



Following Jesus, our Elder Brother

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BROTHERS OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Pilgrims on the path of fraternal life! This theme, proposed by the General Government to the entire Institute for the year 2025-2026, has three origins. The term ‘pilgrims’ is borrowed from the leitmotif of the 2025 jubilee: ‘Pilgrims of Hope.’ The term ‘journey’ refers to the Synod on Synodality, which was celebrated in two sessions: October 2021 and October 2024. The notion of ‘fraternal life’ is part of the deepening of Chapter 6 of our new Rule of Life. The Holy Year, the Synod on Synodality and the new Rule of Life are all opportunities that this theme offers us to **‘follow Jesus, our elder Brother’** and to be **‘Brothers on the Way’**.

This circular letter, **‘Following Jesus, our elder Brother,’** does not intend to repeat the rich and ever-relevant content of my predecessors’¹ writings on the theme of fraternal life in community. Nor will it revisit what I have already expressed on this subject in Circular 316. It simply aims to encourage us to *“serve one another in daily life, to care for one another and to build true fraternity”*². In concrete terms, this commits us to live out our vocation every day, which consists in *“being brothers of Christ, deeply united to Him, “the firstborn of a multitude of brothers” (Rom 8:29); brothers among ourselves, in mutual love and cooperation in the same service for the good of the Church; brothers to every person through the witness of Christ's charity towards all, especially the least and the most needy; brothers for greater fraternity in the Church”*.³

“You are all brothers” (Mt 23:8): this is our grace, our vocation and our mission. To be faithful to it, we are invited each day to become more:

¹ Brother Bernard Gaudeul: Circular 281, Brother José Antonio Obeso: Circular 290, and Brother Yannick Houssay: Circular 301.

² 2024 General Chapter, n° 21.1

³ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, n° 60.

- Brothers of our elder Brother
- Brothers of our Brothers in community and of the Lay members of the Mennaisian Family
- Brothers of every person

These three important and complementary aspects will be the guiding thread of our reflection.

This circular is addressed primarily to the Brothers, but the Lay Mennaisian Family members are also invited to read it. It can help them to better understand their vocation to fraternity on the one hand, and on the other hand, the importance of walking alongside the Brothers in order to build a fraternal, joyful Mennaisian Family that is welcoming to all and attentive to the poorest. Isn't exploring such a subject together a wonderful way to forge bonds of fraternity and thus strengthen our sense of belonging? This may be a magnificent synodal experience that will teach us to support one another in going to God and carrying out his work!

It is my ardent wish that this circular letter be read personally at first, then in community, as a group or a local Mennaisian fraternity. It offers the opportunity to have at least twelve moments of exchange and encounter during the year, four per chapter. What a wonderful opportunity to be Brothers and Lay People of the Mennaisian Family on the journey! Learning to form ourselves together, a true school of fraternity!

May we ***'follow Jesus, our elder Brother'***! He is the Way, the Truth and the Life of our vocation and of our mission to fraternity (Jn 14:6). Without him, we can do nothing (Jn 15:5). Without him, we build our fraternal life in community on the sand of our emotions or our individualism (Mt 7:21-27). Without him, we are nothing more than a charitable or welfare association, or worse still, a gathering of 'old bachelors' or confirmed celibates.

CHAPTER I

BROTHERS OF OUR ELDER BROTHER

We will explore this first aspect of our vocation and mission to fraternity in greater depth, drawing on the biblical icon of the Transfiguration: **Mark 9:2-10**. This is indeed an experience of fraternity, for Jesus offers it to **three** of his apostles: Peter, the leader of the Twelve, and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John. Together they set out for the mountain; together they contemplate the transfigured Jesus. Mark's text finally presents the experience of fraternity as an ascension, a journey of formation in which the various actors are engaged:

- Jesus invites the three apostles to climb the mountain with him,
- Peter wants to set up three tents,
- The Father, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, symbolised by the cloud, asks them to listen to his beloved Son,
- Peter, James and John descend the mountain, following Jesus, their elder brother, more closely.

This is a whole journey of formation and daily commitment for us who are pilgrims on the path of fraternal life and who want to be Brothers of Christ, deeply united to him, *“the firstborn of a multitude of brothers”* (Rom 8:29).

1- Climbing the Mountain

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.” (Mk 9, 2-4)

Climbing the mountain: above all, this is an inner pilgrimage that consists of climbing in order to become more like Jesus, our elder Brother. To do this, as he once did for Peter, James and John, Jesus takes us aside to

a high mountain. And there, he is transfigured: *“His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them,”* as the evangelist Mark points out.

This is an astonishing teaching method used by the Master to educate his disciples to fraternal life: he says nothing but acts. He takes them with him and leads them aside. It is easy to imagine the scene: he beckons to Peter, James and John, then sets off with them. He heads for a high mountain and probably leads the way.

Peter, James and John share the same experience: they contemplate the transfigured Christ. They share in his beauty and thus participate in his glory. In this way, Jesus offers them his most precious treasure, his filial intimacy with his Father. This is a call for us to place the Transfigured Christ, both resplendent with light and transparent to his Father's love, at the centre of our fraternal life in community. This is our first vocation and mission. The more we learn to contemplate together the Son in his relationship with his Father and the Holy Spirit, the more we become his brother and brothers among ourselves.

On either side of Jesus stand Moses and Elijah. In Carmelite tradition, Moses embodies the believer who accepts the mission entrusted to him by the Lord despite his reluctance and personal weaknesses. His willingness expressed before the burning bush (Ex 3:4), despite his objections about his inability to speak (Ex 4:10-12) and his fear of not being listened to (Ex 4:1), become models of humble obedience. Elijah, according to the same tradition, is the itinerant prophet, without a fixed abode, depending entirely on Providence. The stories in which he is fed by ravens at the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:6) and then by the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16) make him the prototype of the poor man of Yahweh who lives in total trust. The light that emanates from Christ and is shared by Moses and Elijah highlights the transparent and chaste relationship that exists between the Father and the Son, in the light of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the mystery of the Transfiguration brings us back to the foundations of our consecrated life. The more we strive to imitate Moses' obedience, the spirit of poverty of the prophet Elijah and the chastity of Christ, the more we learn to live a transfigured fraternal life, that is, closer and more in conformity with *“the infinite love that connects the three divine Persons in the mysterious depth of Trinitarian life”*⁴. In other words:

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, n° 21.

“Fraternal life proclaims the Father who desires to make all of humanity one family. It proclaims the Incarnate Son who gathers the redeemed into unity, pointing the way by his example, his prayer, his words and above all his death, which is the source of reconciliation for a divided and scattered humanity. It proclaims the Holy Spirit as the principle of unity in the Church, wherein he ceaselessly raises up spiritual families and fraternal communities.”⁵

On this path towards building a fraternity that reflects the communion experienced within the Trinity, contemplating the transfigured Christ gradually transforms our gaze and teaches us to look at our sisters and brothers through the eyes of the Lord. Indeed, we know how much the way we look at others can contribute to building or destroying our fraternal life in community. Does our gaze bring us together or drive us apart? Many passages in the Gospel highlight the quality of Jesus' gaze. He looks at the rich young man with a heart full of attention (Mk 10:21). Seeing the crowds, he is moved with compassion because they are like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36). Attentive, he highlights a good deed that might have gone unnoticed: the two coins of the poor widow (Lk 21:2). He marvels at the centurion's confident prayer (Mt 8:10). So, *“how beautiful it is to know that even if others ignore our good intentions or the positive things we do, Jesus does not ignore them; on the contrary, he admires them.”⁶* The grace of admiration and of a positive, compassionate and attentive gaze is a fruit of contemplating the transfigured Christ, who makes us more like him, our elder Brother.

The evangelist Mark reports that Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus. But he does not tell us what they said to each other. In fact, when there is genuine dialogue between the obedience symbolised by Moses, the spirit of poverty embodied by the prophet Elijah, and the chastity expressed through the transfigured Christ, the community lives in transparency, sharing and mutual listening. On the other hand, when there is a flaw in the living out of one of these values, community life stutters, limps and can become a place of counter-witness. Thus, when we are not truly faithful to our vows, fraternal sharing and mutual support are seriously undermined. All this does

⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, n° 21.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Dilexit nos: He loves us*, n° 41.

not contribute to strengthening fraternal bonds between members of the community, the Province or the District. It is then a symptom that our consecrated life is ageing badly: we are carrying out *“a sequela without renunciation, a prayer without encounter, a fraternal life without communion, an obedience without trust and a charity without transcendence.”*⁷ Only contemplation of the transfigured Christ can help us maintain a permanent dialogue between our vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, and live our consecration in a transparent and credible way.

Our new Rule of Life clearly highlights the link between our consecration and our fraternal life in community:

“Through an obedience which is the search for God's will, the Brothers are united by a common project, with respect for each person and recognizing the diversity of their gifts; through a chastity which broadens the capacity to love, the Brothers live to the full their relationships in community and their availability for serving others; through a poverty which implies a sober and simple lifestyle, the Brothers share their goods and talents in order to live in communion. (RL 2024, 56)

Communion in seeking God's will, communion in charity as the ability to love others without wanting to possess them, communion in sharing goods and talents: this is a commitment to live out every day if we want to build together this common home that is fraternal life in community, this is the prophetic witness that today's world expects of us.

This communion is possible; it was lived by our predecessors. *“What gives me the most pleasure,”* wrote John Mary de la Mennais to Brother Hervé Monnerais on 13 April 1847, *“is to know that charity reigns among you. This intimate and truly fraternal union will be your strength and your happiness: keep it as a treasure”*.⁸ Or again: *“As long as we are united, we will be strong and we will be happy; yes, this holy union will be the charm, the grace and the strength of our society”*.⁹ This is the secret to having *“one heart and one soul”*.¹⁰

⁷ François Bustillo, *Passons sur l'autre rive – Vers une religieuse renouvelée*, p. 70.

⁸ John Mary de la Mennais, CG V, 585.

⁹ John Mary de la Mennais, S II, 603.

¹⁰ John Mary de la Mennais, S II, 645.

Climbing the mountain to contemplate the transfigured Christ is the only way to develop a mysticism of fraternity *“that allows us to recognise, value and love each person regardless of physical proximity, no matter where they were born or live”*.¹¹ How blessed we are that Christ offers us his most precious treasure as a gift, namely, his filial intimacy with his Father! The more we enter into it, the more we will discover that we are his brothers, deeply united with him, brothers among ourselves and brothers to every person. Where Christ is, there reigns fraternity!

2- Putting Up Three Tents

“Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three tents—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.”
(Mk 9, 5-6)

On behalf of the privileged trio, Peter expresses to Jesus his joy at contemplating him in all his beauty and glory. In order to perpetuate this state, he proposes to build three tents: the first for the Master, the second for Moses and the third for Elijah. And the evangelist Mark hastens to add that *“Peter did not know what to say, so great was their fear”* (Mk 9:6).

Peter's spontaneous reaction reveals a very human desire: to make the beauty of this encounter with the transfigured Christ last by setting up three tents. But what does this proposal by the Apostle reveal to us about our vocation and mission to fraternity?

2.1- The tent for Jesus

By deciding to pitch the first tent for the transfigured Christ, the apostle Peter invites us to place Jesus at the centre of our fraternity and to make him our priority. Indeed, we are *“gathered by the Spirit around Christ”* (RV 2024, no. 55). And this fundamentally changes the way we live together and experience fraternal life in community. We are called and summoned by the Master. No one chooses their community or their confreres: everything is received as a gift of the Lord's grace.

In fact, in our communities, it is Christ who pitches his tent and dwells among us (Jn 1:14). We see his glory every time we receive him in the Eucharist, worship him in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, listen to him in

¹¹ Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti, n° 1.

his Word or in that of our brothers and sisters. Thus, we see him, contemplate him and touch him (1 Jn 1:1). Every day, if we open the door to him, he comes to dwell with us (Rev 3:20). By celebrating the Eucharist, the sacrament of fraternity par excellence, we are all brothers (Mt 23:8). All barriers and functions cease to exist: there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither man nor woman, neither slave nor free, for we are all one in Christ (Gal 3:28). The Superior and the young Brother, the Lay Mennaisien and the school principal, the sick and the healthy are on an equal footing. This assembly, therefore, constitutes a true communion in the Body of Christ. It is this truth that our Rule of Life affirms:

“Religious fraternal life in community is founded on the Word of God and the Eucharist. Together, Brothers bear the responsibility for their prayer life. Together, they meditate on the Word of God, celebrate the Divine Office and participate in the Eucharist.” (RL 2024, 57)

To pitch a tent for the transfigured Christ is to develop that gaze of faith capable of recognising him in every Brother, especially in those who are unpleasant, sick, suffering or who often contradict me. This is the path that the Master shows us when he tells us the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). He does not merely exhort: he also acts. He stops at Jacob's well to talk with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:5-7). He allows a prostitute to wash his feet (Lk 7:36-50). He forgives the adulterous woman (Jn 8:11). Through all these gestures, Jesus expresses his closeness, compassion, tenderness and brotherhood towards the rejected and the excluded.

