentively (S II, 185). Only then will it progressively enliven us, renewing us by rekindling in us the desire to make Jesus our model in everything (S II, 404). This is possible if we are docile to its action like little children (S II, 543) and willing to close our ears to external noises to "*be alone with God alone*" (S I, 485). Far from considering it a passive action, Jean-Marie de la Mennais compares listening to the Word of God to "*the dew that comes down from heaven to soften the land we cultivate*" (GC I, 108). We can therefore better understand his pressing invitation to last and persevere in prayer: "*Never, under any pretext whatsoever, cut short your meditation, for of all your exercises, it is the most necessary.*"<sup>16</sup>

To let ourselves be taught by the Master is, like Mary, to place ourselves regularly at his feet to listen to him (Lk 10:42). This is our permanent novitiate. Our Rule of Life asks us to devote thirty minutes to daily prayer (C 43). It is truly distressing to note that some Brothers behave as if this spiritual exercise were optional. They do it when they have slept well, when they are in good shape, when they are not too busy. When will they understand that they are depriving themselves of a unique experience of formation at the school of the Master? And if we are faithful to it, let's question ourselves as to the quality of our listening to the Lord and that of our presence?

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<sup>16</sup> Rule of 1825

Furthermore, we are invited to set aside at least two hours a week for spiritual reading, especially of Sacred Scripture (C 45). Many spiritual writers see it as a gateway to prayer. It expresses our desire to open the ears of our heart to listen to our Master. It is the dew that must fertilize our land so as to bear abundant fruit.

### 3- Stay With Us!

*"As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them."*  
**(Lk 24: 28-29)**

The disciples of Emmaus wish for Jesus to stay with them for, they say, the day is almost over and it's getting dark. Jesus complies with their request. What's at stake here is a mutual commitment to stay, for an invitation implies keeping company to the invited party.

In the Johannine tradition, the verb "*to abide*" always defines the relationship that must exist between Jesus and the disciple. Indeed, "*he who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit*" (Jn 15:5). This is the condition for being fruitful and for giving glory to God (Jn 15:8). Without this permanent attachment to the person of Christ, our life is sterile (Jn 15:6). To remain in Christ means to live as he lived (1 Jn 2:6), to keep his Word and to love him with all our heart (Jn 14:23). It also means accepting to be pruned by the Father in order to produce more fruit (Jn 15:2).

Pope Francis points out that Christian life is a daily apprenticeship to abide in Christ. Without him, we can do nothing (Jn 15:5). Thus, we must practice remaining attached to him, like branches to the vine, if we want to bear fruit. This is the most eloquent testimony that the saints leave to us. Day after day, they have learned to be more deeply rooted in Christ in their ordinary lives. What does that mean? They strove to remain in love with God and neighbor. In doing so, they managed to be fruitful. This can only be achieved by developing a deep and intimate relationship with Christ.

In our disenchanted world, many forms of commitment that involve a long-term response (marriage, priestly life, religious life...) are in crisis. The latest statistics show that people are getting married much later in life and that the percentage of divorce is increasing every year. In 2013, following a study conducted from 2008 to 2012, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life noted that every year more than three thousand religious men and women of perpetual vows leave the consecrated life. At the same time, we cannot ignore their wonderful testimonies of commitment. People such as Benedict XVI, Pope Francis, Sister Ann Rose Nu Twang - the Burmese nun who knelt between the military and the young people demonstrating against the ruling power -, and the many people: religious, nuns, doctors, nurses, men and women of good will, who have offered and still offer their lives to care for the sick of COVID-19, the victims of wars, the refugees on the roads of exile ... are all sentries who proclaim to our world that holiness is possible and that love of neighbor is lived in daily fidelity. On the condition that we remain in Christ!

In the novitiate, it was relatively easy for me to notice the progress that the young people made in their ability to remain with Christ. At the beginning, they spent considerable energy in recollection, in prayer, in devoting time to personal prayer. But, with time and practice, they learned to stand before the Lord in silence and to let him shape them. The more they clung to Christ, the happier they were and the more they discovered the beauty of their vocation. Like Peter, some even wanted to pitch three tents on top of the mountain to spend more time with the Lord, a moment of consolation that testifies to how important it is to learn to remain in Christ, the Rock on which we are called to build our lives every day.

For Jean-Marie de la Mennais, abiding in Christ guarantees holiness (S I, 447). It is the best pedagogy for following Jesus in all his ways, loving what he loved, conforming our thoughts to his and becoming his living image (S II, 631-632). But how can we evaluate our progress in this work of configuration? If we grow in our



attachment to the person of Christ, then we will know how to "*leave God for God*" (S I, 112), we will let him "*lead us in the smallest things*", we will always walk in "*the light of his face*" (S I, 111) and we will gradually learn to "*see only God in everything*".

Knowing how to find God in prayer, fraternal relationships and apostolic activity is the goal of our entire formation to the consecrated life. It is a work that is never finished and that must be undertaken each day. This unity of life to which we are called starts from Christ and leads us back to him. This means that our mission begins and ends at the feet of the Lord. In other words, the more we are his disciples, the more we will become his apostles. This is what it means to remain in Christ and to know how to leave God for God.

