



*Circular  
of the  
Superior General  
#3*

---

**BROTHERS!**

*YOU SHOULD ALSO DO AS I HAVE DONE TO YOU (JOHN 13:15B)*

---

André-Joseph Fétis, SM  
XV<sup>th</sup> Superior General  
Missionary Apostolic  
Society of Mary  
(Marianists)

*June 12, 2022  
on the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity*

## CONTENTS

BROTHERS! .....	3
I. THE URGENCY OF FRATERNITY .....	4
1. In a suffering world .....	4
2. Between dark clouds and lights .....	5
3. Unfulfilled desires for brotherhood .....	6
4. Brothers by vocation .....	6
5. Our deficiencies .....	7
6. A Renewed Decision .....	8
7. Take care .....	8
8. To Whom do we show ourselves to be a neighbor? .....	8
9. A personal and collective commitment in response to a universal call .....	9
II. FOLLOWING JESUS OUR BROTHER .....	10
1. “And the Word became brother” .....	10
2. Fraternity is at the heart of his teaching .....	11
3. A community of disciples .....	11
4. Servants of each other .....	12
5. To be a sign and a path of unity .....	12
6. Like Him .....	12
III. CONSECRATED LIFE: A STORY OF FRATERNITY .....	13
1. Stories .....	13
a. Pachomius and Augustine: fraternity at the source of monastic life .....	13
b. Benedict: service of God and of the brothers .....	14
c. Francis of Assisi: an evangelizing fraternity .....	15
d. Multiple paths .....	16
e. Charles de Foucauld, the "universal brother" .....	16
2. Make visible the face of Christ the Brother .....	18
a. The vows, path of fraternity .....	18
b. The superior, servant of the fraternity .....	19
c. The community meeting, an exercise in communion .....	20
IV. MARIANIST PATHS OF FRATERNITY .....	21
1. An evangelizing fraternity .....	21
2. Imitate the community of Jerusalem .....	23
<i>A common path</i> .....	25
3. Assiduous in the breaking of bread and in fraternal service .....	25
4. The Union of Diversity .....	26
a. Union without confusion .....	26
b. A body united .....	27
c. The mixed composition .....	29
<i>A favorable time for renewal</i> .....	31
V. Two Icons of Marianist Fraternity: The Community of Pentecost and the Wedding at Cana .....	32
1. Pentecost: reunited with Mary and filled with the Holy Spirit .....	32
2. Invited together to the wedding at Cana .....	34
a. Brothers in the heart of the world .....	34
b. Fraternal solidarity: opening the eyes, the mind and the heart .....	35
c. Break the silence of ignorance and indifference .....	35
d. Let yourself be challenged by the Master of time and history .....	36
e. Do whatever he tells you .....	37
f. To know, to love, to serve .....	37
AND NOW ... ..	38

# BROTHERS!

*YOU SHOULD ALSO DO AS I HAVE DONE TO YOU (John 13:15b)*

CIRCULAR NO. 3

What desire is more universal than to live as brothers?

This aspiration manifests itself in all aspects of human life: in daily relationships, in families, between friends, in neighborhoods and cities, at work or during leisure time, between members of the same generation or one generation to another, between men and women, ... in a single country or between several, from one continent to another: everywhere human beings want to stamp their relations with the seal of fraternity.

Yet, is there any path more difficult than this? At all these levels, humanity observes the extreme difficulty of achieving its effective realization. Is it even possible? Could this simply be a utopian quest? Recent events -- the pandemic, war, innumerable forms of violence or divisions — do but increase our concerns.

Yet against all these doubts, on October 2, 2020, Pope Francis published his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, inviting all of humanity – and not just Christians – to get back to work, once again. With that text, the pope sent a message of hope to all human beings and challenged us to set out together to achieve that goal of universal fraternity. Going beyond the limits of the Church, he wished “*this reflection an invitation to dialogue with all people of good will*” (FT 6) and that thus “*we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity.*” (FT 8).

Because this question intimately touches Christian life, itself called to be a leaven of fraternity in the world, and even more particularly religious life, which recognizes in it an essential aspect of its own mission, it seemed to me that it was necessary for us also, as Marianist religious, to give some thought to it.

What can we do in response to this great desire for brotherhood? What is the particular form of fraternity that we can offer as our participation in this great movement? To what conversions are we called to achieve this? What new avenues are we to take?

Seen within the universal call of the Pope, religious fraternity finds a new light. It is no longer so much a particular path that distinguishes us from others as a path that, on the contrary, unites us to all. This change of perspective profoundly modifies the meaning of what we have to do, its urgency, and opens up new missionary perspectives that we must welcome. Would we not be called to be an evangelical leaven at the heart of this universal search for fraternity? Could we not find in this call the source of a profound renewal of our vocation and of a renewed joy in living it?

The desire to reflect with you about all this prompted me to write this *Circular*. There is no doubt that religious life struggles to find its place today in society and, sometimes, even in the Church. Doesn't this universalist perspective of fraternity remind us of a mission that is not only important, but even essential to our consecrated life? Is it not also at the heart of our existence as a Family?<sup>1</sup> If the only future of the world is in fraternity, then there is no doubt that we have our part to play to make this possible. Our vocation as brothers demands it of us and makes it a

---

<sup>1</sup> I was already advanced in the elaboration of this *Circular* when I realized that the theme of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of the MLC, which will be held in July near Madrid, will have as its theme: “Dreaming Together the Fraternity.” A happy coincidence! Let us help each other to dream, to live and bear witness together to the fraternity so loved and promoted by our Founders.

duty towards humanity. This is the reflection in which I would now like to engage with you. Let's address the question.

It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. "Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together."<sup>2</sup> Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth, which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all. (FT 8).

## I. THE URGENCY OF FRATERNITY

### 1. IN A SUFFERING WORLD

The first observation is that fraternity is lacking almost everywhere. If the aspiration to rebuild it is so universal, it is because it is sorely lacking. The first chapter of the Pope's encyclical gives a strikingly realistic description of it: "Dark Clouds over a Closed World" (FT 9-55). And it seems that since then we've strayed further from that gift. We can re-read this very inspiring first chapter.

On this subject, the reading of certain passages of the Old Testament, impress as they seem current:

*There is no faithfulness, no love,  
no acknowledgment of God in the land.  
There is only cursing, lying and murder,  
stealing and adultery;  
they break all bounds,  
and bloodshed follows bloodshed. (Hos 4, 1-2)*

The wicked remove landmarks;  
they seize flocks and pasture them.  
They drive away the donkey of the orphan;  
they take the widow's ox for a pledge.  
They thrust the needy off the road;  
the poor of the earth all hide themselves.  
Like wild asses in the desert  
they go out to their toil,  
scavenging in the wasteland  
food for their young.  
They reap in a field not their own  
and they glean in the vineyard of the wicked.  
They lie all night naked, without clothing,

---

<sup>2</sup> Address at the Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting with Young People, Skopje, North Macedonia (May 7, 2019): *L'Osservatore Romano*, May 9, 2019, p. 9.

and have no covering in the cold.  
They are wet with the rain of the mountains,  
and cling to the rock for want of shelter.  
“There are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast,  
and take as a pledge the infant of the poor.  
They go about naked, without clothing;  
though hungry, they carry the sheaves;  
between their terraces they press out oil;  
they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst.  
From the city the dying groan,  
and the throat of the wounded cries for help;  
yet God pays no attention to their prayer.  
“There are those who rebel against the light,  
who are not acquainted with its ways,  
and do not stay in its paths.  
The murderer rises at dusk  
to kill the poor and needy,  
and in the night is like a thief.  
The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight,  
saying, ‘No eye will see me’;  
and he disguises his face. (Job 24:2-15)

This evil is so great that it provokes a painful doubt in Job: would God be insensitive to this scandal! (Job 24:12b). That question haunts the minds of those who experience such suffering.

“Nothing new under the sun,” one could say with Qoheleth: “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). And here we are now in “the dark clouds of a closed world.” marked by the destruction of dreams of peace, by the inequalities and injustices affecting a considerable part of the world’s population – the poor, women, the sick, ... –, by conflicts and deep divisions, by loneliness or the absence of real communication, by the domination of money and the economy over people. Nothing new under the sun.

To the pandemic that came by surprise and invaded the whole world, there has now been added a deadly and senseless conflict in Eastern Europe, on a continent that thought it was done with the scourge of war. Now, this dream seems to be “broken to pieces” (cf. FT 10) and more difficult to achieve than ever. Who will be able to erase the wound now inscribed in the hearts of so many families and children, in Ukraine and Russia, in Syria, in Ethiopia, in Darfur, in Yemen, in Libya, or in Lebanon?

