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Prot. MG 20/25

Re: Lent circular

Our hope in new relationships

Dearest Sisters!

In my circular letter of last Lent, I proposed some ideas for meditation on the first thematic core of our XIIIth General Chapter: “Passion for Christ and for humanity. *I need holy children!*”. I therefore invited to question ourselves about our interior journey in the light of the spiritual experience of St. Teresa of Avila, our patroness and Don Orione’s, and in communion with the Virgin Mary, *Mater Dei*, who always accompanies us on our journey of holiness, since *par excellence* she is the first who lives the passion for Christ and for humanity.

The whole Church is living the Holy Year dedicated to strengthening the virtue of hope. This is a time of grace for all of us. That’s why we want to live this Lent in a special and intense way, to prepare ourselves for Easter. To die with Christ and rise again with Him! To die to the many things that separate us from Him and from our sisters/brothers to experience the joy of conversion of the heart. This is true Easter.

In this Lenten journey, let us turn our eyes, mind and heart to what the Congregation asked in the second thematic core: “**PROPHECY OF FRATERNITY AND COMMUNION**” – “*Love one another in the Lord, like the fingers of the same hand*” (DO).

Let us remember the 3 lines of action of the second core:

- “BEING “WOMEN, SISTERS AND MOTHERS” TO BUILD HEALTHY AND HEALING COMMUNITIES (LA 4)
- SYNODALITY AS A LIFESTYLE AND PROPHECY (LA 5)
- “DISCIPLE-MISSIONARY” COMMUNITY IN THE CHURCH, WITH THE CHURCH AND FOR THE CHURCH (LA6)

While reading these lines, we immediately grasp the great challenge of **RELATIONALITY**, of knowing how to weave deep relationships to be prophetic in this world that proposes individuality, ‘singles’, the desire to be in the limelight, the prevalence of some over others, the culture of personal well-being at the expense of the common good.

Builders of healthy and healing communities

Our fraternal life -lived well- is a great help in the vocational growth and apostolic effectiveness. How beautiful it is to return to the community and find a sister who is waiting for us, who asks “how are you? how did it go?”, who sits next to us listening to our story, who shares our joys and sorrows, who says a word of comfort, of suggestion and of correction/promotion as a true sister and mother in Christ. We all have lived this experience! We all know that leaving our comfort zone to meet the other, inconveniences us a little, but fills us with peace and true joy.

These sisters who do not care only of themselves, but see others and promptly come out of themselves, not for interest, not for a false feeling of “being good people”, but freely, these are the true “weavers of relationships”, the architects of communion. In these healthy communities, many wounds of indifference and selfishness are healed.

Unfortunately, we meet people who feel it hard to create relationships, who are close in themselves, in their own world, narcissistically bent on their own needs, lacking empathy towards others with behaviours that prevent a serene community and apostolic coexistence.

Well aware of the difficulties in relationships, Don Orione encouraged the sisters to work on their irritability that spoils relationships and weakens their witness:

“Always keep your heart and spirit raised to God, without anger or angry words. Good daughters of God, be irreproachable, modest, vigilant, not quarrelsome, all united in one heart and one soul, in a holy way, that is, in the charity of our Lord Jesus Christ; giving good example, good witness of yourselves, preaching to everyone with your behaviour, ...”¹.

And he strongly recommended: *“Each of you should enter in yourself, inside yourself and see if you have something to reform... What good are you doing by going around gossiping? Is this attitude a way of loving the Congregation? Discrediting just one sister affects the whole Congregation. Philosophers say: the soul is in all parts of the body. Love one another in the Lord, help one another in work, pity one another in defects, edify one another with good example. I recommend this to you so, so much!!”².*

We all have “something to reform”. In this journey of conversion of the heart, let us try, as Don Orione asked us, to enter in ourselves, to look inside ourselves and see what we need to work on, improve and heal in our fraternal relationships.

Let us try to dedicate time to being together, to get to know each other better, to show the other sister that we care about each other, to write a kind message, to visit the elderly or sick sisters. In a word, let us commit ourselves to being sisters and mothers, good Samaritans *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit for the grace “to be not only consumers of community, but above all its builders; to be responsible for each other's growth; to be open and available to receive the gift of the other; to be able to help and to be helped; to replace and to be replaced” (VFC, 24).