On this path of permanent growth, self-knowledge is important. If we are more "Martha" than "Mary", then let us train ourselves to spend more time at the feet of the Lord (Lk 10:39). How can we proclaim him to others if we have not first met him? If our health or age no longer allows us in the field to bring the Good News to others, let us accompany those who are still there with our prayer.

#### **4- Breaking the Bread!**

*"When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them." (Lk 24: 30)*

What a reversal: the guest becomes the host! Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the disciples. Indeed, the gesture of breaking bread is already a commitment to sharing. Everyone is called to give and receive. Those who eat the broken bread become companions in life.

In the biblical tradition, bread is rich in symbolism. It is a gift from God that satisfies the people of Israel in the desert (Ex 16:12), but it is also the fruit of human labor (Gen 3:19). Ordinary and essential food, it replenishes the strength of the prophet Elijah to walk to Horeb where the Lord gives him a rendezvous (1 Kings 19:6). It is a sign of peace and brotherhood when Melchizedek, king of Salem, offers it to Abraham (Gen 14:18). Multiplied by Jesus (Jn

6:1-16), it evokes sharing but also refers to his person who is the Bread of life (Jn 6:35). In fact, breaking the bread has only one objective: to create unity among guests, thus achieving communion.

From the beginning, the Church has always believed in the transforming power of the Eucharist. This is what Saint Augustine taught with conviction to the faithful of Hippo when he said: *"Become what you contemplate, contemplate what you receive, receive what you are: the Body of Christ."* Source and summit of the Christian life, this sacrament which unites us to Christ and to others forms and transforms us by healing us from various illnesses. It brings us the love of the Father, dispelling our feeling of being orphans. Thus, our bonds of brotherhood are strengthened: from now on we are sons and daughters in the same family. We are also reminded that we are precious in the eyes of the Lord, that we are his guests and his friends with whom he wants to abide. We are freed from indifference as our hearts are warmed for the service of God and neighbor. Each Eucharist then becomes a new springtime where our Christian life blooms and reflowers, always promising and producing new fruits.

Today, many Christians tend to neglect the Eucharist as they have not discovered its central role in their lives. It is easy to imagine the negative consequences of malnutrition on a person's health. It can lead to death. How can we grow in our Christian life without feeding on Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6)? He who does not eat the Body of the Lord and drink his blood does not have life in him (Jn 6:53). If we do not participate regularly in this meal, we run the risk of spiritual malnutrition and of all sorts of deformities. We will not grow. We will lose our strength. Our whole body, that is, our whole being, will suffer the consequences.

On several occasions, I have had the opportunity to experience the importance of the Eucharist as a way of formation and progress in the configuration to Christ. Many young people have found that the Eucharist nourishes their faith. They have experienced God's love, his loving mercy and his unconditional

affirmation. They have met a friend who hugs them and looks upon them with tender loving care. They have found a Master who shares his bread and warms their hearts. They now have a companion on the journey, always willing to stay with them.

Jean-Marie de la Mennais invites us to put the Eucharist at the center of our consecrated life. As a mystery of the love of Jesus Christ for mankind (S II, 234), it teaches us to make of our life an offering pleasing to God. It imprints in us the attitudes of Jesus Christ (S II, 470), it transforms us into Him, communicates His life to us and introduces us into His intimacy (S I, 444). Each day, thanks to the Eucharist, Jesus renews for us the wonders of his incarnation and redemption (S II, 245).

The Eucharist in which we are invited to participate each day contains a true project of integral formation. God calls us daily around two tables to nourish us: that of his Word and that of his Body.

By acknowledging our sins, we learn to be truthful with God, with ourselves and with others. This prepares our hearts to listen to his Word. As effective as rain, it does not return without having fertilized the earth and made the seed germinate (Is 55, 10). Received and meditated upon, the Word urges us to profess our faith in God alone and makes us compassionate to the sufferings of our brothers and sisters.

After being nourished by his Word, we offer ourselves to the Lord with our joys and sorrows. When the bread and wine become the body and blood of the Lord, we pray for the grace to give ourselves totally to him and to our neighbor. With the prayer that makes us a people of brothers and sisters, we commit ourselves to do his will, to work for the coming of his kingdom, to sanctify his name, to earn our daily bread, to forgive one another. Nourished by his body and blood, we sing his wonders and set off to proclaim him whom our eyes have contemplated, our hands and lips have touched, our whole body has assimilated.

This is a wonderful school of ongoing formation for each of us! This is where the Lord is waiting for us to form, reform and transform us **each day** of our lives. Happy are we if we respond

daily to this rendezvous of love! In fact, our life will be progressively transfigured, becoming conformed to that of Christ, thus sharing Saint Paul's experience: *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"* (Gal 2:20).

## **5- Living Differently!**

*"Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight."* (Lk 24: 31)

The purpose of any journey with Jesus is to come to recognize him. Henceforth, a trained disciple has his eyes open and the tangible presence of the Master is no longer necessary. In other words, he is called to live differently: he is able to do without him and to continue learning from life.