## 2. BETWEEN DARK CLOUDS AND LIGHTS

The magnitude of evil can affect us very negatively.

*By pessimism.* Like the skeptical philosopher Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century, the persistence of evil can lead us to the conclusion that *Homo homini lupus*, according to the famous adage of Latin antiquity. That is all.

*By disengagement.* The abundance of difficulties can extinguish our desires for brotherhood. Thus develops a “shallow, short-sighted culture . . . bereft of a shared vision” (FT 17), seeking “globalization and progress without a shared roadmap” (FT 29-31), individualistic and fragmented, little able to respond to the challenges of society. It is characterized by the absence of common horizons that unite us” (FT 26). We are thus entering a vicious circle of disengagement and disenchantment, even when the response is so necessary and urgent.

*Out of indifference and carelessness.* The search for tranquility prevails over human solidarity and attention to one's brother.<sup>3</sup> The culture of well-being, comfort, consumption, and an excessive search for personal fulfillment push in this direction. We can live in the image of these neighborhoods protected by high walls that leave the problems of the world on the other side. To remain deaf to the cries of our brothers, isn't that our temptation? "Am I my brother's keeper?" asked Cain (Gen 4:9b).

*Spurred by the Gospel.* The Gospel removes these obstacles and opens the way to "the human family's innate vocation to fraternity" (FT 26). We must not give in to selfish acedia (*Evangelii Gaudium* [EG] 81-83), nor to "ancestral fears" (FT 27) which divide, nor even to sterile pessimism (EG 84-86); "Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!" The Gospel protects us from a "false communitarian mystique" (FT 28) that maintains tranquility in the midst of injustice. Despite everything,

We are always capable of going out of ourselves towards the other... Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, ... If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society (*Laudato Si* [LS] 208).

### 3. UNFULFILLED DESIRES FOR BROTHERHOOD

Hope is reborn by noting that immense desires for fraternity inhabit hearts. Young people, above all, eagerly seek places and spaces for encounter and dialogue. Even if they are marked by current individualism, they place family and friendship at the forefront of their values. The Synod on *Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment* echoed their desire, whether Christian or not, to live a "personal commitment to a fraternal, welcoming, joyful and committed community, prophetically combatting social injustice."<sup>4</sup>

All generations experience this desire for greater fraternity because it is so often lacking. Divisions appear in families, at work, in society, between countries, cultures, races, religions, or between generations, .... This sometimes degenerates into opposition, confrontation, demands, violence or war.

The itinerary for building fraternity is often lacking, as well as experienced guides who might open the way. That presupposes knowing how to overcome self-centeredness in order to enter into the perceptions of others by showing empathy. It takes patience and perseverance to overcome obstacles. "It's the time you lost for your rose that makes your rose so important," said the fox to the Little Prince.<sup>5</sup> And we are so stingy with our time...

### 4. BROTHERS BY VOCATION

The call to fraternity touches the Christian deeply since he is the disciple of the one who made himself the brother of all and placed charity at the heart of his life and his teaching. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Mt 25:40). Consequently, it is a duty for the Christian to support the journey of all humanity towards fraternity, to enrich it with the resources of the Gospel and the witness

---

<sup>3</sup> During the pandemic, reflections have multiplied, particularly in the English-speaking world, on the importance of care, of an attitude of "care" towards others.

<sup>4</sup> Final document, § 57.

<sup>5</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Le petit prince*, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1946,) p. 72.

of Christ: the disciples of Christ must become experts in fraternity. For this, they are not more suitable or more worthy than others, but their Master invites them insistently.

This is especially true of religious; fraternity occupies a privileged place in their style of community life and in their missionary action.

In our *Rule of Life*, this call to communitarian fraternity resounds strongly: "... therefore we manifest our love for the Lord by giving a preferential place to love for our fellow Brothers" (RL 21); we want "... a fraternal attitude [that] creates a climate of joy and hope. Thus, the Marianist community becomes a center of human and evangelical friendship" (RL 3.7). "In [Jesus] we are all brothers" (RL 44). Fraternity is also realized through mission: "We come together to form communities of faith, and we aim to share the same faith with our brothers and sisters" (RL3); we want "to reflect to those around us Mary's warmth of welcome to God and to others" (RL 8); we ask God that by offering him "an undivided heart, he makes it a rich source of life and of unselfish, universal love" (RL 18). Many other citations could be mentioned.

Among Christians and religious there is no lack of awareness of this call. Let us remember, for example, the remarkable commitment of the Christian community in Japan, after the devastating tsunami of Fukushima, in March 2011. Let us observe the many current forms of solidarity with Ukraine, inside and outside the country. Look at all those who dialogue with members of other religions. The social, charitable, or educational commitments of Christians are very abundant. For fifteen years, in South Sudan, a team of men and women religious from several congregations have been at the service of the population in very difficult conditions and at the risk of their lives.<sup>6</sup> The lay Catholic community, Sant'Egidio, has played an important diplomatic role in resolving international conflicts, praying for peace, and forming persons for peace, especially young people.<sup>7</sup>

## 5. OUR DEFICIENCIES

But we must also recognize the many weaknesses of Christians in this area. The Church is also marked by disengagement, individualism, divisions, lack of communication. This affects, and sometimes limits, her life and her mission. It is often difficult for her to reach the poor, the young, the people in difficulty who do not really feel at home there.

Religious life also shows its weaknesses. To speak only of us, our communities are often too isolated and difficult to access. Our lifestyle isolates us when it is too comfortable, self-sufficient, indifferent to the preservation of our common home. Our social status is intimidating; we are tempted to protect ourselves and keep our distance. The digital and the virtual invade our lives and isolate us and reduce the space dedicated to personal encounters. Spiritual union needs to be strengthened; exchanges of faith between brothers lack frequency. Too often even, divisions arise within communities, with the risk of passing them on to those around us.

Yet it is a reality that the quality of fraternal life is a characteristic of Marianist life. Many perceive this and are grateful to us. We do not need to create it so much as to renew it. To be a ferment of fraternity in society and in the Church, we must be aflame to be sources of radiant and contagious fraternity. This is probably one of the most important missions of religious life today, in our world that has so much need for brotherhood. Let us not be robbed of this mission and this role in the Church and the world. "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot" (Mt 5:13). The Gospel is very demanding!

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://solidarityssudan.org>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.santegidio.org>

## 6. A RENEWED DECISION

The needs of the world and our specific vocation in this area call us to a new commitment to promote a pact of universal brotherhood. This is our profound vocation: to become, according to the expression of Charles de Foucauld, “universal brothers”, to ignite contagious sources of fraternity everywhere.

This decision presupposes choosing a “culture of encounter” (FT 30) and fraternity. That encounter opens the eyes to real life situations that remain engraved in the memory and in the heart.

I remember an old man alone, isolated by age; his armchair was placed facing a bowl of fish, his only daily conversation partners. What loneliness! I also remember a visit to a nice apartment in a big city; there again, an old man alone. His kitchen was cluttered with moldy food scraps; the human distress was palpable. A short time later, I presided over the funeral of this old man in the presence of five people, only one of them from his family. Why didn't you take the time to return to greet this man? This question still haunts me. So many dramas of this type are happening on our doorstep, calling us to give birth to a "culture of encounter" and fraternity...

Without relationships, man withers and dies. In his terrifying autobiographical testimony, *Night*, Elie Wiesel recounts the exodus of deportees between the camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. In their extreme weakness, only those who remained united to the group survived. Any distance immediately caused a mortal danger. The guards pushed the prisoners to such a level of weakness that they gave up trying to help others in order to survive. To annihilate all attention to the other is to destroy what makes us human beings, gifted with relationships, attention, and fraternity. To have experienced that is an indelible humiliation.

## 7. TAKE CARE

In response to indifference and individualism, particularly as a result of the Covid epidemic, the awareness has arisen that we are all called to take care of each other. It requires showing empathy to be able to put ourselves in their place<sup>8</sup> without filtering out what disturbs our tranquility. It is the other who teaches me the correct response to his needs. Then, empathy must be translated into concrete actions, not limited to good feelings. The quality of care is based above all on the depth of the relationship established between the people concerned, it is a reciprocal learning process.<sup>9</sup>

Our communities are called to be places of mutual help. Can we accept and recognize each other, not only as people with valuable talents, but also as vulnerable people who need mutual help?