By wanting to pitch a tent, Peter wishes to create a space where the transfigured Christ can continue to reveal himself in his beauty and glory. This is a call for our communities to continue the Apostle's desire by offering a beautiful and simple welcome to all those we host. Our mutual welcome is the first sign of this. How do we greet each other in the morning? How do we celebrate holidays and birthdays? Every gesture of welcome is a way of pitching the tent of Christ. Are our guests happy to be with us and do they leave with the feeling of having had a meaningful experience with the Lord? Are they eager to leave or do they want to stay with us?

“Brothers make it their duty to be welcoming to all, especially to their own confreres, their relatives, young people and the poor. They receive their guests warmly, with simplicity and

openness, bearing in mind the needs and priorities of community life.” (RL 2024, 68)

How do we care for our communal spaces: the chapel, the meeting room, the library? How much importance do we attach to the cleanliness of the premises and the tidiness of our rooms? These places reveal our priorities. Their beauty and cleanliness, especially those of the chapel, express our faith in the presence of Christ. For where our treasure is, there also is our heart (Mt 6:21).

Lauds, Vespers and the Eucharist are favourable moments to express to the Lord our happiness at being with him, like Peter, James and John. The quality of the singing, the care taken with the readings, the peaceful silence and mutual attention lift up our eyes and hearts to the contemplation of the transfigured Christ.

2.2- The tent for Moses

In biblical tradition, the figure of Moses is often associated with the living memory of the covenant. He it was who transmitted the Decalogue to the people of Israel (Ex 20:1-17) and ensured that it was put into practice. Thus, by observing the Ten Commandments received from his hand, the twelve tribes became a people of brothers, having as their Father the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 3:19).

For John Mary de la Mennais, the Rule of Life is this code of the covenant which shows each Brother the surest way to be faithful to the will of the Lord. To follow it is to belong, henceforth, to the great family of God made up of brothers and sisters of Christ (Mt 12:50).

Alliance rhymes with allegiance. Just as the Decalogue was a path of fruitfulness for Israel, our new Rule of Life will be for us if we strive to put it into practice. In fact, it transmits to us the proven wisdom of our Founders and generations of Brothers who sought to live the Gospel according to our charism and spirituality. The tent pitched for Moses allows us to relive the sacred history of our Institute, for it is the space where we can contemplate the beauty of our vocation and mission to fraternity. Do we not love to remember the willingness of the pioneers, recalling that of the sixty Brothers present at the retreat in 1837, fifty-two volunteered to go on mission to Guadeloupe? How can we not admire the audacity and courage of Brother Zoël who started a bakery to supply bread to the commune of Plouvorn during the famine of 1847 and who, in 1851, at the height of a typhoid epidemic, got up at four o'clock in the morning to comfort and care for the sick?

Respect for our elder brothers is another way of appreciating their fraternal wisdom. They have experienced the joys, sorrows, hopes and trials of our Institute and community life. They left their families and countries and accepted very difficult missions, sometimes at the risk of their lives. They built our communities and our works from nothing. How do we listen to them? How do we welcome their advice? How do we accept their frailties and disabilities? Being close to them is a wonderful way for us to learn patience, compassion, selfless service, thoughtful attention, recognition and gratitude.

Covenant and transmission are intimately linked. Setting up a tent for Moses means transmitting to younger generations the spirit of the Institute and our vocation to fraternity. Before being knowledge to be instilled, it is first and foremost a life to be shared, a joy to be communicated and a sacred story to be told. Moses was the first among his people to be faithful to the covenant. This was his methodology for bringing to fruition the spiritual heritage entrusted to him. Does our life as Brothers mean anything to young people? This is of paramount importance. It is the best way to build bridges between generations. This is Pope Francis' intuition when he says:

"This society excludes young people and the elderly. Yet the salvation of the elderly lies in passing on their memories to young people. This is what makes the elderly the true dreamers of the future, while the salvation of young people lies in taking these teachings, these dreams, and carrying them forward into prophecy. In order for our young people to have visions, to be dreamers themselves, to be able to face the times to come with boldness and courage, it is essential that they listen to the prophetic dreams of their ancestors. Old dreamers and young prophets are the path to salvation for our uprooted society: two generations of excluded people can save us all."¹²

Happy are we if our fraternities can inspire dialogue between our old dreamers and our young prophets! This is possible if we learn to put up a tent for Moses in our different communities. Our new Rule of Life invites us to do so:

¹² Pope Francis, Dieu est jeune, p. 38.

“Brothers take care above all to ensure the quality of their fraternal relations. They are attentive to each other and spare no effort to understand each other, engage in dialogue and demonstrate good humour towards everyone. They accept the inevitable constraints of living together and see cultural and intergenerational differences as a source of richness. They are open to young people and ready to help them, and they show a particular concern for the elderly, the sick and those in difficulty.” (RL 2024, 59)

2.3- The tent for Elijah

The tent for Elijah helps us to meditate on the prophetic dimension of fraternal life. On Mount Horeb, the prophet seeks the Lord in the earthquake, the hurricane and the fire. But the Lord reveals himself in the gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:11-13). Very often, the same thing happens to us: we look for the Lord in important decisions, in the peak times of community life, while he reveals himself in everyday events: attention to a brother, discreet service, a word of encouragement. Elijah's experience, therefore, invites us to learn to encounter the Lord in the ordinary moments of our fraternal life. Our God is present in the brother who is hungry and thirsty, the stranger to be welcomed, the sick or the prisoner to be visited, the poor to be clothed (Mt 25:31-46).

The prophet Elijah teaches us to be always attentive to the needs of others. He gave food to the widow of Zarephath and raised her son from the dead (1 Kings 17:8-24). Our communities are therefore called to develop this same attention to others, especially the poorest. Setting up a tent for Elijah means keeping our doors and hearts open to brothers in need.

Elijah also teaches us the art of discernment. God is in the gentle breeze, not in the hurricane. During our community meetings, in our chapters and councils, do we know how to listen to the barely audible cry of a colleague, to the meaningful silence of those who no longer have the strength to raise their voices? Discernment sometimes requires patience and time. Elijah learned to wait for God's time. The seeds sown today will bear fruit for generations to come. Do we know how to commit ourselves, relying solely on God and abandoning ourselves to his Providence? Discerning the signs of the times is learned by listening to the wisdom of our

elders and welcoming the prophecy of our young people. Fraternal life in community is the best school for such learning.

The prophet Elijah continues to encourage us to be open and receptive to the surprises of the Holy Spirit. He invites us to leave a place at our table, a space in our plans and schedules, a window open to the One who is always ready to make all things new. It is the Spirit who comes to our aid when our communal prayers open themselves to the joys, sufferings and expectations of the world, the Church and our Institute. He enables us to hope against all hope by opening our eyes, warming our hearts, and sharing with us the bread that allows us to set out again to join our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (Lk 24:13-35). It is there that the Lord invites us to be witnesses of hope.

Peter wanted to build the three tents on the same mountain: Mount Tabor. This is a beautiful image symbolising the unity in diversity that our communities are called to embody. Indeed, Jesus, Moses and Elijah belong to different generations of salvation history, but each brings what he is, what he has and what he does (RV 2024, no. 58): Christ, his divinity; Moses, his fidelity to the covenant; and Elijah, his passion for God and his compassion for the poor. So, strengthened and enriched by our diversity of generations, talents and missions, following Peter, we say again to the Lord: *“Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah”* (Mk 9:5). This is the true miracle of a fraternity gathered around Christ, for *“Christian love breaks down all barriers, brings together those who are far apart, unites strangers, makes enemies familiar, bridges humanly insurmountable chasms, and penetrates the most hidden recesses of society.”*¹³

3- Listening to the Beloved Son

“Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’ ”
(Mk, 9,7)

At the summit of Mount Tabor, covered by the shadow of a cloud, Peter, James and John hear the voice of the Father giving them this recommendation: *“This is my beloved Son: listen to him”* (Mk 9:7). In the

¹³ Pope Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te*, n° 120.

context of fraternal life in community, this passage from Mark offers us three important elements: the cloud, the voice that is heard, and listening.

3.1- The cloud

In biblical tradition, the cloud symbolises God's presence accompanying and guiding his people. Indeed, in the desert, the Lord walked with the Hebrews: by day in a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to light their path (Ex 13:21). This enabled them to continue their journey without having to stop. On Mount Tabor, the cloud covers the trio and not just Peter. Thus, it is together that we are called to experience this presence of the Lord who unites us, envelops us and walks with us. Such awareness radically changes our fraternal life, for the community becomes the space where God reveals himself and gives himself to us, as we are, respecting our personal charisms.

In Mark's Gospel, there is mention of shade: "*A cloud came and covered them with its shade,*" notes the evangelist. In hot countries, we know the importance of shade. It provides shelter from the sun and thus promotes life and growth. It is a beautiful image to define our vocation and mission to fraternity. Each of us is called to provide this beneficial shade that facilitates the happiness of living together. Concretely, each Brother must find in the community the warm home he needs to grow. Sometimes the best help we can offer a confrere in difficulty is our silent, discreet and benevolent presence. Shade makes no noise but provides the coolness necessary for life and happiness to flourish.

The cloud of the Lord's presence, if we open ourselves to his grace, teaches us to transfigure the ordinary activities of our fraternal life in community. Thus, meals, community gatherings and prayers take on a different flavour, that of the mysticism of everyday life where God invites us to live our vocation and mission to fraternity.

3.2- The voice that is heard

From the cloud, a voice is heard. Everything unfolds gently and delicately: no shrill cry, no thunder, no hurricane, but a voice that is heard like a light breeze, the kind that brings so much relief when it is hot. The Lord does not impose himself: he offers himself. Rather than a futile cry, his voice is a word that creates and transforms. "*God said, and it was*": heaven and earth, light and darkness, day and night exist. It is an effective word: what is said comes to pass. It is this same voice that dictated the Ten

Commandments to Moses. Even today, the Lord continues to make his voice heard in the community to those who are silent enough to listen. Are we among those Brothers who are able to recognise his voice as the Good Shepherd who gathers us together (Jn 10:4-5) or who goes out to seek us when we stray (Lk 10:5-4)? Are we ready to be other precursors who cry out in the desert and ask to prepare the way of the Lord (Jn 1:23)? Blessed are we if we listen to the voice of the Lord when it is heard. Learning to be silent in order to savour the word we have received and discern what the Lord wants to tell us is the way to learn to be brothers and to become artisans of fraternity wherever we are sent.

3.3- Listening

In the biblical context, the relationship between man and God unfolds with listening as a perpetual backdrop: *“Lord, hear my prayer; in your righteousness, listen to my cry; in your faithfulness, answer me”* (Ps 142:1) or *“Listen to me!”* ... In our communities, many tensions and conflicts have their roots in a lack of mutual listening. Indeed, every person needs to be listened to. Today, this need is also increasingly felt in the professional world and in families. Places of welcome, consultation or counselling are developing everywhere.

But at the same time, listening remains a challenge for human beings. God complains about humanity's inability to truly hear him: *“Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my way”* (Ps 80:7). God's call is daily and urgent: *“Today, will you listen to his Word?”* (Ps 94:7). Responding to this request is essential for growing in our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters.

To convert us to listening, the Father presents his beloved Son as the Way (Jn 14:6). If we follow him, our way of relating to others will be completely transformed. We will move from a logic of possession to an attitude of welcome, openness and availability. We will respond to the aggressiveness of one colleague with gentleness; to the impatience of another with patience; to the stubbornness of a third one with compassion and mercy. True listening thus converts our community tensions and conflicts into fraternal opportunities for healing and growth. Learning to listen to one another enriches our community life and fosters communion. It prevents the elders from becoming stuck in their ways and the young from starting all over again. One of the fruits of this is a fraternal wisdom that knows how to integrate tradition and innovation, the two pillars of a living community.