To live differently is learning to recognize the Lord when he meets us in our daily reality (Jn 21:7). It means knowing how to overcome the temptation to hold on to him when we have met him (Jn 20:17). It is continuing to believe that he is with us even if we have found an empty tomb, with a few cloths lying flat (Jn 20:6-8). It means understanding that it is in our best interest that he leaves so that we can learn to grow with the help of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:7). It means accepting to continue seeking him throughout our lives, until he returns (Lk 24:53).

From the outset, the Church has never ceased to educate Christians in the constant quest for God. Indeed, Saint Benedict makes this the first criterion of vocational discernment for the monastic life. For Saint Augustine, our heart is without rest until it dwells in the Lord. As for Pope Francis, he defines the Christian life as a permanent quest for God. On this pathway of growth and formation, Christians are called to discern the true motivation of their quest. Indeed, one can seek the Lord for personal use and satisfaction of one's needs (Jn 6:24-35), but only those who seek him out of free and unconditional love can welcome him and allow themselves to be formed and transformed by him. Such a one is therefore ready to sell everything he owns to buy the pearl (Mt 13:46).

In psychology, several forms of absence have been identified. When we are present in body but our mind and heart are elsewhere, we resort to *indifferent absence*. If we are absent when the other person really needs us, we practice *punitive absence*. When we refuse to commit ourselves, using the excuse of a feigned incapacity to avoid failure, we use the term of *resignation absence*. But when we allow the other person to walk alone because it is possible or necessary, when we know how to tiptoe out of his life and when we succeed in making him face up to his responsibilities, we use the pedagogy of *present absence*. It's the only form of absence that really contributes to training. It is the right measure: it gratifies sufficiently, but at the same time leaves a certain dissatisfaction. Such pedagogy motivates to look for the One the heart has already found.

As a trainer, I liked to revisit with young people their experiences of grief. With the help of simple questions, I helped them to relive these important transitions. In truth, at first, this was quite laborious: it is always difficult to revisit our wounds and sufferings, especially if they are linked to significant people in our lives. But some people managed to discover a call to live differently. I still remember the conclusion reached by one of these young people. When his father deserted the house and left him alone with his mother, it was the shock of his life. This traumatic and painful event helped him to look for another father whom he found in God. He found in God a Father who deeply respected his freedom, who was present when he needed to be and who was absent when necessary. He also understood that God can never be owned: he reveals and veils his face to us when he wants to, always for our greatest good.

Jean-Marie de la Mennais uses the symbol of the night to show us that God never abandons us, even when we experience his apparent absence. Indeed, it is in the middle of the night that the angels announce the birth of the Savior in Bethlehem and that the shepherds set out to find him (S I, 531). The disciple is not above the Master: in Gethsemane, in the middle of the night, Jesus experiences the anguish of his Father's silence (S II, 549).

In order to progress along this journey of *"the night of pure faith"* (S II, 499), our Founder advises us *"not to try to foresee and prevent everything, but to do what we can and what we must do... and to fall asleep gently on the bosom of our Lord Jesus"* (S I, 86). If he *"hides his face for a moment"*, we must continue to walk steadfastly in search of him and wait in peace for his hour (GC I, 322). It is often *"in the night that the dew of heaven falls"* (GC IV, 16).

The trials that test the value of our faith, which is more precious than gold (1 Pet 1:6-7), are a true school of ongoing formation. If they are welcomed and accepted, they teach us to live differently. In other words, they help us to recognize the Lord when he comes to us through the way of the cross, suffering and failure. *"If a grain of wheat falls to the ground and does not die, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit"* (Jn 12:24).

Trials knock at our door. We do not choose them. It is up to us, with the grace of the Lord, to turn them into pathways of formation, **each day** of our lives! These rendezvous of the Lord teach us to live differently.

## CHAPTER III

### LET US START AFRESH FROM CHRIST!

To be faithful to its vocation, the consecrated person must always start afresh from Christ. Not once and for all, but **each day**. This requires a permanent openness on the part of those who are called to this life. In fact, it is a matter of remaining a novice, that is, open to the newness of life throughout our existence. To achieve this, we must train ourselves to consider our life as a formative journey. This involves developing a culture of ongoing formation that aims to "*form a heart that is free to learn from the history of each day, throughout one's life, like Christ, in order to be at the service of all*"<sup>17</sup>. As a result, the consecrated person progressively acquires the attitudes of the Son and translates them into a life that is more and more in keeping with him, both individually and in community<sup>18</sup>.

#### 1- Revisit Your Experience of God!

*"They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Lk 24: 32)*

Luke underscores the importance of knowing how to reread or revisit our experience of God. It is a tool to discern his presence and his passage in our lives. Like a gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:12), the Lord often visits us to warm our hearts and to open the

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<sup>17</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *New Wine, New Wineskins*, no. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in the School*, no.10.

Scriptures to us. It is up to us to pay attention and to be faithful to his presence! This is where he is waiting to teach us to start afresh from him.