## 8. TO WHOM DO WE SHOW OURSELVES TO BE A NEIGHBOR?

This is the central question addressed to us by the Pope in the second chapter of *Fratelli Tutti*, through his meditation on the parable of the good Samaritan. It is a reading that challenges our

---

<sup>8</sup> "Caring for someone is...forming a relationship with another that we might never have chosen to know. It's about doing virtually everything we do with the intention of growing in a relationship of respect, listening, presence and truthfulness." Henri J. M. Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Caregiving*, John S. Mogabgab (Editor), (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2011), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> There is “a dimension of reciprocity in the care relationship: the reaction of the other is the criterion for evaluating the “success” or at least the appropriateness of the acts of care. ... [this] introduces reciprocity into the dynamics of care. The giver *needs* the response of the other.” Agata Zielinski, “The ethics of *care*, a new way of taking care,” *Etudes*, 2010/12, p. 635.



conscience and that it is good to revisit. This is consistent with what we know about Jesus' associations. He has always shown himself to be the neighbor of all, and especially of sinners, despite the scandal that he causes:

And as he reclined at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Mt 9, 10-12).

We too are those sinners at whose table our Master came to take his meal. Like him, we must also open our table. This is how we can be a "holy Church of sinners," according to the expression of Yves Congar. We are, in fact, "a holy community of sinners," called to be neighbors to one another through mutual help.

## 9. A PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT IN RESPONSE TO A UNIVERSAL CALL

To open up the space for our commitment to fraternity, we can make the impressive declaration of *Fratelli Tutti* No. 285 our own. This is the *Document on Fraternity and Social Friendship*, the declaration signed on February 4, 2019, in Abu Dhabi by the Grand Imam of Cairo Ahmad Al-Tayeb and Pope Francis:

**FT 285** [...] In the name of God, who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and who has called them to live together as brothers and sisters, to fill the earth and make known the values of goodness, love and peace;

“In the name of innocent human life that God has forbidden to kill, affirming that whoever kills a person is like one who kills the whole of humanity, and that whoever saves a person is like one who saves the whole of humanity;

“In the name of the poor, the destitute, the marginalized and those most in need, whom God has commanded us to help as a duty required of all persons, especially the wealthy and those of means;

“In the name of orphans, widows, refugees and those exiled from their homes and their countries; in the name of all victims of wars, persecution and injustice; in the name of the weak, those who live in fear, prisoners of war and those tortured in any part of the world, without distinction;

“In the name of peoples who have lost their security, peace and the possibility of living together, becoming victims of destruction, calamity and war;

“In the name of *human fraternity*, that embraces all human beings, unites them and renders them equal;

“In the name of this *fraternity* torn apart by policies of extremism and division, by systems of unrestrained profit or by hateful ideological tendencies that manipulate the actions and the future of men and women;

“In the name of freedom, that God has given to all human beings, creating them free and setting them apart by this gift;

“In the name of justice and mercy, the foundations of prosperity and the cornerstone of faith;

“In the name of all persons of goodwill present in every part of the world;

“In the name of God and of everything stated thus far, [we] declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.”

## II. FOLLOWING JESUS OUR BROTHER

The Christian is called to live fraternity in the following of Christ who made himself our brother and, in doing so, made possible new relationships between men. His message and his witness never cease to challenge us and open paths of hope.

### 1. “AND THE WORD BECAME BROTHER”

Through the incarnation, the Son of God made himself one of us, Jesus of Nazareth: he became like men, “being made in human likeness.” (Phil 2:7).

*For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin. (cf. Heb 4:15) (Gaudium et Spes, 22).*

*He wanted redemption to spring, so to speak, from within humanity, as something from itself. Christ wanted to help man, not as a stranger, but as a brother, making himself like him in everything except sin (cf. Heb 4:15).<sup>10</sup>*

Since sin has not touched him, it cannot exercise its habitual power of division in him or through him (cf. Heb 7:26; 9:14).

When Jesus puts blood ties in the background in favor of those created by a righteous life, he opens fraternity to a universal dimension, beyond the natural family. When it is said to him: “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”<sup>48</sup> But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”<sup>49</sup> And pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!<sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt 12:47-50). Bishop Jean-Luc Vesco comments:

*This answer, extremely shocking in appearance but so liberating, commands us to consider as our brothers and our sisters all those who do good, whatever their religion, or their absence of religion.<sup>11</sup>*

---

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, Mass at Ephesus, November 30, 1979, § 2.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Luc Vesco, O.P., *Construire la fraternité*, pastoral letter, (Oran, Algeria: 2021), p. 12.

For Jesus, openness to fraternity is universal, without preferences or limits. He expresses it by his words and by his deeds. Christian de Chergé summarized this in an expressive formula: “The Word became brother.”<sup>12</sup>

## 2. FRATERNITY IS AT THE HEART OF HIS TEACHING

This is the appeal he addresses to his disciples: “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (Jn 13:35). Fraternity manifests itself in caring for others, especially the little ones, as the final judgment will reveal: “*just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me*” (Mt 25). Here too, the way is open to all since no criterion of belonging to a religious group is mentioned in the text. Brotherly love is a universal path to reach God. Saint John of the Cross summed it up in a famous sentence: “In the evening of our life, we will be judged on love” (*Dichos de luz y amor*, 59).

### *Jesus teaches brotherhood through his own testimony of life*

He allows himself to be approached by all and dialogues with all: rich, poor, religious leaders, simple believers, sinners or possessed persons, and even an army centurion (Lk 7:2-9). It is particularly striking and unusual, in the context of the Judaism of his time, that he welcomed among his disciples a whole group of women. They were “many” and “followed him from Galilee” at the time of the Passion (Mt 27:56-57); a whole group of them were with him during his mission (Lk 8:2-3). Many women were the object of his attention, of his words, of his gratitude, often through healing (Lk 4:38-39; 7:11-15; 13:11-12; ...).

He frees himself from traditional limits and allows himself to be approached by a prostitute (Lk 7:37-38) or converses at length with a Samaritan woman (Jn 4) or a Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7:24-31). He approaches the sick and heals them, the possessed and frees them. He speaks to everyone, listens, approaches, and touches. He eats with his friends Lazarus, Mary and Martha, but also at the table with sinners. In all of this is revealed the closeness of Christ to every human being.

## 3. A COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES

From the beginning of his mission, Jesus forms a community of disciples whom he freely chooses and calls. In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, it is his first action, as soon as he begins preaching (Mk 1:16-20; Mt 4:17-23). The teaching of Christ is not simply a theory but it is meant to be lived and practiced. In this community, the disciples are called to listen to his teaching, to understand it and to put it into practice; they will also have to teach it to others. The reception and transmission of the teaching of Jesus are linked from the outset to an intense communitarian fraternal experience. The criteria that governed the choice of the disciples escapes us. What characterizes above all the community of the disciples is its diversity of ages, professions, temperaments, religious sensitivity. These men are only together because of the call received and then the sending on a mission. There is nothing monochromatic here, no prior selection based on a common sensitivity or pre-selected apostolic choices. This is a strong message for us.

The human composition of the community of disciples will be the source of many difficulties that the evangelists have the great merit of not hiding from us. Jesus will have to call them to order more than once. He is saddened to see that they are so slow to understand (Mk 7:18; 8:18;

---

<sup>12</sup> Blessed Christian de Chergé, Prior of Tibhirine, *Homélie du Jeudi Saint 1995*, <https://www.abbaye-echourgnac.org/prier/le-temps-liturgique/la-semaine-sainte.html>.

Lk 24:25; ...), that differences and rivalries disunite them or that their faith is so weak (Mk 9:19; 16:14; ...).

#### 4. SERVANTS OF EACH OTHER

Jesus calls his disciples to follow him especially in the way of service, renouncing their personal worldly ambitions. “*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.*<sup>26</sup> *It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant*” (Mt 20:25-26). The distinctive sign of the disciples of Christ is service, but it is also brotherly love, one expressing the other. At the same time as Jesus declares that “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (Jn 13:35), he also invites them to become servants to one another.

The culmination of this journey occurs on Holy Thursday, with the experience of the Eucharist and the washing of the feet. Both gifts are definitive and called to endure simultaneously in the community. He said to them, “<sup>14</sup>*So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.* <sup>15</sup>*For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.* (Jn 13:14b-15). It's all in these words. The call is launched to follow Jesus in the radical gift of his life, and to “love to the end” (Jn 13:1), like he did, expressing it through the gesture of mutual service. Service simultaneously unites the disciples to each other and to Christ: his love is the deep source of their unity.