Furthermore, listening to the beloved Son gradually purifies our motivations and our hearts by constantly questioning us about the quality of our response to our vocation and mission to fraternity. Our fraternal life in community is not primarily aimed at our personal fulfilment or our own security, but at responding to the call of the Master who asks us to leave everything behind to follow him. This is done every day. This daily exercise in truth strips us of all the dross of a life centred on self-seeking and domination of others and teaches us to listen cordially and fraternally.

"It is only from the heart that our communities will be able to unite their minds and wills, and to pacify them so that the Spirit may guide us as a network of brothers; for pacification is also a task of the heart. The Heart of Christ is ecstasy, it is going forth, it is gift, it is encounter. In Him, we become capable of healthy and happy relationships with one another and of building the Kingdom of love and justice in this world. Our heart united with that of Christ is capable of this social miracle."¹⁴

Fraternal life is also a wonderful school of listening. When our community prayers are accompanied by silence and openness to the Word of the Lord and to our brothers, they become spaces where the Beloved Son leads us to listen. When we meditate together on a passage from the Gospel, this exercise is a wonderful training in mutual listening that strengthens our fraternal bonds. The singing of psalms, liturgical silence and the sharing of intentions are all opportunities to listen to the voice of the beloved Son. A community that truly prays together also trains itself to listen together.

Community discernment is also a place where we learn to listen to one another and, together, to listen to the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:17). When deciding means first listening, then our meetings, our councils, our chapters truly offer us spaces to seek and find the Lord's will. As St. Benedict affirms, the Lord sometimes uses a younger person to show us what is best. This communal listening requires us to have the patience to walk at the pace of others, the humility to recognise that a colleague's proposal is better, the trust to let the Holy Spirit speak through the voice of others, and the inner freedom to decide together what is in accordance with the Lord's will. This is the path that our Rule of Life shows us if we want to support one another in going to God and doing his will:

¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Dilexit nos*, n° 28.

“Discussions where Brothers can express themselves and listen to each other in truth and kindness are a precious means of giving information, fraternal correction, consultation, and sharing.” (RL 2024, 61.1)

Knowing how to listen to Moses and the prophets of our communities is the grace we ask of the Lord every day. When the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers, Abraham offers an alternative: *“They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them!”* (Lk 16:27-31). The testimony of a risen dead man will be of no use if we have not learned to listen to him in those he places on our paths. This is only possible by learning to seek the truth on our knees with others.

To the woman who congratulated him on the mother who had given birth to him, Jesus responds with a deeper dimension of Mary's motherhood. The young girl from Nazareth is fruitful above all because she listened to and put into practice the word of the Lord (Lk 11:28). Thus, she built her house on rock: winds, rains and storms cannot harm her. This is what she also taught the servants at the wedding in Cana, asking them to do whatever her beloved Son would tell them (Jn 2:8). It is also the secret that Mary passed on to the apostles gathered in the Upper Room awaiting the Spirit (Acts 1:13-14). Today, she continues to fulfil this same mission among those who are gathered in the name of her Son.

4- Coming down from the mountain

“Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what ‘rising from the dead’ meant.” (Mk 9, 8-10)

After the extraordinary experience of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, Peter, James and John see only Jesus alone with them. What do they do? They come down from the mountain to join the other apostles. On the way, the Lord asks them *“not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead”* (Mk 9:9). The evangelist Mark adds that they obeyed this instruction to remain silent, without understanding what *“risen from the dead”* meant.

In fact, for them, coming down from the mountain did not mean going backwards, that is, back to their former life, but rather moving forward: for the one who now walks beside them is the beloved Son of the Father, whom they must listen to every day in their ordinary lives. Now, for them as for us, it is a matter of learning to live the mystery of fraternity in daily life by serving as the Master did, building bridges as he did, and carrying the cross in his footsteps.

4.1- Serving like Him

On the evening of Holy Thursday, just before his death, Jesus *“rose from the table, laid aside his outer garments, and took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around his waist”* (Jn 13:4-5). Peter, seeing that his Master was taking on the role of a slave to wash his feet, tried to oppose this revolutionary gesture. It was his turn to wash Jesus' feet, not the other way around. But he let Jesus do it anyway. After finishing, Jesus invites his disciples to serve one another in humility, without considering themselves superior or better than others: *“I have given you an example so that you may do as I have done to you”* (Jn 13:15). Through this gesture, the Master institutes service as a sacrament of fraternity. Indeed, in the daily life of a community, there are many opportunities to serve others freely: closing the door gently so as not to wake a tired colleague, replacing another who has to go to the doctor, taking time to listen to a young Brother who is going through a difficult time in his studies... These small gestures, performed with love and discretion, offer us the opportunity to serve Christ in our brothers and thus contribute, in small ways, to weaving and strengthening our fraternal bonds.

Availability is another way of serving. In community life, Brothers who are available are a real blessing to everyone. They are always ready to help, to listen, to be disturbed, to offer themselves for extra work, especially for the most humble and thankless tasks. They always offer more than is asked of them. Instead of going one mile, they go two (Mt 5:41). They give generously of their time. They devote themselves without counting the cost. They anticipate the needs of others. They are attentive to Brothers in difficulty. They weep with those who are in sorrow and rejoice with those who are in joy. They willingly carry the burdens of others. They know how to defuse community tensions thanks to their refined sense of humour.

Through all these concrete attitudes, they truly live an eminent form of fraternal charity and enable others to experience the happiness and joy of being brothers.

Our Rule reminds us of the importance of service and availability, especially among the older Brothers:

“Through their availability, serenity and assiduous prayer, elderly Brothers and those who have ceased regular employment bear faithful witness and are a precious factor of harmony in their communities. According to their abilities and strengths, they make themselves available to serve in the mission and in the life of the community.” (RL 2024, 67)

4.2- Building bridges like Him

Saint Paul describes the incarnation of the Word of God as a descent whose purpose is to share our humanity in all things except sin (Phil 2:5-11). Indeed, *“Christ Jesus, who was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”* Through his humbling of himself, he became our brother, thus creating a bridge between God and man. Coming down from the mountain, Peter, James and John are called to follow this same movement of Christ's incarnation if they want to respond to their vocation and mission to fraternity. This is the way to learn to build bridges like him. And more than an external activity, building bridges is first and foremost an internal work that requires several qualities on our part.

The first is **empathy**, which allows us to put ourselves in the other person's place in order to understand and experience their motivations, joys, fears and hopes. This helps to create the first internal bridge, which is called compassion. Many gestures of fraternity and closeness to Christ have this as their starting point.

The second quality is **patience**. It takes time to build a bridge. When it takes a long time to accomplish, hope takes over. This is our second inner bridge. Pope Francis describes this Christian virtue as the lamp that illuminates the horizon and makes life more beautiful and fraternal¹⁵. From this perspective, our brother can always progress and succeed better in the

¹⁵ Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti, n° 55.

future. When we strive to give others a second chance, we contribute to building a culture of fraternity in our living environment or mission.

The third quality is **boldness** which encourages us to take risks. For Jesus, the third inner bridge is called mercy. It is the source of many of his acts of tenderness. He forgave the adulterous woman (Jn 8:3-11). He accepted Zacchaeus' invitation (Lk 19:1-10). He welcomed the tears of the sinful woman at Simon's house (Lk 7:36-50). He healed the ten lepers (Luke 11:11-19). Through these actions, Jesus promoted a culture of encounter, which is above all a way of life where no one is useless and where we can always learn something from others. This was his approach to building bridges and developing bonds of communion.

Building bridges also involves concrete actions and outward attitudes. Without these, our projects risk remaining dreams disconnected from our reality. Faith without works is dead (James 2:26). This is what it means to come down from the mountain to live fraternity in daily life.

Our communities are made up of Brothers with very different temperaments. The contemplative and the active, the cautious and the daring, the introvert and the extrovert often live under the same roof. What could be a source of division becomes a source of richness if certain members of the community have the ability to build bridges by creating spaces for dialogue and common projects that value the complementarity of charisms. Reconciling different temperaments in the midst of a joyful and happy fraternal life is nothing short of a daily miracle.

In community life, there are sometimes wounds, whether intentional or unintentional. These can be caused by hurtful or tactless words and by personality clashes. And like small wounds, if left untreated, they will not heal. Worse still, they will get worse. The confrere who soothes, who proposes a process of reconciliation or asks for forgiveness is then a true doctor who cares for our fraternal life in community. This is what our Rule of Life reminds us of when it states:

“So that their ‘joy may be complete’, Brothers also endeavour to forgive and to forget wrongs. Despite inevitable conflicts, they seek to live together in peace, because it is ‘the most precious of all treasures, and one cannot make too many sacrifices to preserve it’.” (RL 2024, 60)

Our communities today welcome Brothers from different generations and cultures. What interests the older generation is sometimes a world away from the concerns of the younger generation. What is important to a religious from an African culture may seem like a waste of time to another from Europe or Asia. What is patience for one is interpreted as slowness by the other. Blessed is the confrere who can harmonise generational and cultural differences to create a rich and beautiful symphony of living together.

*"It takes sacrifice to understand each other when we have different opinions, to forgive each other when we make mistakes, to help each other when we are sick, to support each other when we are sad. But it is only in this way, through these efforts, that we can build something good in life; it is only in this way that authentic and solid relationships are born and develop between people, and that the Kingdom of God grows, spreads and becomes present, starting from below, starting from everyday life."*¹⁶

For several decades, our Institute has welcomed lay people who share our spirituality and charism. The Mennaisian Family is certainly a source of enrichment for both Brothers and Lay people. But this calls on our mutual capacity for openness, adaptation and mutual understanding. Communities that are open to this movement within the Institute build bridges for fraternal life in a synodal manner, where Brothers and Lay people support each other in their journey towards God and in carrying out His will. This is the same invitation that our Rule of Life extends to us:

"The community pays special attention to the welcome of Lay Mennaisians with whom it shares its mission and spirituality. The mutual bonds developed in this way are strengthened through times of prayer and encounter." (RL 2024, 68.1).

4.3- Carrying the cross in His footsteps

In the Gospels, the text of the Transfiguration is always followed by an announcement of the Passion (cf. Mk 9:30-32). The cross is an essential dimension of the personal and communal life of every disciple. It is a

¹⁶ Pope Leo XIV, Homily in the cathedral of Albano, July 20, 2025.

requirement for fruitfulness: *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”* (Jn 12:24). It is a condition for walking faithfully behind the Master: *“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Lk 9:23). In fraternal life in community, there is no shortage of opportunities to carry our cross. It is this same fundamental truth that our Rule of Life invites us to live by when it states:

“Chosen and brought together by God, they seek to know and love each other with the heart of Christ. Through daily self-denial and the generous gift of self, they work at becoming a community that welcomes and forgives, heals wounds and lives in authentic fraternal communion.” (RL 2024, 58)

The first cross of fraternal life consists in accepting to die to one's personal preferences. We do not choose our Brothers in community. We do not impose our tastes. We welcome our mission. We listen to the music that other Brothers enjoy. We participate in community leisure activities even though we would have preferred to watch a film alone in our room on our computer. All these small, seemingly insignificant renunciations gradually build fraternity. Will those who refuse them be able to die to their personal choices when an important community decision has to be made?

The second is to bear the burdens and limitations of our Brothers (Gal 6:2). It is about accepting others as they are, with their qualities and faults. In community life, this cross takes on a thousand faces: putting up with the slowness of a perfectionist Brother, accepting the disturbing spontaneity of another, excusing the forgetfulness of someone who is always distracted, tolerating someone who is always late for community meetings. Practising this fraternal patience is a choice of love that costs but transforms.

A third, which is perhaps the most difficult, is to give up always being right. In fact, it means dying to oneself, to one's own will. It is the other who puts the belt on us to take us where we would not want to go (Jn 21:18). And yet, this freely consented fraternal obedience becomes a source of peace and communion for the whole community.

Another cross concerns accepting being misunderstood or criticized. This trial can affect everyone, especially those who exercise authority. Such a burden brings us into more intimate communion with Christ who was

misunderstood, even by his closest disciples. It teaches us patience and humility and helps us grow in inner freedom and fraternal maturity.

Accepting to carry together the cross of community life helps us to deepen a new solidarity. It is not uncommon for the illness of a fellow member to break down the relational barriers that existed between other members of the community. Thus, the trial borne together brings us closer to one another. When taken up in faith, community crosses are transformed into moments of grace that strengthen our fraternal bonds.