In the Bible, revisiting one's experience often leads to a commitment to serve the Lord. Indeed, when Jacob relives his encounter with God, he is first overcome with fear, then he commits himself to do what God asks (Gen 28:16-22). As for Samuel, he confuses the voice of the Lord with that of the priest Eli; but when the latter helps him understand that it is God who is calling him, he responds favorably (1 Sam 3:8-9). After giving her consent to the angel Gabriel and in the presence of Elizabeth, the humble daughter of Nazareth sings of the wonders of the Lord in her life (Lk 1:46-56). Intending to send Mary away in secret, Joseph, without fully appreciating the significance of the angel's invitation, agrees to welcome his wife into his home (Mt 1:19-24). When Paul, the littlest, revisits his apostolic ministry and sees all the good that has been done by him and thanks to him, he recognizes the fruitfulness of the Lord's grace (1 Cor 15:8-10). In fact, when God visits us, he helps us to do his will. We then understand that he is the only foundation on which we are called to build our life if we want to start afresh from Christ.

The Church constantly reminds the consecrated life that the experience of God is an indispensable condition for fulfilling its prophetic mission in the world. Without it, it will be difficult to read "*the signs of God's providential action*" hidden in the events of history and to be open to the Spirit's inner suggestions (VC, no. 73). The frequent and regular encounter with the Lord is the fire that rekindles in the prophet's heart the passion for God's holiness (VC, no. 84). It is the light that enables him to be an authentic interpreter of the Lord's will and to bear credible witness to it (VC, no. 95). If this is not the case, faith weakens: the face of our brother becomes dull and it is impossible to see the face of Christ. The mission is transformed into a search for vain glory. Therefore, Saint John Paul II warned consecrated persons against lukewarmness and dullness,



encouraging them to make prayer their first commitment. This is the way for *"each reality of consecrated life to be born and regenerated each day in the unceasing contemplation of the face of Christ"*<sup>19</sup>.

Today, growth in the spiritual life is one of the greatest challenges facing consecrated life. Its absence is one of the main causes of abandonment of religious life. Those who begin by abandoning the oratory or the chapel end up losing the meaning of their consecration. Growing in the spiritual life requires experiences in the ordinary of daily life: lived-in silence, regular frequentation of the Word of God, presence and active participation in the liturgy, times of desert (retreats, recollections), moments of spiritual reading. Otherwise, our heart cools down quite quickly and our spiritual life no longer matures. We thus lose that youthfulness of spirit which endures over time. Only those who continue to let themselves be formed each day by the Lord remain young, whatever their age.

When I was Novice Master, I attached great importance to formation in prayer. I proceeded by stages. I tried to transmit not only an objective knowledge, but above all a know-how. Thus, after having presented a few elements of content, I taught the novices how to meditate, beginning by sharing with them my own meditation on the Word of God. Then, each one would take turns preparing and doing his own meditation out loud. Before the beginning of the first class of the day, we would review it together, noting the strong and weak points. This went on for the entire first quarter of the novitiate. With time, the progress in the spiritual life was clearly visible. At the beginning, everyone used the Ignatian method. In the second half of the novitiate, I offered them other methods. Thus, each one could choose the one that suited his spiritual temperament. A good initiation into prayer is a key to growing and maturing in one's spiritual life. Woe betide the one

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<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, Homily of February 2, 2001

who stops this apprenticeship at the end of the novitiate! Have we continued our formation in this area? There is no shortage of good books. Let's just refer to circulars 273 by Brother Bernard Gaudeul and 308 by Brother Yannick Houssay.

To grow in the spiritual life, Jean-Marie de la Mennais proposes the method of surrendering to the will of the Father. Such an attitude is the most beautiful of prayers: it is "*that Amen of love which is the eternal cry of the Angels*" (GC I, 29). If we want to do each day what God asks of us, we must embrace the cross with love (GC III, 20). Thus, "*meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ is the best way to rekindle in our hearts the fire of divine love*" (GC II, 443). It is the best school for learning from the Savior what he has done for us and what we must do for him. In addition to contemplating his cross, our Founder advises us to unite our prayers with those of Christ so that we become one voice with him (S II, 173).

Learning to be in daily contact with the Lord using the tools offered to us by the liturgical seasons of the Church and the various documents of the Congregation, the Province and the community, is a good way to express our readiness to allow ourselves to be molded by the Father and to place ourselves in his hands. In this way, we will make every circumstance of life a *kairos* to discern the Lord's call and the quality of our response.

## 2- Have a burning heart!

*"The two disciples said to each other, "**Were not our hearts burning within us** as he spoke to us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32)*

This awareness radically transforms the two disciples. They are no longer "*all sad*": from now on, their hearts "*burn*" for the Lord. They are henceforth ready to love him with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind and their neighbor as themselves (Mt 22:37-39).

In the spiritual tradition, "*to have a burning heart*" means to have a purified and liberated heart, all ordained to charity (1 Cor 13:8,13). In fact, it is the very attitude of a chaste heart that focuses

all its energy on seeking to please the Lord (1 Cor 7:32-34). The Kingdom of Heaven comes first, even before the love of a man or of a woman (Mt 19:10-12). Furthermore, whoever has a "*burning heart*" strives to imitate the obedient Christ (Phil 2:7) whose very food is to do the Father's will (Jn 4:34). Hence, he learns to serve and not to be served (Mt 20:24-28). On the other hand, he is ready to sell everything he owns (Mt 19:21) to follow the poor Christ (Phil 2:6-7). For his sake, he loses everything, he considers everything as rubbish, in order to gain the one advantage, Christ (Phil 3, 7-9). Religious consecration involves learning chastity, poverty and obedience from Christ. This is essential to keep one's "*heart burning*" as one follows him.