#### 5. TO BE A SIGN AND A PATH OF UNITY

The community receives and embodies the teaching delivered by Jesus. It is like a laboratory for experimenting with this new message which is thus made visible not only in the person of Jesus but also in those who listen to it and put it into practice. This small community becomes, despite its obvious limitations, a sign for others. It is like a prefiguration of what will be the Church which is “in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). The community of Jesus' disciples foreshadows this, in a still hidden way. The religious community, like any Christian community, also expresses something of this reality. It is also a mission: modestly, but really, through the union of brothers, to work for the unity of the human race and for its union with God. The community is, at its own level, a sign and means of union and unity. It is, at the heart of the world, a seed of universal brotherhood.

#### 6. LIKE HIM

Let us conclude this reflection with the words of Blessed Christian de Chergé, commenting on the founding moment of the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus:

*He loved me to the extreme, the extreme of me, the extreme of him... (...)*

*He loved me as I do not know how to love: this simplicity, this forgetfulness of self, this humble and ungratifying service, without any self-love. (...)*

*here he is at my feet (...)*

*Here he is passing on to the feet of the men and women who are my neighbors, and of Judas himself, (...)*

*He loved his people to the extreme, all his people, they are all his, each as unique, a multitude of unique persons.*

*God so loved human beings that He gave them his Unique One: and the Word became BROTHER, brother of Abel and also of Cain, brother of Isaac and*

*Ishmael at the same time, brother of Joseph and of the eleven others who sold him, brother of the plain and brother of the mountain, brother of Peter, of Judas and of both in me.*

*The Hour has come for God to learn what it costs to enter into brotherhood. An only son he came (from God). Brother to the infinity of men, he returns to God, leading the multitude to the extreme of the Only One.*

*It's an example that I gave you: the lesson of things is there, on the table, with this bread and this cup to share, but the Master's book is this gesture of servant heart and body delivered, there, from foot to foot, from brother to brother, to engrave it in memory.*

*“My brother and my sister, and my mother, these are the ones who will do to the youngest of my brothers what I have done to you there.”*

**There is nothing purer from now on than a multitude of brothers loving each more and more to the extreme of patience and compassion, so that none of those may be lost whom JESUS, our brother, offers tonight to his Father like his own Body and his own Blood.<sup>13</sup>**

### **III. CONSECRATED LIFE: A STORY OF FRATERNITY**

Religious are “experts in communion”: they “are called to be an ecclesial community in the Church and in the world, witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design. ... they are a sign of fraternal fellowship.”<sup>14</sup>

The expertise of religious in this area is the fruit of their nearly two-thousand-year-old history. Let us be enlightened and inspired by the example of some of our predecessors.

#### **1. STORIES**

##### **a. Pachomius and Augustine: fraternity at the source of monastic life**

Already at the beginning of the 4th century, Pachomius, one of the initiators of cenobitic life, emphasized the service to the brother in his communities. A Roman soldier, still pagan, he was taken prisoner in Egypt, with other companions. Christians came to their aid and fed and cared for them, completely gratuitously, simply in the name of their faith in Jesus Christ. This testimony of fraternal love overwhelmed Pachomius; that was the origin of his conversion and then of his choice to live first as a hermit, then in community with those who came to join him. The rule that he wrote for them integrates the service of the brother, obedience to a superior, a sign of unity, and proposes the pooling of goods as a sign of fraternity and for the service of the poor. For him, fraternal life is a *koinonia*, a communion.

**Augustine** put fraternal charity at the heart of his life and his action. He wanted to reunite the Christian community wounded by doctrinal divisions and heresies. His remarkable commentary on the first Letter of Saint John seeks to contribute to this by calling for union through charity. He cannot conceive of his activity as bishop without the support of a fraternal community. The *Rule* he wrote in 397 synthesizes the lived experience and describes its ideal. It contains a strong appeal to fraternal life. It opens as follows: "The first thing for which you are gathered in one

---

<sup>13</sup> Blessed Christian de Chergé, Prior of Tibhirine, *Homélie du Jeudi Saint 1995*, <https://www.abbaye-echourgnac.org/prier/le-temps-liturgique/la-semaine-sainte.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life [CICLSAL], *Fraternal Life in Community*, 1994, No. 10.

[Ps 132] is to live together at home and to have one soul and one heart [Acts 4:32] stretched out towards God.”<sup>15</sup> The fraternal harmony of the brothers in the community is destined to provoke that of the Church by contagion, as the community of Jerusalem had done in the nascent Church.

### **b. Benedict: Service of God and of the brothers**

**Benedict** also strongly emphasizes the importance of community and brotherly love. Like Pachomius, he passed from an eremitic life to a cenobitic life under the influence of the disciples who came to join him. For Benedict, the community – the monastery – is a “school of service to the Lord”<sup>16</sup> where the brothers help each other to faithfully put into practice the teaching of Christ. We find this same idea, in his spirit, in our *Rule* at Articles 39 to 41. The abbot watches over his brothers and helps them to respond to the call received. He helps them to fight against their “evil inclinations,” with prudence and love, in a way adapted to each one.

<sup>8</sup> *The abbot knows ... that he must be a servant rather than a master.*<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *He always puts tenderness before justice (James 2:13), so that God might treat him in the same way (Cf. Mt 5:7).*

<sup>11</sup> *He hates evil inclinations, but he loves the brothers.*

<sup>12</sup> *When he corrects others, he is careful. He does not exaggerate anything; otherwise, by scraping the rust too much, he will puncture the dish.*

<sup>13</sup> *He never forgets that he is fragile, too. He remembers not to crush the reed already split (Mt 12:20).*

<sup>15</sup> *The abbot will seek to be loved by the brothers rather than to be feared.*

<sup>16</sup> *He is not restless, he is not worried. He does not exaggerate things, he is not stubborn. He is not jealous and he knows how to trust the brothers. Otherwise, he will never know rest.*

Benedict draws attention to the value of daily fraternal service through ordinary tasks. The chapter on cooks (RB 35) is a good example.

<sup>1</sup> *Brothers will serve one another. So no one will be exempted from the service of the kitchen (...).* <sup>2</sup> *Indeed, this service increases the reward and makes love grow.* <sup>6</sup> *all the other brothers will serve each other with love.* <sup>9</sup> *The cook who ends the week and the brother who is about to start it also wash everyone's feet.*

<sup>15</sup> *On Sunday, immediately after Lauds, the cooks who are about to begin their week of service and those who have finished it kneel down before everyone in the oratory, and they ask the brothers to pray for them.* <sup>18</sup> *The New Cook Gets a Blessing, Then He Starts the Week.*

For this service, he is also asked to take care of the "serving utensils." They will be clean and in good condition. (RB 35,10). It is also said to the cellarer: “All the objects of the monastery and all its goods he regards as the sacred vessels of the altar” (RB 31,10). The service of the brother joins that of God. “*For the whole community he will be like a father.*”<sup>3</sup> *He will take care of all.* Goods are at the service of the fraternity and must therefore be cared for accordingly.

Another remarkable aspect of the Benedictine fraternity is the reception of the stranger (RB 53):

<sup>1</sup> *All arriving guests will be received as Christ. Indeed, he himself will say: “I was a guest and you received me” (Mt 25:35).*

---

<sup>15</sup> Translation quoted by Dominique Nau, O.P., “Une approche de la théologie de la vie monastique augustinienne à travers la Règle,” in *Vies Consacrées*, (Bruxelles:1998), No. 4, p. 235.

<sup>16</sup> Rule of Saint Benedict (RB): Prologue, No. 45.

<sup>17</sup> RB 64, like all the following verses.

<sup>2</sup> *They are all received with the respect due to everyone, especially Christian brothers and strangers (Gal 6:10).*

<sup>3</sup> *This is why, as soon as the arrival of a guest is announced, the superior and the brothers go to meet him with all the honor that love inspires. (...)*

<sup>7</sup> *We bow our heads or prostrate ourselves on the ground to adore in them the Christ whom we receive.*

<sup>8</sup> *After this welcome, the guests are led to prayer. Then the superior or the brother he sends sits down with them.*

<sup>9</sup> *One reads the law of God before the guest, to do him good. Then, we give him all the marks of hospitality.*

<sup>12</sup> *The abbot pours water on the hands of the hosts.*

<sup>13</sup> *With the whole community, the abbot washes the feet of all the guests.*

<sup>14</sup> *After the washing of the feet, we say this verse: “God, we have received your tenderness in your holy house” (Ps 47,10).*

<sup>15</sup> *The poor and foreigners are received with the greatest care and attention. Indeed, it is above all through them that we receive Christ.*

Benedict presents a true mystique of hospitality. It is Christ who is welcomed, especially in the poor and the stranger.