CHAPTER II

BROTHERS OF OUR BROTHERS IN COMMUNITY

The passage from Mark (**Mk 3:13-19**) presents Jesus calling those he wants and choosing twelve of them. Thus, our fraternal life in community is a response to the Master's call with a twofold mission: to be with Him and to go forth to proclaim the Good News. In this second part, Brothers of our Brothers in Community, we will explore the first objective of our vocation. The second will be addressed in the following chapter.

Based on the calling of the Twelve as recounted by the evangelist Mark, we will structure our reflection in four main parts:

- 1- Called by Christ
- 2- Gathered around the Master
- 3- Instituted to be with the Lord
- 4- instituted to live as brothers

The more we learn to be brothers of Jesus, the more we will be so among ourselves.

1- Called by Christ

“Jesus went up the mountain and called those he wanted” (Mk 3:13). This text offers us an opportunity to reflect and meditate on the beauty and demands of our common vocation. It is a gratuitous call from the Lord that springs from his loving heart. It does not depend on our talents, our qualities, or our merits. One day, he looked at us and we understood that he loved us, as he once did the rich young man (Mark 10:21), Peter and Andrew, James and John (Matthew 4:18, 21). An unforgettable experience that marks a whole lifetime! John, the beloved disciple, even remembers the precise moment of his call: it was about the tenth hour (Jn 1:39). And yet, this gratuitous and loving call from the Lord frees us from the obligation to produce results. We are called, not because we are the best or the most capable, but by pure grace. This should be a reason for us to give thanks. Like Mary, let us sing our Magnificat to the Lord every day for the gift of our vocation.

“He appointed twelve. Simon – whom he gave the name Peter –, James, son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Mk 3, 14. 16-19)

Mark provides us with the list of the names of the twelve apostles. This is no coincidence. Christ's call is both personal and communal. He calls each one by name and chooses twelve of them. In this way, we are called to be with him and to live together. By establishing us as a community of life, the Lord entrusts us with the mandate to prefigure the great family of God that we will form in heaven.

Mark takes care to name each of the Twelve. Peter is often described as a spontaneous, even impulsive person. Did he not declare that he wanted to give his life for the Lord, even though he would betray him three times a few moments later (Jn 13:37-38)? James and John are called the *sons of thunder*: they had suggested to Jesus that he send fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans after they refused to receive him (Lk 9:54). They also seem to love power: they want to sit at the right and left of the Lord in his Kingdom (Mt 20:21). Matthew is a collaborator with the Roman occupiers, a tax collector (Mt 9:9). He is among those despised by the Jewish people, some of whom took more money than necessary (Lk 3:13). Simon the Zealot is a revolutionary who wants to drive out the Romans. Thomas is a pragmatic man, somewhat distrustful. He needs to see in order to believe (Jn 20:25). Judas is the one who will betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Mt 26:15). Bartholomew (or Nathanael) is a righteous and upright man (Jn 1:46). Andrew, Philip, James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus seem to be discreet and simple men.

From a human perspective, we might be tempted to say that Jesus did not make the right choices in forming the first apostolic community. Such different people, with sometimes diametrically opposed convictions. And yet, all are called to be with him. This is the same observation made by the Scottish writer Bruce Marshal:

"Jesus Christ gathered the roughest and most miserable pieces of wood he could find in the world and, as a good carpenter he had

become in his father Joseph's workshop, he built with them a boat that, astonishingly, has withstood the sea for twenty centuries.”¹⁷

Indeed, our differences are not obstacles, but rather complementary gifts to be used in the service of fraternal life in community. Like the body, which is one but made up of many parts, we are called to become one in Christ (1 Cor 12:12). Fraternal communion does not erase our origins, our cultures, or our talents, but harmonizes them in love. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who allows us to understand one another despite different languages and cultural barriers (Acts 2:5-13). He transforms our weaknesses into strengths. He makes possible what seems impossible: people so opposite by nature and temperament becoming witnesses of fraternal love. *“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that the things that belonged to him were his own, but they had everything in common.”* (Acts 4, 32) *“See how they love each other”*: such is Tertulian’s witness of the first Christian community.

How do we live our call to fraternity today? By calling us, the Lord has placed a gaze full of love upon us. Therefore, this is our first commitment: to love one another as brothers and sisters of the same family. But how can we achieve this? Saint Paul’s hymn to charity offers us some interesting pointers (1 Cor 13:1-8). The fraternal love to which we are called is concrete: it is patient, it serves, it rejoices at the success of others, it is discreet and gentle, it is considerate, it forgives, it speaks the truth, it bears all things, it trusts all things, it hopes for all things, it endures all things. It is in this field of fraternal charity that we can verify whether we truly follow Christ, our elder Brother. Is not every act of love towards our neighbour, in some way, a reflection of divine charity? We cannot love God without extending his love to those near to us through life and mission. *“True love is always contemplative; it allows us to serve the other not out of necessity or vanity, but because it is beautiful, beyond its appearances.”¹⁸*

To educate us to fraternal love, John Mary de la Mennais offers us practical advice. He asks us to learn to excuse our brother rather than accuse him. He encourages us to help each other bear one another’s burdens, accepting that ours is likely heavier than that of others. He invites us to apply

¹⁷ François Bustillo, *Passons sur l’autre rive – Vers une vie religieuse renouvelée*, p. 62.

¹⁸ Pope Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te*, n° 101.

*“the oil of charity”*¹⁹ to heal and mend what has been hurt by *“the little scratches of character”*²⁰. This is the path to know how to *“forgive, forget wrongs, and, despite inevitable conflicts, live in peace”* (RL 2024, 60).

For John Mary, fraternal charity is nurtured when we learn to be happy about the joy of others, to offer each other mutual support to go to God and accomplish his work. It is strengthened when we avoid *“any subject of quarrel,” “any harsh, bitter, or reproachful word, any sign of contempt or impatience”* (Rule of 1823), or when we strive to acquire *“that sweetness full of joy, peace, love, and hope”* towards everyone, especially those we might have a legitimate reason to complain about. This is the secret to learning to *“love each other with the heart of Christ”* (RL 2024, 58).

By calling us, Jesus also asks us to foreshadow here on earth the life of communion that we will experience with him in the Kingdom of Heaven. The path is the fulfilment of the Father’s will: *“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, my sister, and my mother”* (Mt 12:50). One then belongs to the family of God. Thus, by following the path of obedience, we learn to seek and carry out what pleases our Father, following the example of the Son (Jn 8:29). This helps us move forward together in communion of spirit and heart, placing our being and our actions in his hands. Obedience, learned at the school of Christ and enlivened by charity, unites us in the same witness and mission, while respecting the diversity of gifts and the unique nature of each person. In this way, we become a shining sign of the unique fatherhood that comes from God, of the brotherhood born of the Spirit, and of the inner freedom of people who entrust themselves to God despite their weaknesses and limitations²¹. Thus, we gradually prepare ourselves for the great feast of communion prepared for all those who have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14).

To grow on the path of fraternal communion, John Mary de la Mennais first urges us to help one another to *“praise and serve our divine Master.”* For him, this mutual support is part of *“the communion of saints, which will certainly be fully realized only in heaven, ... but which must begin on earth through the sharing of our feelings, efforts, and prayers.”*²² Next,

¹⁹ John Mary de la Mennais, GC I, 180.

²⁰ John Mary de la Mennais, Memorial, 123.

²¹ Pope John Paul II, Vita Consecrata, n° 92.

²² John Mary de la Mennais, GC I, 180.

he invites us to have a Catholic heart, that is to say, an open heart, capable of appreciating and valuing all that is good around us. This allows us to live together in *“the most perfect union.”* Finally, he encourages us to mobilize our energies to walk together: *“Come, and let us unite our forces; let us place our hearts in each other; and following the expression of Holy Scripture: let us array ourselves like an army in battle before the enemies of Christ; with the cross on our chest, let us forge ahead; by this sign we will conquer.”*²³ In this way, *“Trinitarian communion is the source and model of fraternity.”* (RL 2024, 55) By virtue of our vow of obedience, which is the pursuit of God's will, we are united around a common project, respecting each person in the diversity of personal gifts (RL 2024, 56)

2- Gathered around the Master

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.” (Mk 3, 13) By answering favourably the call of their Master, the Twelve make up a living community. Mark translated this reality by the simple sentence *“they came to him”*. One may recall that the Twelve gather around the Master because they answer his call together.

“They came to him.” This simplicity expresses the spontaneity of the Twelve's response. Indeed, they are available, trusting, and immediately say yes to the Lord: at once, Peter and Andrew, leaving their nets, and James and John, leaving their boat and their father, follow him (Mt 4:20-22). The swiftness of their decision to leave everything to follow their Master shows that they recognized the voice of the Good Shepherd who gathers his sheep (Jn 10:1-4). This is an act of faith based on a fundamental intuition: *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them”* (Jn 6:44).

By freely coming to the Master, the Twelve obeyed his call. This allows the Lord's grace to bear fruit in them. Thus, Peter, whose work is fishing, becomes a fisher of men and the leader of the Church; Matthew, the tax collector, will become an evangelist. Free obedience to Christ fills us with multiple gifts for the service of the common good that is life in fraternal community.

Coming to Christ also means abandoning. The Twelve left their work and their families to follow the Lord. These separations are necessary and help us to

²³ John Mary de la Mennais, S II, 557.

let go of everything that might keep us away from our Master. They purify our attachment to Christ and make us place our happiness and joy solely in him.

In response to the Master's call, the Twelve converge towards him. It is a true centripetal dynamic. Indeed, they come from twelve different backgrounds, but they have a single focal point: Christ. This is what creates their unity. In our groups, the normal human tendency is to gather based on personal affinities. This is not the case in our communities. It is Christ who calls us to come to him, and this shared attraction is the source of our fraternal communion. He it is who works on our unity from within our diversity.

Coming to Jesus shows a wish to build a relationship with him. We want to know him and love him more, thus sharing in his intimacy. This is the experience that Andrew and John had. At the invitation of their Master, they came, they saw, and they stayed with him. It was about the tenth hour (Jn 1:39). Only such an intimate encounter with Christ can teach us to be brothers to our Brothers in community.

Gathering around Christ with people we did not choose requires a dual trust, namely, in the Lord and in our Brothers. It takes time and patience. It is a task that must always be started anew. Simon the Zealot had to make an effort to trust Matthew the tax collector, and vice versa. The Apostle Thomas certainly asked the Lord to help him overcome his tendency to distrust. Thus, the more we learn to surrender to the Lord, the more we grow in mutual trust. This is the key to overcoming our mutual prejudices and building our life together.

By gathering around their Master, the Twelve had no clear idea of what awaited them, but they trusted and launched into the deep. Day after day, they discovered the demands of their calling. They could never have imagined experiencing the events of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them and upon Mary. Only afterward did they realize how essential it is to be open to the surprises of the Lord's grace which never fails those who are willing to stake everything on him.

Gathering around Christ is a path that requires patience. The union of the Twelve was not achieved in a single day. It took them time to get to know each other and to accept one another. There were no shortages of tensions and misunderstandings. They argued about who was the greatest (Mk 9:33-37). There were failures: Peter denied his Master three times (Mk 14:66-72),

Judas betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver and then hanged himself (Mt 27:3-5). At the Passion, with the exception of John, they all fled (Mk 14:50). Yet after the resurrection, their community was reformed (Lk 24:33-36). Despite everything, it held firm, it persevered. Thus, when we are truly gathered around Christ, it is always possible to start afresh from him and to remain with him.

What does it mean when we say that we are gathered around Christ? First of all, at the roots of our fraternal life in community lies a dual trust in God and in our Brothers. This constitutes the soul of our fraternity. We must take good care of it. Without it, we tend to withdraw into ourselves and to build walls and barriers around us. It is this trust that allows us to share, with simplicity and joy, who we are, what we do, and what we have (RL 2024, 58). It is this trust that helps us to watch over the quality of our fraternal relationships and to be attentive to one another (RL 2024, 59). A community where we trust one another is healthy. On the other hand, when distrust predominates, even if we are gathered around Christ, we succumb to the temptation of the Evil One who wants to divide us, scatter us, sow discord among us, and lead us to distrust one another.

To grow in trust in God and in our Brothers, John Mary de la Mennais proposes that we develop two complementary attitudes: surrender to Providence and mutual understanding. For him, when we practice being docile and flexible in God's hands, we simultaneously learn to trust him and to rely on others. The foundation of this dual surrender is the certainty that the Lord works all things for the good of those who love him. To cultivate trust, our founder encourages mutual understanding, this patient taming that allows us to approach others without fear, "*and even with a kind of joy*" that reassures, affirms, and soothes²⁴.