In the Church, consecrated life, through living the vows, is portrayed as an icon of the Trinity. Chastity, the gift to God of an undivided heart, reflects the infinite love that unites the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (VC, no. 21). Consecrated persons who live chastity joyfully testify to contemporary men and women that it is possible in Christ, despite human frailty, to love God with all their hearts, placing him above all other loves, loving every creature with God's freedom (VC, no. 88). Lived in the footsteps of Christ, poverty expresses the total gift of self that the three persons of the Trinity make to each other. Thus, it "*sets us free from the slavery of material things and the artificial needs to which consumer society pushes us, and helps us rediscover Christ, the only treasure for which it is truly worth living*"<sup>20</sup>. Practiced in reference to the obedient Christ, obedience reveals the liberating beauty of the dependence around which all the relationships of the three divine Persons unfold. Through obedience, the consecrated person places his life entirely in the hands of God so that he may dispose of it according to his will. In this way, "*consecrated life constitutes in truth a living memory of the way in which Jesus exists and acts as the incarnate Word in relation to his Father and his brothers and sisters*" (VC, no. 22). No matter what stage we are at in our journey as followers of Christ,

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<sup>20</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ*, no. 22.

who can say that his consecrated life is the perfect icon of the Trinity? We have much work to do! It will come to an end on the day of our face-to-face encounter with the One we have sought, loved and served, sometimes with a burning heart, but very often with a lukewarm, even cold one.

Nowadays, our consecration is being put to the test. Although the vow of chastity is lived consistently and faithfully by the majority of consecrated persons, the sexual abuse of which too many religious have been guilty reminds us that we carry "*this treasure in earthen vessels*" (2 Cor 4:7). This sometimes leads to suspicion from those around us, creating a sense of unease, discomfort and fear. On the other hand, there are Brothers who do not regularly remit their salaries to the community or who keep part of them for their personal needs. In this regard, our Rule of Life is clear: "*All salaries, stipends, pensions, gifts, insurance benefits or other income received by the Brothers belong to the Congregation and must be promptly and faithfully surrounded according to the norms of the region or Province*" (C 22). Without the sharing of goods, there is no longer any consecrated life. The Province, the District and the Congregation will no longer have the means to live in solidarity with other more disadvantaged sectors. As for the vow of obedience, the temptation of individualism sometimes makes its practice a challenge. Do we not often confront our superiors with *faits accomplis*, especially when we sense a negative response to our request? Do we not find so-called good reasons to refuse an obedience? And yet, our vows can be an excellent school of formation to keep "*our hearts burning*" as followers of Christ, constituting an authentic "*spiritual therapy*" (VC, no. 87) for us and those around us. On the condition that we accept to always start afresh from Christ!

At the novitiate, after presenting each vow, I organized a day of recollection the purpose of which was to help the novices be at the school of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ. Each vow was then examined at spiritual counseling sessions during which the young men were invited to identify the assets they had to live the vows and the limits that could hinder them. Then, together, we

drew up a roadmap in which the work to be done, and the graces to be asked of the Lord to follow him more closely, were clearly listed. Those who entered this process with faith and willingness gradually internalized the values of chastity, poverty and obedience. They realized how wonderful it is to be chaste, poor and obedient for the Kingdom of Heaven.

As Brothers sought belonging to God alone, Jean-Marie de la Mennais proposed to them the way of self-denial. For him, obedience is self-denial par excellence as Brothers renounce their will, their affectivity and their goods. In so doing, they lose ownership of their "*thoughts*", their "*tastes*" and their "*desires*" (S II, 502). As a fundamentally interior reality, obedience demands a "*submission of mind and heart*" (GC I, 189) without which there is no longer any religious life (S II, 503). Linked to the theological virtue of charity, chastity helps one to renounce oneself in order to "*consecrate oneself to God exclusively*" after the example of Christ (S I, 413). As for religious poverty, Jean-Marie de la Mennais encourages us to love it and to practice it in all things. It is a means to have access to all the treasures of heaven.<sup>21</sup>

If we faithfully attend the school of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, the vows will gradually help us to become more like him. We will become freer to love the Lord and our neighbor, to share what we have and what we are, and seek to fulfill his will in everything. It is a wonderful school in which to learn **each day** to always start afresh from the Master!

### 3- Leave Emmaus!

*"The two disciples **got up at once** and went back to Jerusalem."* (Lk 24: 33a)

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<sup>21</sup> Rule of 1825.

The expression "*at once*" underscores the urgency of the disciples *to leave Emmaus*. No sooner have they arrived than they must leave, albeit with new mind-sets. Their life has changed: they have met Jesus. No longer despondent, they have good news to share.