The penultimate article of the *Rule* (RB 72) reaffirms the importance of fraternal relations. This location, just before the conclusion of the *Rule*, is far from trivial:

<sup>4</sup> *Everyone will want to be the first to show respect to their brother.*

<sup>5</sup> *[the brothers] will bear with great patience the weaknesses of others, those of body and those of character.*

<sup>6</sup> *They will obey one another wholeheartedly.*

<sup>7</sup> *No one will seek his own interest, but rather that of others.*

<sup>8</sup> *They will love one another without selfishness, like brothers of one family.*

<sup>9</sup> *They will respect God with love.*

<sup>10</sup> *They will have a humble and sincere love for their abbot.*

<sup>11</sup> *They will prefer absolutely nothing to Christ.*

These admirable texts deserve to be meditated upon by confronting them with our experience. They are a synthesis of wisdom that Benedict himself received from his predecessors, enriching them with his own experience. They offer deep and rich motivations.

### **c. Francis of Assisi: an evangelizing fraternity**

Much later, Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) responded to the new challenges of his time. The Franciscans are preachers, living more in contact with the city. Fraternity opens the hearts of those to whom the brother is sent, through simplicity, a peaceful attitude or detachment from possessions, a source of freedom.

Francis achieved the miracle of a meeting with Sultan Malik-el-Kamil, in Egypt, in 1219, while the Fifth Crusade was underway. He favored dialogue over confrontation. Through that episode, Francis teaches us that fraternity also requires taking risks. It is not the virtue of weak people, but on the contrary requires a lot of inner strength. Francis had to overcome his fears and those of all the persons who advised him against making such a trip; the inner call and his own discernment were stronger than those powerful restraints. Often fear drives people away and provokes violence. People are rejected or mistreated because of the fear they inspire. Their

power, their number, their difference in appearance are enough for this, in addition to the irrationality of personal or collective fears. Anti-Semitism is a tragic past and present example of this. This type of prejudice or fear makes brotherhood difficult or even impossible.<sup>18</sup> With us, it happens that the meeting of two people, sometimes of two brothers, is made impossible by the prejudices and fears they have about each other. Saint Francis teaches us to overcome this by listening to a deeper call.

The Franciscan fraternity asks to renounce any form of power over the other. It is the opposite of violence and intimidation. Its strength is the weakness that allows it to disarm the aggressiveness of the other. This is the fundamental attitude of non-violence. It was the strength of the young man who knew how to stop the tanks in Tian-an-men Square on June 5, 1989, by standing in front of one of them, defenseless; his example continues to arouse admiration and provoke emulation.

Francis, remarked the Pope, went to meet the Sultan with the same attitude that he instilled in his disciples: if they found themselves “among the Saracens and other nonbelievers”, without renouncing their own identity they were not to “engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake.”<sup>19</sup> This is a Franciscan attitude that has become a universal path.

#### **d. Multiple paths**

Religious fraternity will find other fields of realization in active orders or congregations. It is particularly expressed in the service provided by each of these foundations. St. John of God, Louise de Marillac, and Camille de Lellis assist the sick; Vincent de Paul,<sup>20</sup> Mother Cabrini, Mother Theresa of Calcutta served the poor; Joseph Calasanz, Angela Merici, Elizabeth Seton, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle or Marcellin Champagnat educated poor children; Jean-Joseph Lataste visited prisoners; Damien Veuster and Marianne Cope treated lepers in Molokai; Daniel Comboni and François Libermann defended the dignity of the poor in Africa and fought against remaining forms of slavery. These are all paths of fraternity offered to us as examples and inspirations.

#### **e. Charles de Foucauld, the "universal brother"**

Charles de Foucauld, canonized recently, opens fraternity to the universal. Through it, the Christian makes present the gratuitous friendship of Christ for all persons and evangelizes human relations. *Fratelli tutti* repeatedly presents Charles de Foucauld as a source of inspiration for our time. Let's listen to him:

---

<sup>18</sup> Father Joseph Wresinski, founder of the ATD-Quart-Monde movement wrote: “we are afraid, we are afraid of the poor; the poor who are on our doorstep can talk to us about freedom with much more intensity, I was almost going to say “truthfully.” But we don't hear them because at the start, we are afraid, we are afraid of them, we believe that they carry hatred when they only carry despair.” Joseph Wresinski, Interview, in: *Revue Quart-monde*, 240, 2016/4, p. 54 (<https://www.revue-quartmonde.org/6759>).

<sup>19</sup> FT 3, which specifies in a note that the quotation is from Francis of Assisi, *Rule non bullata* of the Friars Minor, 16, 3.6.

<sup>20</sup> Vincent de Paul wrote: “We must make [his] feelings our own and do what Jesus did: care for the poor, serve the poor, comfort them, succor them, help them. He himself wanted to be born poor, to welcome the poor among his friends, to serve the poor, to put himself in the place of the poor, to the point of saying that the good or the bad that we do to the poor he considers as done to his own divine person. God loves the poor and therefore loves those who love the poor. In fact, when we love someone very much, we have affection for his friends and his servants. So we have reason to hope that, out of love for them, God will love us, too.” Vincent de Paul, Letter 2546, *Correspondence, entrevues, documents*, Paris 1922-1925, VII. This letter is quoted in part at the Office of Readings for the Memorial of Saint Vincent on September 27.



*Our whole life, however mute it may be, ... must be a preaching of the Gospel, not by preaching it by mouth but by preaching it by example, not by announcing it but by living it.*

*Every Christian must be an apostle: [...] - To be an apostle, by what means? [...] by kindness, tenderness, fraternal affection, the example of virtue, by humility and gentleness always attractive and so Christian; with some without ever telling them a word of God or religion, patient as God is patient, being good as God is good, loving, being a tender brother and praying; with others, talking about God as far as they can bear it. . . Above all, to see a brother in every human - "you are all brothers, you have one father who is in heaven" - to see in every human a child of God, a soul redeemed by the blood of JESUS, a soul loved by JESUS, a soul whom we must love as ourselves and for whose salvation we must work. . . What a great distance is there between the way of doing and speaking of JESUS and . . . of those who . . . see enemies who must be fought, instead of seeing sick brothers who must be cared for, the wounded lying on the roadway, for whom you have to be good Samaritans.<sup>21</sup>*

Through his own experience, he understands how much the negative attitude of Christians in the Muslim world makes it difficult for those who do not share this faith to have their religion respected.

*What are we doing for evangelism . . . ? We can say: nothing. Do not seek for a long time to make conversions, but to love, to be good, to be virtuous, to make close contact with the Tuaregs...*

*But if these unfortunate Muslims do not know any priest, see as so-called Christians only unjust, tyrannical, harsh exploiters, setting an example of vice, how will they convert, how will they not hate our Holy Religion? . . . how will they not be more and more our enemies? (Letter of December 11, 1912).*

He also writes in his personal notes: "*My apostolate must be the apostolate of goodness. Seeing me, one must say to oneself: "Since this man is so good, his religion must be good."*<sup>22</sup>

In conclusion to *Fratelli Tutti* (FT 287), the Pope says, about Charles de Foucauld: "he wanted... to be 'the universal brother.'<sup>23</sup> But it was only by identifying himself with the least that he succeeded in becoming the brother of all. May God inspire that dream in each one of us."

Christian brotherhood is by nature universal, as is that of Christ, open to all. It leads us to ever larger spaces. It cannot limit itself to a selective circle, abandoning others. It leads us to venture beyond our comfort zone, where the announcement will be more uncertain and probably less easily received.

Only when the last, the farthest has been joined, can brotherhood be considered truly universal. Thus, Fr. Joseph Wresinski, founder of the ATD-Fourth World [*Agir Tous pour la Dignité*] movement, thought that the access of the poorest to the presidential palace of his country or to the Vatican could be the real sign that all have effectively become capable of entering it.<sup>24</sup> It is in following a similar idea that the Pope first visits the most remote places, thereby reaching all of humanity.

---

<sup>21</sup> Charles de Foucauld, *Letter to Joseph Hours*, Tamanrasset, May 3, 1912.

<sup>22</sup> Idem, *Notebooks of Tamanrasset*, p. 188.

<sup>23</sup> The expression is found in a letter of January 7, 1902, to Madame de Bondy, his cousin.

<sup>24</sup> "When we asked him how he had been able to become a priest himself despite the extreme poverty of his family, he said: "[I] had the chance to meet in (my) life priests who were real priests because they had put, I was going to say, on the pediment of their presbytery: 'Here any man who presents himself is welcomed, any man who presents himself is a brother.'" Wresinski, "Interview," in: *Revue Quart-monde*, 240, 2016/4, p.54 (<https://www.revue-quartmonde.org/6759>).