Coming together around Christ is a call that we must embody every day. What does this mean? It means that each day the Lord invites us to live brotherly life in community. Each day he asks us to leave our parents, our friends, our boats, our nets, our activities, to follow him. Each day he calls us to know Him and to love him even more. Each day we are invited to come to him. Each day we are called to be brothers to our Brothers in community. In a word, it means living the mystique of fraternity in the ordinary course

²⁴ John Mary de la Mennais, GC III, 486.

of our lives. This is the grace we must continually ask of the Lord: that he make us brothers, he who has gathered us together.

To help the Brothers live the mystique of fraternity in daily life, John Mary de la Mennais asked them to celebrate together their main exercises of piety. *"Without this,"* he wrote to Brother Porphyre-Marie on February 20, 1844, *"there is no community, no fervour, and one ends up completely losing the religious spirit."* He also reminded him that *"all the Brothers must be together for recreation and walks."* *"If each one is by himself,"* he said to Brother Adolphe on April 29, 1846, *"according to his personal preferences, there is no longer a community."* Thus, we better understand the insistence of our Rule of Life on the communal dimension of our spiritual life when it affirms:

"Religious fraternal life in community is founded on the Word of God and the Eucharist. Together, Brothers bear the responsibility for their prayer life. Together, they meditate on the Word of God, celebrate the Divine Office and participate in the Eucharist." (RL 2024, 57)

Building our life together around the Master also requires a long-term commitment from all members of the community. Now, time involves patience. It is this virtue that has allowed so many generous people to weave strong and stable bonds²⁵ of brotherhood. Like a house being built stone by stone, patience helps create this magnificent space where everyone finds their place²⁶.

For John Mary de la Mennais, kindness best expresses our patience with others when it comes to helping them adopt the pace of life in a fraternal community. This teaches us to avoid *"breaking the reed already bent," "snuffing out the still-smoking wick,"* and *"causing the slightest hurt to those who hurt us most."* Thus, when we practice giving others time to grow at their own pace, we bear witness to the Gospel of fraternity. This is why our Rule of Life encourages us to be open to the younger members and willing to help them, as well as to show particular consideration for older, sick or troubled confreres (RL 2024, 59).

²⁵ Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti, n° 198.

²⁶ Pope Francis, Ibid., n° 190.

3- Appointed to be with the Lord

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him.” (Mk 3, 13-14)

In this passage, Mark wants to convey to us that the Lord calls us and gathers us *to be with him*. This is the first mission he entrusts to us. His priority is that we be his companions in life. It is not primarily about *'doing'* but about *'being.'* The verb *'to appoint,'* in Greek *'poiein,'* adds an interesting element: we are called to be his close friends, not just once in passing but permanently. He has established us to dwell with him and to share in his life.

The main motivation for the calling and gathering of the Twelve around Jesus is rooted in the desire to be with him. Consequently, the closer we are to him, the more beautiful, joyful, and strong our fraternal life in community will be. Indeed, many of our community difficulties are primarily spiritual problems. We do not spend enough time at the Lord's feet, like Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (Lk 10:38-42). How is it possible for a Brother to refuse to greet another member of the community in the morning after having prayed Lauds together, meditated on the Word of God, and celebrated the Eucharist? Shouldn't the love of Jesus nourish fraternal charity? Jesus' parable of the two houses provides an interesting explanation. Indeed, the one who hears the Word of God and puts it into practice is like a man who builds his house on the rock. Rain, torrents, and winds cannot destroy it. On the other hand, it is quite the opposite for the one who does not put it into practice. At the slightest storm, everything collapses (Mt 7:24-27). Only a fraternity built on Christ, the Word of God, can withstand the shocks of being-together-as-brothers.

Meditating on the Gospel where Jesus is welcomed at the home of Martha and Mary, Pope Leo XIV reminds us that it would be wrong to oppose the attitudes of these two women. He states:

“Service and listening are, in fact, twin dimensions of hospitality. Our relationship with God comes first. Although it is true that we must live out our faith through concrete actions, faithfully carrying out our duties according to our state of life and vocation, it is essential that we do so only after meditating on the Word of God and listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to our hearts. To this end, we should set aside moments

of silence, moments of prayer, times in which, quieting noise and distractions, we recollect ourselves before God in simplicity of heart. This is a dimension of the Christian life that we particularly need to recover today, both as a value for individuals and communities, and as a prophetic sign for our times. We must make room for silence, for listening to the Father who speaks and 'sees in secret' " (Mt 6:6).²⁷

That's it, choosing the better part, as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, did.

In our brotherly life in community, many opportunities are offered to us to learn to be with the Lord. The Liturgy of the Hours is one of them. Praying and singing the psalms together introduces us into the praise and prayer of the Church, the people of God. Christ is in our midst because we are gathered in his name. Faithfulness to the thirty minutes of prayer allows us to come together, in silence, to listen to the Lord. It is a beautiful opportunity to build our brotherly life on the rock that is the person of Christ.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our being with the Lord in community. In this sacrament, Christ gives himself to us, nourishes us, and makes us into his mystical body. *"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread"* (1 Cor 10:17). Thus, each time we celebrate together the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, we renew and deepen our fraternal communion, harmonize our differences, heal our wounds, and purify and strengthen our mutual love. Our Rule of Life rightly emphasizes the fundamental link that exists between community, prayer, and the Eucharist:

"Religious fraternal life in community is founded on the Word of God and the Eucharist. Together, Brothers bear the responsibility for their prayer life. Together, they meditate on the Word of God, celebrate the Divine Office and participate in the Eucharist." (RL 2024. 57)

When our sins and failings break the bonds of fraternal life, they also weaken our desire to be with the Lord. The sacrament of reconciliation is there to help us put our priorities in order and return to the Father's house,

²⁷ Pope Leo XIV, Homily in the cathedral of Albano, July 20, 2025.

where we will be welcomed with joy and celebration (Lk 15:11-32). Reconciliation with our brothers and sisters is the first offering the Lord expects from us (Mt 5:23-24) and delights in.

As the evangelist Luke has shown us, the Lord calls us and gathers us to be with him. To remain faithful to this first mission He entrusts to us, we are invited to offer each other mutual support in nurturing all that concerns our spiritual life.

3.1- Cultivating inner silence

It is necessary to learn to find our way back to our heart to rediscover the value of silence. It is there that God meets us and speaks to us. This inner recollection allows us to hear the voice of the Lord who is neither in the hurricane, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the whisper of a gentle breeze (1 Kgs 19:11-12). It is a source of fertility for our spiritual life. It is in the silence of Nazareth that the Word of God takes flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

In the era of new information and communication technologies which tend to scatter us and feed our inner and outer noises, we are encouraged to preserve spaces of silence so that, following the example of Mary, we can keep in our hearts the treasure of the Lord's Word (Luke 2:51). Let us not shun from cultivating the great silence of the night, that of moments of recollection, adoration, contemplation, and especially of annual retreats. It is in the silence of the night that the dew from heaven falls, thus fertilizing our land to produce abundant fruits.

3.2- Nurturing personal prayer.

The first devotion to which we are all called is daily faithfulness to prayer. Without it, our mission becomes empty, loses its deep soul, and is reduced to mere activism which, in the end, leaves us unsatisfied. But when our prayer is nourished by the Word of God, we can see reality with a fresh perspective, through the eyes of faith, and the Lord, who speaks to the spirit and the heart, gives new light for our path. We then acquire the firm conviction that he always precedes us.

Today, the crisis affecting consecrated life is partly due to the slow and gradual abandonment of the daily prayerful listening to the Word of God. At the same time, the emergence of so-called new communities and the existence of personal conversions are not unrelated to the discovery or rediscovery of the Word. This is a call for us to ground our spiritual life even

more deeply in the Word of the Lord, the solid rock of our inner house. For this, prayer, as our Rule of Life reminds us, is the most necessary spiritual exercise. Through daily exposure to the Word, we learn to *“contemplate the love of Christ, which helps us become more attentive to the sufferings and needs of others, makes us strong enough to participate in his work of liberation as instruments of spreading his love.”*²⁸ *“By drinking deeply from this love, we become capable of building fraternal bonds, of recognizing the dignity of every human being, and of caring together for our common home.”*²⁹

On this path of meditation, help is not lacking. It is recommended to prepare for it in the evening before going to bed. Spiritual reading is also a distant form of preparation. Personal discipline, which helps maintain a wise balance between work and rest, is also essential to persevere in prayer. Experiences of sharing meditation can finally be useful for certain Brothers at a given moment in their journey.

Where our treasure is, there also is our heart! Let us learn to make prayer our treasure. May it truly become the fine pearl of our life, for the acquisition of which we are ready to sell everything (Mt 13:45-46)!

3.3- Caring for the Eucharist

Source and summit of the Christian life, the Eucharist is the ultimate educational place where Christians are invited to let God take care of them. It is there that the Lord heals us by forgiving our sins. When his Word meets us on our road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-39), he teaches us to seek light to discover the truth. We become aware that our hearts are slow to believe and that we are blind and lacking understanding. When we accept to journey with him, he gives breath and meaning to our lives. When we welcome him into our homes to break the bread, he invites us to rise again and go to Jerusalem where our brothers are waiting for us.

Following the example of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, sharing the bread of the Word and the Eucharist is the best school to rekindle the flame of hope within us. Thus, we will be sentinels of the dawn, always ready to recognize the Lord’s presence on the shores of our lives.

²⁸ Pope Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te*, n° 2.

²⁹ Pope Francis, *Dilexit nos*, n° 219.

3.4- Forming ourselves

Ongoing formation is the bread that allows us to nourish ourselves so as not to falter along the way. Continuing to train ourselves is the key that grants access to a creative fidelity and that prepares new wineskins to receive the new wine.

Learning to spend time with the Lord daily, using the tools offered by the liturgical times of the Church and the various documents of the Congregation, Province, or District, is a good way to express our willingness to be formed by the Father and to place ourselves in his hands. In this way, we turn every circumstance in life into a *kairos* to learn to discern the Lord's call and deepen the quality of our presence with him.

4- Appointed to live like brothers

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach the Good News.” (Mk 3, 13-14)

After reflecting on the first mission of our fraternal life in community, which is to be with the Lord, we now want to delve into the second. Indeed, the Lord has also called us to proclaim the Good News, starting with our Brothers with whom we live in community. Our first preaching, therefore, is to bear witness to the Gospel of fraternity to our closest neighbours. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke illustrates this reality very well by stating: *“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.”* (Acts 4, 32) The first Christians also *“devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* (Acts 2, 42).

Concretely, the mutual evangelization to which we are called can take a thousand forms: daily forgiveness, patience in trials, fraternal support, discreet service. By acting in this way, we make our Brothers the primary recipients of the Gospel. Paraphrasing Pope Francis, we could say that our fraternal life in community is strengthened not through proselytism but through attraction.³⁰ How could it be otherwise if we want to proclaim the Good News of fraternity to the children and young people entrusted to us?

³⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n° 14.

To live as brothers and thus bear witness to the beauty of our fraternal life in community, we are invited to practice speaking five languages harmoniously and simultaneously. Which ones?

4.1- The language of compassion

Living as brothers means knowing how to take care of one another. In the parable in Luke (Lk 10:25-37), the priest and the Levite see the man injured by the side of the road and pass by while the Samaritan sees him and is filled with compassion. What does he do then? He reaches out, tends to his wounds by pouring oil and wine, places him on his own animal and takes him to an inn. In fact, it is his compassionate gaze that drives him to see the other person in need of help, to get his hands dirty, and to take care of him. Very early on, the first Christians learned to speak the language of compassion. Indeed, when they learned that their brothers in Judea were suffering from famine, they decided to send help, each according to his means (Acts 11:29). Deacons, for their part, were appointed to take care of the most vulnerable, including Greek widows (Acts 6:1-7).

In our fraternal life in community, there are many opportunities to learn to speak the language of compassion: tending to a sick confrere, listening to another who is discouraged, offering our help to someone who is overburdened, comforting someone who is sad. In this way, fraternity is built through these small gestures that express our closeness, our thoughtfulness and our care for the most vulnerable. When we are willing to get our hands dirty, to interrupt our journey, to spend our time, to bear burdens, and to reach out to help others, we then learn, at the school of the Good Samaritan, to speak the language of compassion harmoniously, which makes us neighbours to our brother, not in words but through concrete acts of care.