In the Gospels, when someone experiences an encounter with Jesus, he is convened to a new beginning. This means leaving his previous life, his "Emmaus". In other words, he is called to conversion. The Samaritan woman leaves her pitcher at Jacob's well and tells the people that she has met the Savior of the world (Jn 4:28-30). Zacchaeus decides to make amends for the wrongs he committed as a tax collector (Lk 19:1-10). Matthew leaves his work and hosts a meal in honor of Jesus and his companions (Mt 9:9-10). The first four disciples leave their nets and follow the Master (Mk 1:16-20). The commitment to follow Jesus is a call to permanent conversion.

After Pentecost, Peter's first response to those who ask him what they must do to become Christians is a call to conversion (Acts 2:38). From then on, it is the condition for adhering more intimately to Christ, for following him more closely. Do we not belong to those who are in a state of permanent renewal out of fidelity to Jesus Christ? In consecrated life, the examples of radical transformation abound: Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Teresa Benedict of the Cross... But there are also all the other "*next door neighbors*" who are not so well known. All of them have endeavored daily to respond in their own way to a call to full renewal through self-denial for the Lord (VC, no. 35). Consecrated life is often presented as "*a journey of continual conversion, of exclusive dedication to the love of God and of your brothers and sisters, in order to bear ever more splendid witness to the grace which transfigures Christian life.*" (VC, no. 109).

Even today, Christians, all the more so the Pastors of the Church, must continue to respond to this call of the Lord. In his December 22, 2014 address to the Curia, Pope Francis identified fifteen diseases that gangrenated the life of the Church. Such a warning concerns us all. Everyone is called to be salt and light in the

environment in which he lives, failing which the Church cannot recover its vitality and beauty as the Bride of Christ. Are we ready to enter into this state of permanent conversion? Only those who allow themselves to be transformed by Christ can help others do the same and live according to the demands of the Gospel.

As a formator, I could give many examples of conversion, not in the spectacular manner of Saint Paul or other saints of the Church, but I have been fortunate to witness lasting changes in the lives of some young people. I still remember one young man who shared with me how he was now living in peace, having been a victim of scruples for years. He had experienced the Lord's mercy which outweighed all his sins. This had brought about numerous reforms in his life: he had been reconciled with his father, he had managed to forgive himself, he was no longer afraid to share his thoughts with others. Indeed, his countenance reflected his happiness. He was a different person. Every night, before going to bed, he gave thanks to the Lord for the marvels he had accomplished in his life.

For Jean-Marie de la Mennais, conversion is both a gift from God and a personal accomplishment. It is above all an act of mercy of the Father who clothes us with the filial robe (S II, 400), a miracle which, as for Paul, converts us into apostles of Christ (S II, 352), a feast which rejoices all heaven (S II, 278). But it is a difficult and laborious work: "*one does not break oneself at any cost*" (S I, 89). It requires great humility to acknowledge one's sins (S I, 518), to begin a process of transformation and to repair what needs to be repaired (S I, 519). In this way, Christians "*work earnestly and wholeheartedly*" to live according to the values of the Gospel (S II, 265).

**Each day** we are called to leave our "Emmaus" if we want to start afresh from Christ. Our pilgrimage will end at the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem. Happy will we be if we are the permanent pilgrims following him who invites us to the feast of those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14)!

## 4- Go to Jerusalem!

*"The two disciples got up at once **and went back to Jerusalem.**" (Lk 24: 33a)*

After Jesus' departure, the two disciples go to Jerusalem. This is the place of community and brotherly life. Without this affiliation, they would no longer be the disciples of the Master.

Indeed, to go to Jerusalem is to respond once again to Jesus' summons: he wishes those he calls to be with him (Mk 3:13-14). In the community, the Master moulds his disciples. After his resurrection, he shows the eleven gathered apostles his pierced hands and side and offers them his peace. Then, having revived them with the breath of the Holy Spirit, he sends them on mission with the power to forgive sins (Jn 20:19-23). We know that Thomas, one of the Twelve, was absent from the community that day and rejected the testimony of his companions. Eight days later, Jesus, once again present, insists on the central role of faith in the lives of his disciples (Jn 20:24-31). On the day of Pentecost, they receive the Holy Spirit in community (Acts 2:1-4). This was a real formative experience for them: no longer afraid, they opened the doors of the Cenacle to proclaim Christ. Thus, fraternal life in community becomes the first focus of growth and adherence to the person of Christ.

In the Church, brotherly love has always been the distinctive sign of Christian life (Acts 4:32-35, 1 Jn 4:20). Consecrated life soon became the place where women and men made the commitment to live its radical version (VC, no. 41). Consequently, fraternal life in community is conceived as an intrinsic dimension of the consecration (VC, no. 67). This lifestyle, the aim of which is to fulfill the Lord's new commandment of mutual love (Jn 13:34), commits us to the total gift of self, to the readiness to welcome the other as he is, and to forgiveness (VC, no. 42). The fraternity becomes a school of formation because it introduces each consecrated person to the effort and joy of community life. It teaches each member to live with those whom the Lord gives him as brothers, accepting their qualities as well as their limitations (VC, no. 67). By fostering



good communication between the different members of the same community, community life facilitates a better knowledge of each other, educates to dialogue and listening (VC, no. 92), thus contributing to the perseverance and fruitfulness of each one. When it helps to overcome individualism and to join hands in order to move forward together, it is "*prophetic in a society which, sometimes without realizing it, has a profound yearning for a brotherhood which knows no borders.*" (VC, no. 85).