## 2. MAKE VISIBLE THE FACE OF CHRIST THE BROTHER

The community of Brothers manifests in that way the universality of the brotherhood begun by Christ, for it is not based on natural bonds but on the power of the Holy Spirit, living principle of love among human beings. Authentic community life represents a living sign of the essential reality that the Brothers have to announce. The love that God has shown to humanity in Jesus Christ becomes a uniting principle for human beings among each other: "May they be one so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). Building on faith, the community makes real the ministry of revealing the love of the Triune God by means of the communion that reigns in it.<sup>25</sup>

Making visible the love of God and the face of Christ the Brother is the mission of religious life.<sup>26</sup> It contributes to this by its very structure. Let's look at a few aspects that contribute to this.

### a. The vows, path of fraternity

The fraternity of consecrated persons is not expressed solely by the quality of their human relationships. It is also intimately linked to the vows that characterize it.<sup>27</sup> By basing ourselves in particular on what our *Rule* says about it, it is easy to perceive it. Let us contemplate the vows as a path to others.

**Poverty** has a strong fraternal dimension since "We form a new family, based on the gospel of the Lord, in which we share in common . . ." (RL 35; cf. Acts 4:32b). The pooling of goods is at the root of fraternal life. Thus, as stated in the Acts: "There was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34a). Poverty helps us to free ourselves from an egocentric use of goods to share them among ourselves and with those who lack them and thus make them an instrument of

---

<sup>25</sup> Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life [CICLSAL], *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, 2015, No. 21.

<sup>27</sup> 15. (...) In every time and place consecrated persons show their contemporaries the traits of Jesus with which he himself had made clear that the mystery of the Kingdom of God had broken into history. Visibility is achieved by a way of being present which reveals the charism of each religious family in the *here and now*. Therefore consecrated people should frequently ask themselves how to be witnesses of the Lord today. What kind of presence should we live so that the Lord Jesus can be seen, experienced, by people today? Consecrated life is called to be "a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren." In particular, the Religious Brother, and also the Religious Sister, make visible in the Church the face of brother Christ, "*firstborn among many brothers*" (Rom 8:29), creator of a new brotherhood which he established with his teaching and with his life. [Library: Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church | Catholic Culture](#)

<sup>28</sup> CICLSAL, *Fraternal life in community*, 1994, No. 10. "As experts in communion, religious are, therefore, called to be an ecclesial community in the Church and in the world, witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design. Above all, by profession of the evangelical counsels, which frees one from what might be an obstacle to the fervour of charity, religious are communally a prophetic sign of intimate union with God, who is loved above all things. Furthermore, through the daily experience of communion of life, prayer and apostolate -- the essential and distinctive elements of their form of consecrated life -- they are a sign of fraternal fellowship. In fact, in a world frequently very deeply divided and before their brethren in the faith, they give witness to the possibility of a community of goods, of fraternal love, of a programme of life and activity which is theirs because they have accepted the call to follow more closely and more freely Christ the Lord who was sent by the Father so that, firstborn among many brothers and sisters, he might establish a new fraternal fellowship in the gift of his Spirit."

internal and external fraternity (cf. RL 27-28). It reveals “the universal destination of the world’s goods” (cf. LS 158).

**Chastity** has an obvious fraternal dimension. Fraternal love will “strengthen our apostolic dedication” (RL 38). It is a source of availability (RL 2.2). We want our heart to be “a rich source ... of unselfish, universal love” (RL 18), especially for our brothers (RL 21), for the poor (RL 27) or for young people.<sup>28</sup>

Without **obedience** there can be no brotherhood. Obedience makes it possible to unify hearts around the same objective which is no longer mine, but that which has been given to us as a community, Unit, congregation, Church. Through obedience, I enter into this greater and common reality which allows me to come out of my narcissistic vision of life, to give myself to the community, to the Society of Mary (RL 29) and to “overcome selfishness” (RL 31).

In *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope affirms that *“Today there is a tendency to claim ever broader individual – I am tempted to say individualistic – rights. Underlying this is a conception of the human person as detached from all social and anthropological contexts, as if the person were a “monad” (monás), increasingly unconcerned with others... Unless the rights of each individual are harmoniously ordered to the greater good, those rights will end up being considered limitless and consequently will become a source of conflicts and violence”* (FT 111). The vow of obedience helps us to free ourselves from a possible tyranny of the “I” to make ourselves available to all the calls received.

Because “Through our vows, we take up a way of life like that of Jesus and Mary” (RL 16), we follow in their footsteps, on a path of progressive conversion, imitating their fraternity and letting ourselves be challenged and inspired by it.

## **b. The superior, servant of the fraternity**

Fraternity is embodied in the structures that govern the community. It needs those points of support which are born of experience.

From the origins of monastic life, Pachomius understood the need for a superior to guide his brothers and as an instrument of unity. Without it, the strongest will prevail, without allowing the rich diversity of the community to express itself. The superior sees to it that everyone takes his place in the community. The proper exercise of authority is a source of peace, harmony, and unity. In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer comments with insight on the account of the rivalry of the disciples of Jesus: “Now a thought came into their minds, to know which of them was the greatest” (Lk 9:46):

*We do not know enough that no Christian community can be formed without this thought immediately arising as the seed of division. As soon as men are together, they must begin to observe each other, to judge each other, to regulate each other. It follows that, from the beginning, a Christian community can become the scene of a terrible struggle, which decides its life or its death, but which remains invisible and often unconscious. “Now a thought came into their minds...” - that is enough to destroy the community. Any Christian community will therefore understand that it is vital for it to be able, from the first moment, to face the enemy who threatens it, in order to exterminate it. (...)  
Here are gifted people and people without talents, simple people and complicated people, pious people and less pious people, sociable people and individualists: will they not seek from the outset to ensure their respective positions to the*

---

<sup>28</sup>According to Article 259 of the *Constitutions* of 1839, when a brother is called upon to form pupils, then “however numerous they may be, he expands his heart to make them enter there and carry them there unceasingly.”

*detriment of others, and to impose their way of being? You wouldn't have to be a man not to instinctively seek to occupy a safe and defensive position in relation to others, for which you will fight with all your might, and which you will not want to give up at any price. This tendency to assert itself can assume the most courteous and pious forms, it is nevertheless important that a community clearly realizes that at every moment it finds itself in the situation described by the words: "A thought came into their minds, to know which of them was the greatest." The most effective means of combating our harmful thoughts is to absolutely refuse to speak to them.*<sup>29</sup>

In the Gospel, Jesus reverses this attempt by speaking of service, the only path of the disciple of Christ. The superior is a true servant of the fraternity.

### **c. The community meeting, an exercise in communion**

The community meeting is especially important for building unity and brotherhood. It is an essential time for sharing, discerning and building, and also for repairing or reconciling. It makes it possible to tackle difficult questions with more freedom than in an informal way: without this framework, certain debates can easily degenerate into personal conflicts or opposition between factions. It is everywhere and always necessary that it take place on a regular and fairly frequent basis, in a form adapted to the reality of the community. Informal exchanges do not replace it.

Its effectiveness is linked to its good organization: clarity of the agenda, respect of schedules, minutes, circulation of speech, etc. But it must above all be a moment of meeting for all, allowing information, reflection-formation, discernment, by opening a real sharing of each one on his joys, his worries or his aspirations.

Article 68 of the *Rule* mentions: “. . . the community as such should always be a unified apostolic body, which supports, guides, and evaluates the work of each member.” We too rarely use this opportunity to make the community a place of discernment.<sup>30</sup> Other articles encourage this:

*42. Under the guidance of superiors, important directives for community life are determined after a sincere effort by all the members to discern the will of God through prayer and discussion. This process of discernment is sometimes painful, but it will succeed in the measure that the members are mature and remain open to the Lord as he speaks through their brothers.*

*6.18. Community conferences and meetings ... may ... take the form of a meeting in which the members of the community share group or individual concerns in order to discern God's will and to formulate community goals, policies, and programs of action.*

The dynamism of our life plays out in particular in the realization of these calls. In such a changing era, if we do not know how to reread our life and adapt it to current calls, then we will content ourselves with repeating what we have always done, or else we will let ourselves be carried away by current fashions or by each one's personal ideas. What is at stake here is whether or not each of our communities can be guided by the Spirit and respond to its calls in a creative way, in accordance with its mission and our tradition, echoing the word of God heard together and the situations experienced. Our fruitfulness and our present and future *raison d'être*

---

<sup>29</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *De la vie communautaire*, (Paris: Delachaux and Niestlé, 1968), pp. 91-92.