Passing through this journey means passing through the Holy Door of the Jubilee as pilgrims of hope for new relationships.

Promoters of synodality

Thanks to the good experience of fraternal life, religious life is already a sign and prophecy of the new humanity in our society. Our Congregation has made a significant journey of renewal by allowing itself to be trained in dialogue, sharing, participation and discernment in the Church-communion.

We know, however, that we are not always able to live according to these ideals. The change in mentality is very slow and, often, we feel the split between what we think and desire and what we say and do. Sometimes we see in ourselves and experience in others attitudes that are opposed to synodality, such as: walking alone without noticing others, without stopping with them, without listening to them and entering in a dialogue with them, in a deep relationship... Don Orione suffered for this way of life and often corrected his sons and daughters: *“The Lord knows how much I respect you and how much I love you in Him, but I beg you to turn the crank of the House and the Parish in another way, more responsive to the union of souls in the House, with a more ordered work, giving each person more responsibility and freedom in their tasks, - directing everything, comforting everyone, uniting everyone to you in Domino, suffocating no one, but helping and forming everyone...”³.*

¹ 5 December 1939; *Writings*, 39,114 -115; *DOPSMC*, 351.

² 5 August 1932; *Word*, II, 202ss; *DOPSMC*276

³ To don Risi, 5 September 1932; *Writings*, 7,360.

A great obstacle on this path is self-referentiality and the tendency to perfectionism in which people experience the fear of failure and the devaluation of the goals achieved. This type of rigidity, of seeking success to be accepted and loved, prevents from involving in discernment those people who think differently or more slowly. We tend to rush things by often making decisions alone, excluding others from active and creative participation.

Through the synodal document⁴ the Holy Spirit tells us to learn from Jesus, the new Man, the ability to meet people and together with them start a new journey: “We should, therefore, look to the Gospels to outline for us the journey of conversion we are required to undertake, learning little by little to make Jesus' practices our own. The Gospels present to us a Lord who is often ‘in the act of listening to the people who come to Him along the roads of the Holy Land’ (DCS 11). Jesus never sent anyone away without listening and speaking to them, whether men or women, Jews or pagans, doctors of the law or publicans, righteous men and women or sinners, beggars, the blind, lepers or the sick. He revealed the Father through meeting people wherever they were, where their history and personal freedom had led them. By listening to the needs and to the faith of those He met, and by responding through words and gestures, He renewed their lives, opening the path to healed relationships. Jesus is the Messiah who ‘even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak’ (Mk 7:37). He asks us, His disciples, to do the same and, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, gives us the capacity to do it conforming our hearts to His: only ‘the heart makes all authentic bonding possible, since a relationship not shaped by the heart is incapable of overcoming the fragmentation caused by individualism’ (DN 17). When we listen to our sisters and brothers, we are participants in the way that God in Jesus Christ comes to meet each of us” (51).

In our journey of conversion of the heart, it is necessary to learn from Jesus the way to relate to people. Every day we meditate on the pages of the Gospel and we are truly privileged in this. In this Lenten season, let us try to pay greater attention to the words, gestures and relational style of Jesus, learning from Him how to be with people in a more intense way. Let us share spontaneously, at different moments of the day, what has touched our hearts and let us encourage one another to promote relationships and a synodal style.

May this style also be present in relationships with collaborators in our services and works and with all those whom Divine Providence allows us to meet. In the synodal document we read: “The synodal Church can be described using the image of the orchestra: the variety of instruments is necessary to give life to the beauty and harmony of music...” (42).

Passing through this journey means passing through the Holy Door of the Jubilee as pilgrims of hope for new relationships.

Disciples, missionaries, daughters of the Church

“Every disciple is missionary, for Jesus makes him participate in his mission, while also binding him to himself as friend and brother” we read in the Aparecida document (144). This is possible thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit: “Now, in the Cenacle, with the breath of the Spirit, the new creation begins: a People of missionary disciples is born” (Synod Document, 140).