Nowadays, building fraternity is urgent if our society is to survive. In this common work of building a more fraternal civilization, Pope Francis' Encyclical "Fratelli Tutti" makes a very interesting contribution by identifying values that can promote living together as brothers and sisters. In response to the distrust that leads one to withdraw into oneself and build walls and barriers around oneself, the Pope proposes the culture of trust, the foundation of all brotherhood. To counter the slander and defamation that destroy others, he encourages respect that appreciates what builds up and moves us forward. Faced with the globalization of indifference that leads to considering neighbors as strangers to be shunned or avoided, he promotes the attention that leads to seeking their good freely. This creates the culture of encounter, which is above all a lifestyle where no one is useless and where one can always learn something from others. In order to break down the prejudices that tend to evaluate others according to their appearance, Pope Francis refers to hope, defined as that audacity that broadens the horizon and makes life more beautiful and more fraternal. In this perspective, a brother or sister is never "*locked into what he or she has said or done but is considered according to the promise he or she carries within*"<sup>22</sup>, that is to say, the seeds of a new life. that is to say, the seeds of a living together that is ever more in keeping with his vocation to brotherhood.

When I was in charge in the houses of formation, I was able to identify quite easily the young people who carried relational wounds in them. They were distrustful, having difficulty trusting

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<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, no. 228

others. It was almost impossible for them to congratulate a companion who had done better than them. They tended to see the negative rather than the positive side of people. They always wanted to be the center of attention. When they were not, they became aggressive. They tended to be pessimistic, often taking pleasure in reminding others of their limitations. One day, I noticed that two members of the group had changed attitude from being good friends. They were avoiding each other, not talking to each other. After a few days, I called them in to share my observations. They hadn't spoken to each other for two weeks. One of them wanted to reconcile, but the other refused and preferred to end his journey. After a week, the other young man in question came to tell me that he was leaving as well. Why was he leaving? When he was about to go home, the first had threatened him. Without mutual forgiveness, humility and kindness, fraternal life in community is likely to be a place of conflict, not of growth.

The fraternal life to which every Brother is called was spelled out in the 1835 Rule:

*Let fraternal love reign among all the members of the same community! Let each one be happy with the joy of the others and suffer from their sorrows, and let all lend each other mutual support in order to go to God and accomplish his work, avoiding contentions, rivalries, secret jealousies, words of reproach, everything that hurts, everything that divides and alters charity!*<sup>23</sup>

To implement this beautiful fraternity project, Jean-Marie de la Mennais encouraged Brothers to get to know each other. For him, mutual knowledge is that patient "getting-to-know-you" which allows one to go to the other without fear, "*and even with a kind of joy*" which reassures, appreciates and calms (GC III, 486). He also invites them to be gentle, delicate and kind. These values will help them to avoid "*finishing off the reed that is already bruised*", "*putting out the wick that is still smoking*" and "*causing the least pain to those*

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<sup>23</sup> Rule of 1835

*who cause us the most pain*" (S I, 85). He also exhorts them to be credible witnesses (S I, 47). Only credibility allows for an education to brotherhood by osmosis, by attraction, by admiration and by contagion. When all seems lost and misunderstandings and disappointments multiply, our Founder asks the Brothers to use hope to learn to walk in step with God who never despairs of anyone (GC III, 312). To grow in fraternal collaboration, he urges them to develop "*a truly Catholic heart*". This enables them to consider those with whom they work as "*brothers*" and not as "*competitors*" (S II, 645).

Our fraternal life in community will be a true school of ongoing formation if each member commits himself to living brotherhood as his primary mission by virtue of his very consecration. It will then become the most beautiful facet of consecrated life, bearing witness to the transforming power of fraternal love lived daily, always starting afresh from Christ.

## **5 - Witness to Jesus Christ!**

*"The two disciples found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread."* (Lk 24: 33b-35)

First the eleven Apostles, then the two disciples testify to the resurrection of the Lord. Peter and the two pilgrims on the road to Emmaus saw and met him. It is true: Jesus is alive and well! This is how Luke wants us to understand that the mission of every disciple is *to witness to Jesus Christ*.

In the Johannine tradition, the witness is above all the one who points to Jesus and invites us to follow him, like John the Baptist (Jn 1:19-37). Like Andrew, he transmits the call (Jn 1:41-42) or, like Philip, he proposes to come and meet Jesus (Jn 1:44-46). He is sent to encourage adherence to the Master (Jn 4:28-30), to awaken faith (Jn 19:35) and to live in communion with God (1 Jn

1:3). In other words, witnessing to Jesus Christ consists in proclaiming by one's life the One whom the disciple has seen, contemplated, heard and touched (1 Jn 1:1-2).