<sup>30</sup> Article 2.23 of our *Rule* supports this dimension: “Each member should submit activities for which he is personally responsible to the advice and evaluation of his superiors and fellow Brothers. Community meetings and regular interviews with the director facilitate this accountability.”

are played out particularly on this point. Are we giving it due attention? When do we discern in community? A community that is content to do its duty will not be radiant, unlike a community that allows itself to be guided by the Spirit. May the example of Mary inspire us, as she "treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." (Lk 2:19; cf. Lk 2:59b).

One of the most important fruits of this reflection is the community mission project, which guides the life and mission of all its members and serves as a common point of reference for them. It is the sign that the community really feels in a state of mission in response to its context of life and to the calls it receives there. This project allows everyone to review his own life and to evaluate and then adjust its practical implementations. For this, it is a real community cement, a major instrument of fraternity. As is verified by experience, the absence of such a project runs the risk of leading each member to seek his way independently, which will cause the loss of the strength of common action and witness.

The community meeting is also a space for dialogue when tensions or conflicts arise. That difficulties can be discussed together is a sign of maturity. Article 3.10 of the *Rule* recalls that "*We are a community of men marked by sin, with its consequences of discord, division, and selfishness in all its forms.*" So, in addition to the fraternal correction which makes it possible to struggle with *our individual and collective weakness, . . . We make suggestions for our collective improvement during community meetings. . .*" Dialogue makes it possible "*to create a many-faceted polyhedron*" that is also a community. "*A polyhedron can represent a society [a community] where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements... Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable*" (FT 215).

In all this, we must remember the strength of our fraternal witness because "*The community itself is a primary instrument to fulfill our mission. We know that the quality of our life has greater impact than our words. Therefore together we seek ways to bear living witness to our shared faith*" (RL 67). "*We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together!*" (FT 8).

## IV. MARIANIST PATHS OF FRATERNITY

Fellowship has a special flavor for us Marianists, we have our own motivations in favor of it and we particularly emphasize some of its aspects. This is what we are called to, but also what we offer according to our sensitivity. It is therefore a responsibility that is specific to us and to which we must be particularly attentive.

### 1. AN EVANGELIZING FRATERNITY

From the origins of our Family, great importance has been given to fraternity. Blessed Chaminade highlighted it particularly as one of the constituent dimensions of Christian life. He especially emphasized its importance for evangelization. A fraternal community evangelizes each of its members, at the same time as it attracts and convinces those who are not yet part of it, thanks to the "contagion ... of example."<sup>31</sup> It facilitates the mutual formation of the members, and it evangelizes through its witness. These aspects appear frequently in the writings of the founder.

*Although collective perfection essentially results from individual perfection, it is still true that the esprit de corps contributes admirably to the support, progress*

---

<sup>31</sup> W. J. Chaminade, Letter 89, March 19, 1817 to Mother de Trenquelléon, Agen.

*and perfection of the entire Society through the interest it inspires for one another among the individuals, so that the resulting harmony and edification may never be lacking.*<sup>32</sup>

The spirit of zeal and propagation. *In the old sodalities about the only concern was supporting pious Christians in the right paths by means of mutual edification. But in this century, at the moment of renewal in which we find ourselves, religion requires something else of its children. It wants all of them, together, to second the zeal of its ministers and, guided by their prudence, to work at restoring it. This is the spirit which the new sodalities take care to cultivate. Each director is a permanent missionary; each Sodality, a perpetual mission.*<sup>33</sup>

*... a few men may indeed be religious and upright. But separated and isolated, they will provide a very weak example compared to the needs of all young men who are, so to speak, surrounded by a massive collection of dangers.*<sup>34</sup>

*It is of little value for a single person to appear virtuous. Usually, it will be said of him that he is beyond imitation. . . . Only a group of virtuous men can lessen or dispel this unfortunate prejudice . . . If the gathering is large and numerous, it will attract all the more attention; it will open more doors to those who are asking what religion is all about.*<sup>35</sup>

In 1804, from the château of Trenquelléon, the young Adèle launched the project of the *Little Society* which brought together young women with a view to supporting them in Christian life and making them missionaries. The convergence of views led this group to unite in 1808 with the Sodality of Bordeaux. Here again, friendship and fraternity were at the heart of the project of life and missionary action of the *Little Society*.

*Let us ...help each other to win hearts for Jesus Christ and his holy Mother!*<sup>36</sup>

10 ° - *Each associate will choose as mentor in the ways of the Lord her best friend, the one in whom she has the most confidence. They will point out their failings and support one another in correcting them.*

11 ° - *Each associate will, as much as possible, seek out another young woman, trying to win her over to God and inspiring her with the desire to serve him and to save herself.*<sup>37</sup>

*How thankful I should be to God for giving me friends whose examples and advice can contribute to my sanctification.*<sup>38</sup>

*Oh, may this friendship serve to promote the love of God in us. Let us bind ourselves to God for life and be his completely.*<sup>39</sup>

*Let us adopt the motto of St. Ignatius: "For the greater glory of God!" Our Society should be totally devoted to it.*

---

<sup>32</sup> Idem, "The Institute of the Society of Mary," *The Chaminade Legacy* [CL] VII.18 [2] (in "Cahier D", traditionally dated between 1828 and 1838).

<sup>33</sup> Idem, "Answer to the Objections Usually Raised against Sodalities...", CL I.154 [9-10].

<sup>34</sup> "Instruction for Chief Officers of Divisions," CL I-43, [32-33].

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, [34-36].

<sup>36</sup> Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, Letter 97, March 15, 1809 to Agathe Diché.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, "Rule of the 'Little Society,'" *Letters*, Vol. I, 324-26.

<sup>38</sup> Idem, 21, September 26, 1805, to Agathe Diché.

<sup>39</sup> Idem, Letter 99, April 11, 1809, to Agathe Diché.

*Let us try to procure this glory by all the means in our power. Let our devotion be meek and loving; let us reform our characters so as to draw all hearts to Jesus Christ.*<sup>40</sup>

## 2. IMITATE THE COMMUNITY OF JERUSALEM

The first community of Christians, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, was a fairly frequent reference among religious communities. In particular, it inspired the model of community life that Saint Augustine proposed and then codified in his *Rule*, a *Rule* used in a large number of orders and congregations including the numerous Dominican foundations, the Premonstratensians, the men and women Assumptionists, ... This reference is therefore far from being unique in religious life.

This ancient testimony also fascinated Fr. Chaminade. It is found in his writings on numerous occasions and at all stages of his foundations. Thus, in 1806, still in the first period of establishment of lay Marian Sodalities, he wrote:

*The union of the first Christians and that which must ought to exist among sodalists, are both founded on charity. Charity is both the principle and the bond of such union. Its model is the very union of the three adorable Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.*

*This union of spirit and hearts in some way makes of all souls a single soul in different bodies. It allows Christians, in their assemblies on earth, to have a foretaste of that happiness of the Blessed...*<sup>41</sup>

The same reference is found more than thirty years later, in the *Constitutions* of 1839:

131. *The name of Brother which the religious give to one another expresses but imperfectly the union and charity that should exist among them. The Holy Spirit gives testimony to the first Christians that they had one Heart and one soul. All that is implied in the Rule of the religious on this point is contained in these two words.*

The call to have "**one heart and soul**," like the first disciples (Acts 4:32), is present in these two references and in many others throughout these years. This is one of Fr. Chaminade's favorite quotes to exhort his followers. Even if the line of tradition is not assured, we know that the formula was already used by the Jesuit Marian Sodalities, those which Fr. Chaminade was conscious of following when he founded the Marian Sodalities of Bordeaux.

On a more general level, Blessed Chaminade placed great importance on **unity**. On January 4, 1834, he wrote to his brothers: ". . . we shall prosper, if we always remain intimately united and if you are all really regular.... Let us all work together, my dear children, in perfecting our Society."<sup>42</sup> And he also warns: "*the spirit of disunion can be the ruin of the Society and of several of the members who have provoked it.*"<sup>43</sup> In fact, and particularly at the time of this letter, the divisions had been significant. For him, unity was a condition not only favorable, but even necessary because it allows members to encourage each other<sup>44</sup> but also to testify to the

---

<sup>40</sup> Idem, Letter 105, June 15, 1809, to Agathe Diché.

<sup>41</sup> W. J. Chaminade, *Concerning the Sodalities under The Title of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, The Mother of God*, 1806, CL I-58 [5].