4.2- The language of the beatitudes

Living as brothers also means embodying the spirit of the beatitudes within the community (Mt 5:3-12). We practice poverty of heart when we acknowledge that we need each other and that each member of the community has something to share with us. This is what the early Christians strove to live out by selling their possessions and sharing the proceeds according to the needs of each person (Acts 2:45). We promote the beatitude of meekness when we are peacemakers in our communities, when the oil of charity animates our interactions and heals our wounds. We

embody those who hunger and thirst for righteousness when we work for truth and transparency in our relationships. This was the motivation behind fraternal correction in the early Christian communities. Did not Paul rebuke Peter in Antioch when he changed his behaviour towards the believers of Gentile origin out of fear of those from Jewish origin (Gal 2: 11-21)? We train ourselves to be merciful when we succeed in forgiving our brothers. The most eloquent example from the Acts of the Apostles is the forgiveness of Stephen (Acts 7:60), which certainly challenged the conscience of Saul of Tarsus and prepared his heart to accept the Christian faith.

In our community life, the beatitudes constitute our charter. We remain faithful to it if we cultivate humility and gentleness daily in our fraternal interactions. We live it if we practice mutual forgiveness. We observe it if we seek truth in love and learn to correct our Brothers with kindness and charity. We put it into practice if we share who we are and if we are agents of peace and reconciliation in our communities. We will be blessed if we speak harmoniously in the language of the beatitudes! Then holiness will be the most beautiful face³¹ of our fraternal life in community.

4.3- The language of relationships

Living as brothers also means learning to speak the language of relationships harmoniously. What does this mean? It involves putting into practice five main values in daily life: altruism, service, thoughtfulness, humour, and generosity.

Altruism helps us to step outside of ourselves in order to genuinely open up to our brothers, to their joys, their sorrows, and their concerns. It is the proper methodology to move from "I" to "we." "*When a man burns the dead wood of his peculiarities in the fire, when he allows the words of another to unfold in a silence filled with meaning, what happens is that, by stepping back, he truly becomes himself and offers an authentic presence to the other.*"³² The prophet John the Baptist teaches us this kind of altruism when we accept to diminish so that fraternal life may grow, when we become that voice crying in the wilderness, asking for the way of the Lord to be prepared (Jn 1:23). This is the secret to increasing the joy of living together.

³¹ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, n9.

³² Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'inouï*, p. 127.

Service teaches us to imitate the Master who came, not to be served, but to serve and give his life (Mt 20:28). It is the example he left us on the evening of Holy Thursday when he washed the feet of his disciples (Jn 13:1-17). Through this gesture, Jesus changes our perspective on others, who are no longer opponents but brothers to love and serve. On this path, Mary teaches us how to be at the service of others. At the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel informs her that her cousin Elizabeth is expecting a child. Immediately, she travels through hills and valleys to help her (Lk 1:39-40). There is joy in the encounter, first between these two women, then between John the Baptist and Jesus. Thus, to serve, following Mary's example, is to help build a joyful, radiant and fruitful fraternal life.

Consideration is revealed in the ability to anticipate the needs of others. It allows us to foresee their needs and desires. It was this quality that led Lydia, the merchant from the city of Thyatira, to open the doors of her home to Paul and his companions (Acts 16:11-15). By taking the initiative to welcome the missionaries into her home, she made her house the first domestic church in Europe. In other words, cultivating consideration is another form of fruitfulness for our communal fraternal life.

Humour is defined as the ability to laugh at oneself, not to take oneself too seriously. It defuses tensions and conflicts. It heals what could hurt others. It rebuilds bonds where they have been broken. The Syro-Phoenician woman is the prime example (Mt 15:25-28). She does not take herself too seriously and responds to Jesus that little dogs can eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. A situation that seems disadvantageous to her allows her to bounce back, forge stronger relationships with her interlocutor, and get what she wanted. Knowing how to incorporate humour into our lives becomes another way to be fruitful in our interpersonal relationships.

In a world where activities take precedence over relationships and everything is for sale, **gratuity** seeks to put being-together back at the forefront. First of all, this can be expressed through playing which allows us to approach life with relaxation and celebration. It is an essential aspect for maintaining our human balance as it emphasizes contact, connection and attention to others. This is why it is important to "*develop free and simple*

activities to connect people and strengthen communities".³³ Secondly, a second manifestation would be rest, this wisdom that prevents us from falling into hyperactivity. It helps us to reassess our life and our actions with more accuracy and perspective. It "*allows one to act with a more balanced rhythm to reconcile the mission, generosity, and contemplation*".³⁴ King David dancing before the ark (2 Samuel 6) clearly expresses the playful, simple, and selfless dimension that our fraternal life should contain. Knowing how to be together to celebrate, laugh, dance, and cry is a wonderful asset for living out the prophetic dimension of our calling to fraternal life in community.

4.4- The Language of brotherly love

Living as brothers means also helping each other to speak harmoniously the language of brotherly love, which contains five particular nuances.

The first involves learning to *love our enemies*. At first glance, some members might be tempted to say that they harbour no hatred or resentment toward anyone. However, upon deeper reflection, others discover that a certain member of the community who usually speaks loudly in the hallway, or another who slams their door noisily upon entering their room, stirs feelings of anger, irritation, and annoyance in them. In fact, "*the enemy according to the Gospel is the one who undermines my spiritual and emotional integrity and with whom I regularly have relational difficulties that slow down our common journey toward communion. In community, the 'Gospel' enemy highlights our differences and the invisible yet real distance that separates us.*"³⁵

To grow in the love of our enemies, Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus shows us the path of smiling and joyful service. This fellow sister, whom she found particularly annoying, she deliberately chose to smile at her and even to serve her with joy. This was her way of practicing fasting and perfuming her face so that her sacrifice would be known only to her Father who sees in secret (Mt 6:17-18).

³³ François Bustillo, *Passons sur l'autre rive – Vers une vie religieuse renouvelée*, p. 21.

³⁴ François Bustillo, *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁵ François Bustillo, *Ibid.*, p. 167-168.

The second emphasis is on *loving with mercy*. This means being full of love and compassion for someone in a state of fragility and vulnerability. This was the attitude of Shem and Japheth toward their father Noah (Gen. 9:22-23). When Ham told them that their father was naked and drunk, they took the garment, placed it on both of their shoulders, and, walking backward, covered his nudity. What a beautiful gesture of filial modesty and tenderness! Today, it is up to us to be that garment, not to cover the wrongdoing of our brother, but to spare him humiliation and to show him our respect and mercy.

The third aspect invites us *to love without judging or condemning*. This is the most ascetic dimension of love, which requires a genuine inner conversion. The classic example is the attitude of Saint Francis of Assisi who dismounted from his horse to kiss the leper. Through this gesture, he showed that he no longer saw a sick person to avoid, but a brother to welcome, respect, and love. This is the path to follow if we want to love our Brothers in the manner of the Lord, who judges and condemns no one.

The fourth emphasis urges us *to love by forgiving*. In our communal fraternal life, forgiveness is essential if we want to live freely and liberated. Without it, our capacity for love is weakened. We are prisoners of our slavery in Egypt. Our memory remains wounded. Are there not Brothers who, years later, are able to remind us of a word or an attitude that had hurt them? On the path of forgiveness, Joseph, Jacob's youngest son, offers us the right attitude:

“Joseph is a reconciled man; he has found his way, he has learned to forgive. He has managed to tame the instinct for vengeance that keeps violence alive within. He can then comfort his brothers so that they do not live in guilt and fear. He can speak words that liberate.”³⁶

Happy are we if we have learned to love by forgiving. In this way, we will be free to be makers of peace and reconciliation in our various communities of life and mission.

The final emphasis encourages *loving by giving*. This means offering the best we have for the good of others. This is what the woman with Simon wanted to express when she poured a very precious perfume on Jesus' head (Mt 26:6-12). *“The simplicity of this gesture reveals something great. No act*

³⁶ François Bustillo, *Ibid.*, p. 180.

of affection, however small, will be forgotten, especially if it is directed towards those who are suffering, in solitude, in need, as the Lord was at that moment.”³⁷

We will be blessed if we practice speaking harmoniously the language of fraternal love by learning to love fully, with mercy, without judging or condemning, by forgiving and giving. Then we will be fully faithful to our vocation to fraternal life in community.

4.5- The language of the Mennaisian charism

Living as brothers ultimately means learning to speak the language of the Mennaisian charism, the first rudiments of which are humility and charity.

For John Mary de la Mennais, humility is the virtue that drives us to accept our limitations and to value the qualities of others. It also helps us to learn from our Brothers. In this way, by providing us with the criteria to identify humble Brothers in the community, our Founder encourages us at the same time to imitate them:

“Do you want to know who the truly humble men in a community are? They are those who, always and at all times, in the smallest as well as in the greatest matters, willingly renounce their own will to fulfil God’s, who, flexible and obedient, distrusting the plans of their own mind, allow themselves to be placed, guided, and so to speak handled, with a childlike simplicity; they are those who love to be nothing, to be counted for nothing; who sincerely wish to be the most despised, the most neglected, the most forgotten, the most dependent on everyone ...”³⁸

John Mary de La Mennais presents charity as an art of living a fraternal life in community. It is realized when we serve as models of gentleness and patience for others and offer each other mutual support to seek God and accomplish his work.

"May fraternal love reign among all members of the same community! May everyone rejoice in the joy of others and share in their sorrows, and may all offer each other mutual support in

³⁷ Pope Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te*, n° 4.

³⁸ John Mary de la Mennais, *S II*, 650.

going to God and accomplishing his work, avoiding quarrels, rivalries, secret jealousies, reproachful words, everything that harms, everything that divides, and anything that diminishes charity!"³⁹

Thus, when we practice humility and charity, we join hands to grow together in our fraternal life in community, and we gradually learn to speak harmoniously the language of the Mennaisian charism.

³⁹ Rule of 1835.

CHAPTER III

BROTHERS OF EVERY PERSON

The Gospel passage about the sending out of the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10:1-11) offers a wonderful opportunity to deepen the missionary aspect of our fraternal life in community. However, two remarks are in order. First, the number seventy-two refers to the seventy-two nations that inhabit the world according to Jewish tradition (Gen 10:1-32). It therefore also indicates that the mission of proclaiming the Gospel concerns us all. Secondly, Jesus sends the disciples out two by two to emphasise the communal dimension of the apostolate. This is the path that the Master invites us to take if we want to be brothers to every person. To fulfil such a mission, the Lord sends us:

- Ahead of Him
- Like lambs
- To bring peace
- To heal the sick

1- Ahead of the Lord

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’.” (Lk 10, 1-2)

In this passage, the evangelist Luke defines the fundamental mission of the disciples: to walk ahead of the Lord to prepare for his coming. No one takes on such an apostolate on their own initiative. It is the Master who takes the initiative: he chooses and sends out two by two whom he wants. He reminds his missionary disciples of three important truths: first, the harvest is plentiful; second, the labourers are few; finally, they are simple servants who must ask the Master to send many more.

Walking two by two ahead of the Lord is the mission he entrusts to us. But how can we understand it and, above all, how can we fulfil it properly? Two important elements must be considered: *'together'* and *'ahead of the Lord'*.

1.1-Walking together

Walking together is the prophetic response that the Lord expects from us in this increasingly individualistic world. By doing so as disciples of Jesus, we convey God's love and tenderness to a wounded humanity. We teach them that we belong to God's great family and that we are all brothers and sisters. Consequently, we proclaim to them the Good News of fraternity, that little lamp which must not be placed under a bushel but on a candlestick so that it may give light to the whole house (Mt 5:15).

Walking together is something that must be learned; it is the best way to prepare for the coming of the Lord. It is nothing other than striving to live each day in synodal fraternity which promotes participation and co-responsibility. In this way, no one is left out or allowed to remain on the sidelines, even if it means adapting to the pace of others. This is the only way to walk with others as disciples of Christ. This is corroborated by the magnificent African proverb: *"If you want to go fast, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk with others."*

Learning to walk together requires mutual listening and trust. It is therefore a wonderful exercise to search together as if groping our way for the best path to walk ahead of the Lord. This means continually checking with each other to ensure that we are listening properly. This true act of humility requires us to approach each other on our knees!

Learning to walk together also encourages dialogue which is defined as a conversation that converts us to fraternity. Such an approach teaches us empathy which allows us to share the joy of those who are happy, the sorrow of those who suffer and the concerns of those who call for help. It is a wonderful way to learn to be companions on the journey of our brothers and sisters while proclaiming the Gospel of fraternity to them!