To proclaim Jesus consists above all in transmitting an experience. Since consecrated life imitates more closely and continually represents in the Church the form of life that Jesus embraced and proposed to his disciples (VC, no. 22), it is only natural that witnessing be placed at the center of its mission. Thus, each form of religious life, according to its charism, emphasizes a specific feature of the face of Christ. Indeed, institutes dedicated to contemplation imitate Christ praying on the mountain (VC, no. 7-8), while those dedicated to apostolic activity refer to Jesus who teaches, heals the sick, and blesses children (VC, no. 8-12). In this sense, consecrated persons are called to give concrete witness to their belonging to Christ in everything they do (VC, no. 25). By living in this way, they attest that *"the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the Beatitudes"* (VC, no. 33). In other words, the more they allow themselves to be configured to Christ, the more they make him present and active in the world for the salvation of people (VC, no. 72). This is what it means to live **each day** the call to holiness (VC, no. 35), radiating a life totally given to God and to one's brothers and sisters (VC, no. 75).

Today's world is not indifferent to the testimony of religious men and women who give their lives for the cause of Christ. How else can we understand the worldwide repercussion of Xavier Beauvois' film, *"Des hommes et des dieux"*, which won the Grand Prize at the 63rd Cannes Film Festival in 2010? Indeed, this film recounts the life of the seven Cistercian monks of Notre-Dame de l'Atlas in Algeria, kidnapped on the night of March 26, 1996 and probably murdered around May 21. In this film, there is a very significant exchange between a villager and a monk, in which the monks are compared to the branch of a tree and the people of the village to a bird. This comparison expresses very well the attachment of the villagers to the monks who were announcing Christ by their very presence in this Muslim land. Similarly, Brother

Henri de Vergés, a Marist Brother, killed two years earlier in Algeria, affirmed with accuracy that "*the fifth Gospel that everyone can read is that of our life*"<sup>24</sup>.

In my experience as a formator, I have realized how much witnessing can challenge young people. During counselling, many of them attributed their vocation to a particular priest, a specific Brother or Sister, or a committed lay person. In fact, they wanted to imitate the dedication of this religious, the goodness of this Brother, the joy of this priest, the courage of this lay person. If they went a little deeper, almost all of them managed to discover that behind the qualities of these people, Christ was there. Each one, in his own way, through his life, told them that following Christ in the Church makes one happy and gives meaning to one's existence. Each day, each consecrated person learns to bear witness to Christ in his or her different environments.

In order to make Jesus Christ known to children and young people, Jean-Marie de la Mennais invited the Brothers to be credible witnesses (S II, 476). To do this, he advised them to strive to spread around them the perfume of the "*good odor*" of the Good Shepherd. How can this be done? By serving them after the example of the Master (S II, 558), by paying special attention to the most troublesome and by protecting them (S II, 560), by working zealously for their sanctification (GC V, 477) and by being ready to give their lives, if necessary, to save them (S II, 510). Such a life and formation program can only help us to be saints while making saints!

Our mission each day will be an experience of permanent formation if it becomes an altar that allows us to offer the best of ourselves to make Jesus Christ known to those in our care. Our world needs these Mennaisian Brothers and lay people who testify to the Good News with their lives

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<sup>24</sup> Sr Benedict of the Cross, Contribution of the religious life to today's culture.



## EACH DAY, WITH MARY

**As a mother**, Mary educated, taught and accompanied Jesus as he grew in stature, grace and wisdom before God and man (Lk 2:52). At the foot of the cross, John, obeying the invitation of his Master and in the name of the disciples of all times, welcomes her into his home (Jn 19:27). Thus, she becomes our Mother. What she did in Nazareth for Jesus, she does today for us who want to follow her Son more closely.

**A sublime example of perfect consecration** by her full dedication to God and by the total gift of herself (VC, no. 28), Mary teaches us to be clay in the hands of the potter (Jer 18:6). This is the way to let the Lord's grace work wonders in us daily and to abandon ourselves to his transforming action.

Because she is close to Christ, along **with Joseph** in the hidden life of Nazareth, and present with Jesus in the crucial moments of his public life, she gradually imprints in us the attitudes of her Son. This enables us to follow him unconditionally and to serve him faithfully in our lives **each day**.

**Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit and Eucharistic woman**, Mary communicates the love that allows us to offer our lives to Christ daily. Thus, the Word becomes flesh of our flesh. Day after day, it is no longer we who live, but it is Christ who lives in us (Gal 2:20).

**As the first consecrated woman**, Mary educates us to perfect charity by teaching us to serve the Lord with zeal and ardor, to be joyful in hope, strong in trials, persevering in prayer and attentive to the needs of our brothers and sisters (Rom 12:11-13).

**Full of grace and a new Eve**, she participates maternally and actively in our hard struggles each day in order to help us grow in holiness, becoming ever more like her Son, Jesus.

**As Star of the night**, she guides and accompanies our steps on our pilgrimage so that we may come to Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6). With her, we learn to walk without falling on roads that are always old and always new, and to rise courageously when we fall.

**As a woman of everyday life**, she teaches us to walk with Jesus, to welcome him into our homes and to always start afresh from him. This is where Mary, our Mother, leads us to be formed, reformed and transformed daily by her Son Jesus.

Are we ready, at her invitation, **each day** to do all that he will tell us (Jn 2:5)?

God alone in time!  
God alone in eternity!

**Brother Hervé Zamor, s.g.**

**April 14, 2022**

**On the Feast of the Institution of the Eucharist / Holy Thursday**