Every PSMC is a disciple who always learns from her Master how to be a missionary of charity. We can rejoice at this important vocation in the heart of the Church and give thanks for the many sisters who have been -and are- able how to give their active contribution so that our communities be open to the needs of the poor, capable of learning how to read the signs of the times and respond with missionary zeal to ever-new needs, in communion with the diocese and their local church.

However, we can observe a weakening of being disciples in permanent formation in order to learn to be missionaries with a generous and magnanimous heart, as Don Orione wanted us to be. Self-referentiality often limits the capacity for active listening and weakens collaboration. To avoid

⁴ Final document of the XVIth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *For a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission*, 26 October 2024.

misunderstandings, competitiveness, jealousies and tensions, we choose to work alone, as individual disciples, effective perhaps, but not happy.

Jesus taught his disciples the style of communion, he sent them two by two, so that they could witness their mutual love, and, in the unity of diversity, prepare together the way for the Lord who comes.

In the final document of the Synod the Holy Spirit enlightens and encourages us: “Becoming missionary disciples of the Lord is not something achieved once and for all. It demands continuous conversion, growing in love ‘to the measure of the full stature of Christ’ (Eph 4:13) and being open to the gifts of the Spirit for a living and joyful witness of faith” (142).

“One of the requests that emerged most strongly and from all contexts during the synodal process is that the formation provided by the Christian community be integral, ongoing and shared. Such formation must aim not only at acquiring theoretical knowledge but also at promoting the capacity for openness and encounter, sharing and collaboration, reflection and discernment in common. Formation must consequently engage all the dimensions of the human person (intellectual, affective, relational and spiritual) and include concrete experiences that are appropriately accompanied” (143).

“In the Church, no one simply receives formation: everyone is an active subject and has something to give to others” (144).

The journey of *conversion of the heart* is expressed in the openness to always allow ourselves to be formed, to develop self-awareness, to know how to look at ourselves in truth and realize what state we are in: self-centered, in conversion or open to the relationship...? Only in the relational state are we able to practice active listening, value and welcome the proposals of others, collaborate with others, be grateful to benefactors, and, with ecclesial sense, open ourselves to the new existential peripheries through networking with other entities.

Passing through this journey means passing through the Holy Door of the Jubilee as pilgrims of hope of new relationships.

To live Easter with a renewed heart it is necessary to ask for forgiveness. There are many shortcomings and sins against the relational proclamation of the Gospel, against communion. At the beginning of the last session of the Synod, Pope Francis said: “The Church is in its essence a Church of faith and of proclamation that is always relational, and only by healing sick relationships can we become a synodal Church. How could we be credible in the mission if we do not recognize our errors and do not bend down to heal the wounds that we have caused with our sins? And the healing of the wound begins by confessing the sin that we have committed”. And he proposed the penitential celebration (1 Oct 2024), a concrete sign for the conversion of the heart for the synodal journey.

We bend down to heal the wounds

In this Lent of the Holy Year, I suggest welcoming the same celebration that Pope Francis proposed to the participants of the Synod (1 October 2024)⁵, adapting it to our realities, adding our community and apostolic sins to those that the Pope listed, and, in the silence of the heart, our personal ones. Let us also reflect on his words⁶. By living this moment with true contrition of heart like the tax collector in the temple (Lk 18:9-14), we shall receive God's forgiveness, heal our wounds and pass inwardly through the Holy Door of the Jubilee, reconciled and strengthened in the hope of being able to be, a little more deeply, a prophecy of communion for the world.

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https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly2024/press16_09/penitentialcelebration/ITA_Celebrazione_penitenziale.pdf

⁶ <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/homilies/2024/documents/20241001-omelia-veglia-penitenziale.pdf>

Conversation in the Spirit

As you gather to make your community discernment on how to live and what commitments to make to live this Lent to the fullest, I suggest using the method of "conversation in the Spirit", which the Church is proposing to us in this time to live the prophecy of brotherhood and of communion.

Our hope is in new relationships, more and more mature and deep. May the Holy Spirit make our Lenten commitment fruitful and the Virgin Mary and Don Orione accompany us on this Jubilee pilgrimage towards Easter.

I greet you with affection in communion with the Sisters of the Council.



Sr M. Alicja Kędziora

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Superior general

Rome, General House, 5 March 2025

Ash Wednesday