1.2- Walking ahead of the Lord

Walking before the Lord is the mission entrusted to every disciple of Christ, yesterday and today. To fulfil this mission well, the prophet John the Baptist shows us the way of sharing, justice, gentleness and truth (Lk 3:10-17). Indeed, he asked those who had two coats to give one to those who

were naked and to offer food to those who were hungry. He encouraged tax collectors to be just by ensuring strict compliance with the law. He exhorted soldiers to live the values of gentleness and truth. Thus, sharing, justice, gentleness and truth are concrete paths of fraternity whose main objective is to prepare hearts to welcome Jesus, the elder Brother.

Walking ahead of the Lord also means calling for conversion (Matthew 3:1-17) through preaching, but above all through the witness of one's life. Indeed, John was that voice crying out in the desert, asking people to prepare the way of the Lord, but he was clothed in camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey. His preaching and fasting bore fruit: people were converted and were baptised. They now belong to the great family of the sons of Abraham.

Walking ahead of the Lord also requires bearing witness to the light that is Christ (Jn 1:7-8), even if it leads to martyrdom as was the case for John the Baptist during Jesus' lifetime (Mk 6:14-29). This is the price to pay for entering the kingdom of heaven (Mt 11:12). It is the experience of the grain of wheat that accepts death in order to bear much fruit (Jn 12:24). It is the very vocation and mission of the disciple: to diminish so that the Master may grow (Jn 3:30).

To walk ahead of the Lord in meeting children and young people, the figure of the Good Shepherd offers us an interesting lesson. Indeed, Jesus asks Simon Peter three times to be the Shepherd of his sheep (Jn 21:17-19). In the Johannine tradition (Jn 10:1-5), the Good Shepherd is an educator, that is, someone who leads, accompanies and serves. The evangelist attributes four main qualities to him. First, he is the one who calls each one by name, who pays special attention to each sheep. Secondly, his mission is to help each sheep grow, to help them take risks and to take greater control of their lives. He is also the one who walks at the head of the flock, because he knows the way, with its ups and downs and difficulties. Finally, he gives his life and his time without measure, even to the point of paying with his own life.

An educational ministry inspired by the pedagogy of the Good Shepherd, which seeks to walk ahead of the Lord, ensures that young people receive quality attention and listening. This is reflected in the time we devote to them. It is not primarily a question of quantity, but rather of the quality of our presence. Our attitude must convey to them the assurance that we listen to them unconditionally, without taking offence, without being

scandalised, without their annoying or tiring us. In other words, we learn to walk alongside them in the manner of the Pilgrim of Emmaus, even if it means sometimes walking with them in the wrong direction for a moment. Thus, the listening and presence we offer them indicate the value that person has for us, regardless of their life choices.

This pastoral care also seeks to accompany the growth of children and young people, especially the most vulnerable. It takes care not to extinguish the wick that still smoulders, not to break the reed that is already bent. It can identify paths where others see only walls and to recognise possibilities where others perceive only risks, threats or dangers. It knows how to take the stray or wounded sheep upon its shoulders.

By striving to walk together and imitate the Good Shepherd who walks ahead, in the middle or behind the flock, we become sentinels of fraternity for all those to whom the Lord sends us to prepare for his coming. This is what our Rule of Life reminds us when it states:

“The community ‘is always a brotherhood for mission’. Dedicated to the common task of evangelization, the community revises its orientations, adjusts its approaches, and reflects on the meaning of its witness with humility and realism, recognizing the need for continual reassessment. Through collaboration with Lay people in schools, other educational establishments and places of evangelization, Brothers work with them to build a true educational community that inspires and supports each of its members.” (RL 2024, 66)

2- Like lambs

“Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.” (Lk 10, 3-4)

In this passage from Luke, the Lord offers us guidance on how to accomplish the mission he entrusts to us. He “sends us out like lambs among wolves”. He also asks us not to “carry a purse, a bag, or sandals” and not to “greet anyone along the way”. From a human perspective, this is a very difficult mission. How can a lamb resist a wolf? How can a disciple proclaim the Gospel without money, food or shoes? Yet this is the paradoxical path of fruitfulness that the Lord shows us if we want to be brothers and sisters to everyone.

In biblical literature, the term “*lamb*” is rich in meaning. First of all, it expresses redeeming love. The Lord welcomes the firstborn of Abel's flock. The blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts protects the Hebrew families (Ex 12:23). John the Baptist presents Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). Then, this word evokes gentleness: Isaiah compares the Suffering Servant to a docile lamb led to the slaughter (Is 53:7). Finally, this word refers to the promise of universal brotherhood. The prophet Isaiah announces a time when “*the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them*” (Is 11,6).

When the Lord “*sends us out like lambs among wolves,*” he asks us to respond to aggression with gentleness. This is the beatitude we are called to live by in this world where the law of the strongest reigns, where victory is won through violence. It is the only path to take in order not to crush, not to dominate, not to respond to violence with violence. Was it not Jesus who said to us: “*Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart*” (Lk 11:29)? By sending us forth in this way, he also invites us to accept our own vulnerabilities. In fact, it is a matter of disarming ourselves in order to go and proclaim the good news of gentleness, the path of fraternity. The vulnerable disciple gradually learns to place his trust in the Lord and thus opens up a space for authentic encounter with others. Daily experience shows that our masks, our protections, our helmets distance us from those we want to meet. The lamb, on the other hand, can only count on the kindness of the one who welcomes it. This becomes an opportunity for the other to offer us the best of himself. “*God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong*” (1 Cor 1:27).

When Jesus “*sends us out like lambs among wolves,*” he is also inviting us to embrace poverty. He invites us to let go of our most basic securities. Without a purse, there is no money. By detaching ourselves from it, we learn to depend on God and the kindness of others. Without a bag, there is no food. By leaving it at home, we entrust ourselves to the Providence of the Lord who clothes the lilies of the field better than Solomon in all his glory (Mt 6:28-30). Without sandals, we are no longer equipped to walk. By agreeing to walk barefoot, we consent to be touched by the roughness of the road. By asking us to leave all this behind, Jesus wants to set us free for him and for others. Did not Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Teresa of Calcutta,

Saint Charles de Foucauld and many others discover that detachment from material goods freed up a spiritual richness within them that radiated out to all those they met? When we empty our room of everything it contains, it is to better welcome our guests.

When Jesus “*sends us out like lambs among wolves*”, he also tells us not to greet anyone. With this invitation, which some might describe as antisocial, the Master asks us to get straight to the point, not to get lost in superficial relationships when faced with the urgency of the mission. What matters to him are the bonds we forge with people. At the well in Samaria, he asks for a drink (Jn 4:7). When he comes to Zacchaeus, he looks up and invites him to come down from the tree because he wants to stay at his house (Lk 19:5). Jesus' simplicity reveals his deep respect for others. Indeed, when we respect someone, we do not waste his time, and we get to the heart of the encounter.

The ministry of fraternity to which the Lord calls us consists not in avoiding wolves or becoming wolves ourselves, but in remaining lambs even amid danger. This is the only teaching that can help us, with the Lord's grace, to transform the wolf. This is possible. We need only look to Saint Francis of Assisi who tamed the wolf of Gubbio with his gentleness. This ferocious animal, which terrorised the town, became docile in the face of an unarmed man who offered him only his trust in God and his love for all created beings. Why not also mention Saint Maria Goretti's forgiveness of her murderer, Alessandro Serenelli? This was the starting point for the man's conversion, and he spent the rest of his life as a Franciscan tertiary brother.

This ministry of fraternity also leads to a radical reversal: a child leads the wolf and the lamb (Is 11:6). The secret of this revolution is the trust that helps the child to remain gentle before the wolf and to see in the lamb a friend and playmate. This is nothing other than the spiritual childhood advocated by Saint Teresa of Lisieux. She defines it as “*the gentle path of love and trust, opened by Jesus to the little ones and the poor, to everyone. It is the path of true joy.*”⁴⁰ When we exercise our ministry of fraternity by taking the path of spiritual childhood, we become artisans of reconciliation in our different places of life and mission. In this way, we gradually learn to reject the logic of confrontation and to bet on the capacity of every person to open themselves to the beauty of the Gospel. This allows us to be

⁴⁰ Pope Francis, “C’est la confiance », n° 17.

surprised by kindness and generosity where we least expected it, to discover brothers and sisters to love where we saw only turbulent and lazy children or young people to punish. Such an experience broadens our capacity to love unconditionally, to offer our friendship without demanding anything in return, to reach out without calculating the risks.

In exercising their ministry of gentleness⁴¹, John Mary de la Mennais offers the Brothers two main tools for acquiring this *“holy virtue”*: *“union with God and self-renunciation”*.⁴² For him, only the Lord can teach us to be humble and gentle, following his example. To this end, he invites us to *“lose ourselves in God,”* to let him *“guide us even in the smallest things,”* to *“walk in his light”* and to *“take up the happy and holy habit”* of seeing him in everything. In this way, we will gradually learn to annihilate ourselves and to die to our own will.

Without this dual learning process, we will resort to harshness rather than gentleness in our living and working environments. We will scold our students and punish them too harshly. They will become irritated with us and their character will sour. As a result, they will become real wolves at work, at home and in their interpersonal relationships. However, every time we choose gentleness rather than violence, simplicity rather than accumulation, welcome rather than exclusion, we proclaim to children, young people and members of the Mennaisian Family the Gospel of fraternity in the manner of *“lamb among wolves”*. This is the right approach to avoid *“breaking the already bent reed, extinguishing the smouldering wick”* and *“causing the least pain to those who cause us the most”*.⁴³ Is this not the beautiful legacy left to us by Brother Hyacinthe Fichoux which earned him the nickname *‘the Saint of Basse-Terre’*? Only the credibility gained through gentle teaching allows for an education in fraternity by osmosis, attraction, admiration and contagion. John Mary de la Mennais said much the same thing when he gave this advice to Brother Liguori-Marie Langlumé on 8 October 1845: *“Be kind, patient and gentle with children... You will correct the faults of these poor children much better by making them love you than by making them fear you.”*⁴⁴ Gentleness, patience and kindness are

⁴¹ John Mary de la Mennais, GC V, 530.

⁴² John Mary de la Mennais, GC 1, 141.

⁴³ John Mary de la Mennais, S I, 85.

⁴⁴ John Mary de la Mennais, Letter to Brother Liguori-Marie Langlumé, October 8, 1845.

therefore the three beatitudes of the Mennaisian educator. Blessed are we if we are patient: we will learn to walk at the pace of children and young people. Blessed are we if we are gentle: we will help them carry the burden of learning. Blessed are we if we are kind: we will become their source of motivation and commitment.

Saint Joseph is the one who can accompany us on the path of gentleness, patience and kindness. *“We never perceive frustration in this man,”* Pope Francis remarks, *“but only trust. His persistent silence contains no complaints but always gestures of trust.”*⁴⁵ Today's world is in such need of educators who point to the Heavenly Father, who *“makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous”* (Mt 5:45). Thus, the Congregation has always encouraged its members to take Saint Joseph as their model in their educational mission.

In conclusion, as Pope Francis so aptly puts it, *“gentleness can win hearts, save friendships and so many other things. There is no land more beautiful than the heart of another person, no territory more beautiful to conquer than peace restored with a brother. This is the land that has been given to us as our inheritance!”*⁴⁶

3- Peace to this house

“Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘May peace be on this house!’ And if a peace-loving person is there, your peace will remain on him, but if not, it will return to you. Stay in that same house, eating and drinking what they give you, for the worker deserves his pay. Do not move around from house to house.” (Lk 10, 5-7)

After specifying two important missions for missionary disciples: *“Walking ahead of the Lord”* and *“Acting like lambs among wolves,”* the evangelist Luke gives us a third: being messengers of peace.

In the New Testament, the word *“peace”* appears twenty times. Each time it is used, it refers in some way to the person of Jesus himself. By paying attention to the passages that overlap, it is easy to see that Jesus is the Messenger of Peace. First of all, he is so through his life and person. At his birth, the angels sing: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to*

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, *Patris corde*, n° 7.

⁴⁶ Pope Francis, General audience, February 19, 2020.

people of good will" (Luke 2:14). After his resurrection, he presents himself to his disciples as the one who brings peace: *"On the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors being closed where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you'"* (Jn 20:18). Secondly, he is the messenger of peace through his actions: each healing is accompanied by a *"go in peace"*. This is how he concludes his encounter with the sinful woman at Simon's house: *"Your faith has saved you; go in peace"* (Lk 7:50) or with the woman who touched the fringe of his garment: *"Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace"* (Lk 8:48). Finally, he is peaceful in his teachings: he proclaims blessed those who are peacemakers (Mt 5:9) and entrusts this mission to his disciples (Lk 10:5-6).

Humility is the foremost quality of a missionary-disciple. It is the prerequisite for offering peace, for peace cannot be imposed. It therefore presupposes a free acceptance. It is the fruit of brotherhood. It must be welcomed as a friend in complete freedom; otherwise, it returns to its messenger. This is the instruction that the Master gives to his envoys.

Peace, like a house, is built on three main stones: the sharing of bread and water, the reassurance of closeness, and the ability to make one's home with others.

3.1- Sharing bread and water

"Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the labourer deserves his wages" (Lk 10:7). Sharing a meal is one of the most meaningful fraternal gestures. At the table, defences and masks come down, hearts open and trust is born. Eating and drinking together nourishes not only the body but also the bonds of friendship. A community or family where members no longer eat together falls apart. But when we sit at the same table, we recognise at the same time that we need each other. It is a good opportunity to listen to one another, to reconcile when necessary, to share who we are and what we have.

Sitting at the same table to share the bread of listening and the water of friendship inevitably leads us to a true relationship of equality and fraternity. This is what it means to be messengers of peace in our different places of life and mission.

3.2- Reassuring closeness

“Stay in that house...” (Lk 10:7). With this instruction, Jesus invites us to draw close to those who welcome us. He asks us to be present and available, to be everything to everyone. We are no longer strangers or passers-by but now belong to the one family of God (Eph 2:19). Such closeness is not intrusive but respectful. It knows how to discern when to speak and when to remain silent, when to act and when it is better to simply be present or close by. Like a gentle breeze, it does everyone good. It reassures when necessary and eases tensions by keeping the flame of the fraternity alive.

Learning to sit next to someone who is crying, to hold the hand of someone who is ill, to give our time to someone who needs to be listened to—these are attitudes of closeness that reassure and make us messengers of peace, following the example of Christ.

3.3- Able to make one's home with others

“Do not go from house to house” (Lk 10:7). In an interconnected world where images and photos flash by at high speed on our screens, Jesus urges us to develop our ability to make our home with others. What does this mean? It means making a long-term commitment. It takes time to build relationships of trust and to get to know others with their qualities and faults. Fidelity and mutual acceptance are learned over time.

By learning to dwell with others, we help them to patiently cultivate their land so that their tree may bear fruit of love, truth, justice and peace (Ps 84:11-12). For them, the messianic times are already here. Christ, the Messenger of Peace, has pitched his tent in their midst.

Today more than ever, when we look at our world with its many armed conflicts, or our society with all the forms of violence reported daily by the media, *“offering peace is at the heart of the mission of Christ's disciples. And this offer is addressed to all those, men and women, who aspire to peace amid the dramas and violence of human history.”*⁴⁷

A fragile little flower, peace demands the utmost care from everyone. It requires a conversion of the heart on three levels. First, each person is called to work on themselves in order to control their intransigence, anger and impatience. This is the path to achieving, in the beautiful words of Saint

⁴⁷ Pope Francis, Message for the World Peace Day, January 1, 2019.

Francis de Sales, *“a little gentleness with oneself”* in order to be able to share it with others. Next, each person is invited to practise living in harmony with their neighbour, their friend, the stranger, the poor, the suffering. Finally, each person must learn to cultivate communion with creation by rediscovering the greatness of God's gift and their share of responsibility in managing our common home. In this way, caring for oneself, others and creation becomes a lesson in being a messenger of peace in one's environment.

Teaching generations to dialogue with one another builds peace. *“Dialogue,”* says Pope Francis, *“consists in listening, discussing, agreeing and walking together. Fostering all this between generations means ploughing the hard and barren soil of conflict and rejection to cultivate the seeds of lasting and shared peace.”*⁴⁸ This is where young people will drink from the fountain of wisdom of their elders, while the latter will listen to their creativity and dynamism. What could be more beautiful than elders and teenagers joining hands to build a more fraternal and supportive environment! It is their small drop of water irrigating the tree of peace under which everyone can find the shade they need to dialogue patiently with one another.

Educating for fraternity is a path that also leads to peace. This is achieved when the school or educational centre becomes a family that pays attention, encourages, cares for and promotes dialogue. This was John Mary de la Mennais' experience when he was a young teacher: *“The most intimate union reigns among the teachers at the college in Saint-Malo. They love one another, they help one another, they follow the same method and they are animated by the same spirit. This perfect harmony is our wealth.”*⁴⁹ The educational community of Saint-Malo not only transmitted knowledge, but above all a way of being and a way of relating to others in the spirit of fraternity. At the 2024 General Chapter, the Pope reiterated the importance of our presence in the peripheries of the world so that young people can continue to realise their dreams, especially that of living in a world of peace:

“Dear Brothers, you work in regions of the world where poverty, youth unemployment and social crises of all kinds are rampant. I therefore invite you to be fathers to those to whom you are

⁴⁸ Pope Francis, Message for the World Peace Day, January 1, 2022.

⁴⁹ John Mary de la Mennais, Letter to Mgr Enoch, Bishop of Rennes, January 7, 1808.

sent, fathers who reflect the loving and compassionate face of God. In a world in constant change, you generously place yourselves at the service of young people, attentive to their aspirations and constantly referring to Christ, the supreme rule of your life.

*Your vocation urges you to go where others do not go, to the peripheries, to those who are rejected, wounded by life and victims. May your presence be a source of hope for many. In your spirit of fraternity and welcome, they will recognise another face of our humanity, disfigured by wars, indifference and the rejection of the weak. These children, these young people, these individuals also have dreams, but dreams that are now shattered due to several factors. May you help them to revive their dreams, to believe in themselves and to realise them!*⁵⁰

4- Healing the sick

“Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’” (Lk 10, 8-11)

Healing the sick is another mission that Jesus entrusts to his disciples. In fact, it is a matter of carrying out a ministry of mercy whose main purpose is to express the Lord's goodness and compassion towards all humanity. In doing so, the disciples proclaim through concrete actions the nearness of God's kingdom, especially that of brotherhood, where suffering finds consolation and wounds find healing.

In the biblical conception, physical illness introduces disorder into the harmony of God's creation. It affects not only people, but also their relationships and their place in the community. Lepers had to live outside inhabited areas and address healthy people from a distance (Lk 17:11-17).

⁵⁰ Pope Francis, Message to the General Chapter members, April 22, 2024.

Such exclusion hurt both the sick person and the community. The same is true of spiritual illness. In the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32), the younger son, by squandering his share of the inheritance, broke family ties. But what does the Father do? As soon as he sees him, he runs to him, embraces him and covers him with kisses. This paternal embrace is already a true healing: it restores the younger son to his dignity and reintegrates him into the family communion. Whether physical or spiritual, all healing expresses God's compassion for humanity. This is the mission that the Lord entrusts to us.

"The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Lk 10:9). With these words, the evangelist Luke establishes a direct link between the act of healing and the coming of the Kingdom of God where everyone will find their place and no one will be left by the wayside. By conferring this mandate of healing to his disciples, Jesus announces a radical change. All categories are overturned: there are no longer healthy or sick people, righteous or sinners, pure or impure. We all share in the same dignity as sons and daughters of God. Thus, when the disciples heal the sick, they bear witness that this reign of inclusive fraternity is already at work. They announce and anticipate the definitive healing that God is preparing for all humanity.

For Pope Francis, *"what animated Jesus in every circumstance was nothing other than the mercy with which he read the hearts of those he encountered and responded to their deepest needs."*⁵¹ This enabled him to do everything out of pure love. Indeed, the Lord *"does not love us with words. He draws near to us and, close to us, he gives us his love with all possible tenderness"*.⁵² It is this same path that we are invited to take if we want, following his example, to heal all illnesses and all forms of suffering.

When we practise mutual forgiveness, the fruit of the Lord's gratuitous love, we become capable of authentic fraternity. This then transforms our place of mission, in the words of Pope Francis, into a *"field hospital"* where everyone is both patient and caregiver. By living in such reciprocity, those who care for others are themselves healed by the very act of caring. Thus, our gestures of mercy and healing constitute a true mutual catechesis because they proclaim God's closeness and compassion.

⁵¹ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, n° 8.

⁵² Pope Francis, *Dilexit nos*, n° 36.

To exercise this ministry of healing and mercy inherent in the mission of every disciple, Pope Benedict XVI proposes to Jesuits the path of contemplation of the pierced Heart of Christ. Indeed, looking at the wound in the heart of the Lord who *“took up our infirmities and carried our diseases (Mt 8:17) helps us to be more attentive to the sufferings and needs of others, makes us strong enough to participate in his work of liberation as instruments of spreading his love”*.⁵³ In his encyclical ‘Dilexit nos’, Pope Francis recalls a group of saints who placed mercy at the heart of their spirituality and apostolate. He cites, among others, Saints Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Charles de Foucauld, Pio of Pietrelcina, Teresa of Calcutta, and John Paul II. All these witnesses drew from the contemplation of the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus the strength and energy they needed to learn to be merciful, following the example of our Father in Heaven, who causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mt 5:45). Blessed are we if we accept to walk in the footsteps of these predecessors! This is the secret to proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord's mercy to all those in our care.

Faithful to the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, John Mary de la Mennais constantly urged the Brothers to be forgiving in their apostolate, reminding them that they must be merciful in order to obtain mercy from the Lord (Lk 6:36). He compared their school to a hospital where they were called to exercise their ministry of healing in a spirit of faith, with patience, charity and zeal. Their vocation was to be compassionate fathers to children and young people. This is the best pedagogy for fulfilling our ministry of healing. Have we not been *“chosen, marked, appointed to extend his reign, to be instruments of his mercy”*?⁵⁴

Yesterday, Jesus sent his disciples to heal the sick. Today, it is our turn. But there is one condition, as Pope Leo XIV reminds us in his commentary on the healing of a deaf man who also had difficulty speaking (Mk 7:32-37):

“Before anything else, Jesus offers him silent closeness, through gestures that speak of a profound encounter: He touches this man’s ears and tongue (cf. v. 33b). Jesus does not use many words; he says only what is necessary in that moment: ‘Be

⁵³ Pope Benedict XVI, Letter to the Proposed General of the Jesuits for the 50th anniversary of the encyclical Haurietis aquas (May 15, 2006): AAS 98, 461.

⁵⁴ John Mary de la Mennais, S II, 522.

opened!' (v. 34). Mark uses the word in Aramaic—Eph'phatha—as though to let us hear, almost 'in person' its sound and breath. This simple and beautiful word contains the invitation that Jesus addresses to this man who had stopped listening and speaking. It is as if Jesus were saying to him: 'Be opened to this world that frightens you! Be opened to the relationships that have disappointed you! Be opened to the life you have given up facing!'. Closing in on oneself, in fact, is never a solution."⁵⁵

Is this not the beautiful mission of education that the Lord entrusts to us today? This is where he calls us to be his ministers of mercy. Will we dare to respond? This is the path of life. This is what it means to heal the sick, following the example of Jesus!

⁵⁵ Pope Leo XIV, Catechesis, July 30, 2025.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this reflection, I would like to entrust our vocation and mission to the Lord. Only he can make what our hands have sown sprout, grow and blossom. Only he can teach us to wash one another's feet. He alone knows how to meet us on our different roads to Emmaus, to explain the Scriptures to us and warm our hearts so that we can join our brothers gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem. He alone is the source and summit of our fraternal life in community.

Lord Jesus, our elder Brother, we give you thanks for calling us to follow you on the path of fraternity. Through your life, your example and your teachings, you teach us that we have one Father and that we are all brothers. Continue to intercede so that we may live in unity and peace!

You who make us brothers and sisters and bring us together, teach us to share who we are, what we do and what we have. Grant us to love one another with all the affection of your heart. Help us to become a community of welcome, forgiveness, healing of wounds and authentic fraternal communion.

You who send us forth to proclaim the Good News of fraternity, make us welcoming to all those who await from us the fraternal gesture they need to get back on their feet and continue to follow you.

Virgin Mary, our Mother, teach us, each day, to become more like brothers to your Son Jesus, thus making us ever more brothers to our brothers in community and to every person.

God alone in time!

God alone in eternity!

Brother Hervé Zamor, s.g.

December 26, 2025

On the feast of Saint Stephen, deacon, first martyr of the Church.