<sup>42</sup> Idem, Letter 720 January 4, 1834 – Circular for the Entire Society.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, Letter 555, October 25, 1830, to M. Lalanne, at St-Remy.

<sup>44</sup> This is the motivation he presented, in 1819, to the parish priest of Libourne to convince him to accept the foundation in his parish of a Marian Sodality of lay people. He wrote: "it is necessary to announce to the faithful the necessity or the very great need of their remaining united, so as to keep themselves on the right path. They will find in union the power which Jesus Christ has promised to those who would be gathered in his name." Letter 119–To Father Rouquet, Pastor of Libourne, and Father Mural, Diocesan Missionary.

value of the gospel. If there is unity, “good works will thus be carried out with charity, with order, all in competition and by a spirit of emulation. The effects that result from these first conditions are easy to deduce.” It is interesting<sup>45</sup> to note that later in this text, Fr. Chaminade sees the source of unity in a common belonging to Mary through consecration.<sup>46</sup>

The same call to unity, with the same motivations, is found in our *Rule*, in particular in Articles 37 and 38:

37 [...] *By this shall all know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.*

38. *The whole of our community life is inspired by this new commandment of love. If we forget it, our life together will be a source of ruin; if it directs our actions, community life will rekindle joy, inspire love and esteem for our vocation, attract others to share in our life and strengthen our apostolic dedication.*

Here too, the motivations and benefits are both internal and external and the source of unity is interior: “It is Christ present among us, who gives inspiration and strength to community life and makes it a sign for those around us” (RL 37).

It is of course necessary to remember the basis of the testimony of the first community. As the Acts of the Apostles mentions:

2<sup>42</sup> *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers....* 44 *All who believed were together and had all things in common.*

Any community can rely on these foundations to build and develop: a common faith received, fraternal life, the Eucharist, prayer, the pooling of goods. The text adds:

2<sup>47</sup> *[They were] praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.* 48 *And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

The community develops and grows stronger by actively collaborating in the gifts received and God plays his part in it by giving it growth. From his experience and the history of his order, the Cistercian André Louf gives an interesting and enlightening illustration of this text:

*The sight of brothers or sisters celebrating the liturgy together, praying and working together but in silence, and living under the same roof, apart from the world, this is the image which has been the starting point of many Cistercian vocations. In such a community, we recognized the attraction that dwelt in our hearts and we chose to join it. (...)*

*In fact, such a choice was not ours. Once again was going to be realized in the Church what Saint Luke noted about the first Christians: “48 And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47). We didn't really have to choose. We had been chosen. Not by the members of this community, moreover, who did not know us, but by the Lord himself who had chosen this community for us and had chosen us for it. Given to each other, as a free gift from the Lord, it is henceforth through this gift and the beginning of communion that he established, that we would have to wait and hasten our encounter with him.*

---

<sup>45</sup> W. J. Chaminade, *Introduction to the state of a Sodalist*, CL I.93 [23]. This document is found in the *Manual of the Servant of Mary* of 1815.

<sup>46</sup> In another text, probably from 1817, Fr. Chaminade also writes: “By their consecration to Mary, the sodalists form among themselves bonds which no distance in space, no difference in time, and no change of social condition can break.” *In*: “The Sodality,” CL I.106 [2].



This comment deserves to be heard, in particular for vocation ministry, the latter being as much the fruit of the fervor and unity of the community as of the work of God who calls freely whom he wills. The call of God has no reason to be lacking when the testimony of the community is not lacking either!

### *A common path*

If the community of Jerusalem is offered by Fr. Chaminade as a source of inspiration in each of his foundations,<sup>47</sup> he even happens to extend it to several of them.

*One of the reasons which led to the institution of the Society of Mary was to renew in France, or rather in the world, the spectacle of an emerging church, the church of Jerusalem. For that purpose and with the same inspiration, two Orders were founded, one of religious men and the other of religious women, and in both of these all states and all conditions may enter without confusion through a wise organization and good General and Particular Regulations. Although collective perfection essentially results from individual perfection, it is still true that the esprit de corps contributes admirably to the support, progress, and perfection of the entire Society through the interest it inspires for one another among the individuals, so that the resulting harmony and edification may never be lacking.*<sup>48</sup>

Here, the community of Jerusalem is presented to the two religious congregations as a source of inspiration and testimony: it is together that they give this edifying spectacle. This is an interesting note which corresponds well to the vision, of Chaminadian origin, of the same religious institute in two branches, animated by the same spirit incarnated in a way specific to each of them. The Founder notes the variety of “*states and [of] conditions*” that subsist there. This should probably be interpreted above all as a description of the internal variety of the congregations, composed of teaching and working brothers and priests, for the Society of Mary, or of mothers, assistants and companions for the Daughters of Mary.<sup>49</sup>

This commentary from our Founder is valuable for our current reflection on the Marianist Family. The Jerusalem community can be a common source of inspiration for our entire Family; it is an important perspective to explore further to help us develop it and reveal all its fraternal and missionary potential.

### **3. ASSIDUOUS IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND IN FRATERNAL SERVICE**

Among the reasons for unity of the first community was regular attendance at “**the breaking of the bread.**” The Eucharist was very quickly perceived by Christians as the meal of unity. Paul says, “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*” (1 Cor 10:16-17). Communion with the body of Christ, and thereby with Christ himself, makes us one body.

---

<sup>47</sup> The use is infrequent with regard to the Daughters of Mary, nevertheless, it is found, for example, at the very beginning of “The Institute of the Daughters of Mary,” a text from 1816. Cf. CL V.5 [1].

Adèle had written herself in 1813 to her friends in the *Little Society*: “Let us all form but one heart and one soul which belong to God alone, following the example of the first Christians.” Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, Letter 178 to Agathe Diché. See also, in the same spirit, Letter 81.3

<sup>48</sup> W. J. Chaminade, CL VII.18 [1-2], “The Institut of the Society of Mary.” Document also taken from *Notebook “D,”* traditionally dated between 1828 and 1838.

<sup>49</sup> For these distinctions, see articles 325 to 329 of the 1839 Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary (CL VII.29). Article 330 specifies: “Whatever exterior difference these distinctions make among the religious, they are all equally Daughters of Mary.”

Saint John Damascene comments:

*This sacrament is called a Koinonia and indeed it is; for by receiving the flesh of Christ we commune with Christ who shares in his flesh and his divinity and we commune and are united with one another and we come to unity. The one bread, in which we partake, makes of all of us the one Body of Christ, his one blood. It makes us members of one another, co-corporals of Christ.<sup>50</sup>*

Cardinal Ratzinger wrote about this:

*The Eucharist is the sacrament by which Christ constitutes himself in body and makes us one bread, one body. The content, the event of the Eucharist, is the union of Christians from their separation in the unity of the one bread and one body. The Eucharist ... is the living event that sustains the Church in her future.*

*The Church is the Eucharistic community. It is not just a people: from the many peoples that make it up, it becomes one people through the one table that the Lord sets up for all of us. The Church is, so to speak, a network of Eucharistic communities and is continually united by the one body which we all receive.<sup>51</sup>*

Finally, let's not forget that the Eucharist is the moment of the washing of the feet, when "Jesus ... Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13,1). Having washed the feet of his disciples one by one, including Judas, he said to them: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:14-15),

The Eucharist nourishes fraternal communion in two ways: through communion in the one body of Christ and through Christ's supreme act of service. The consequences are immense. Our daily experience of the Eucharist is not too much to allow us to take full measure of the gift and the call: it is a privilege and a responsibility. For this reason:

The celebration of the Eucharist, which renews our share in the paschal mystery, is central in our daily life. ... Sharing together the bread of life and the cup of salvation we form a single body" (RL 50).

#### **4. THE UNION OF DIVERSITY**

##### **a. Union without confusion**

One of the Chaminadian peculiarities of brotherhood is the union of diversity. The lay Sodality already brings together Christians of "all states, all conditions and all ages ..." <sup>52</sup> Father Henri Lebon interprets it as a permanent characteristic of the different foundations:

*... the spirit of Christian brotherhood, ... in "a union without confusion," brought together the different classes of young men at the Madeleine. The presence of this characteristic, very much heralded by the world at the beginning of the 19th century, showed that Father Chaminade sensed the needs of the times, ... [Here is, on this subject], an extract which Father Lalanne wrote for the Dictionnaire des Ordres Religieux on the Society of Mary. "The Sodalities of Father Chaminade were organized on the model of the former lay sodalities which the Jesuits established and directed in their colleges, with this exception, that in the former persons of every class and age were received and then grouped*

---

<sup>50</sup> St John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, 4, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph, Card. Ratzinger, *Il Dio Vicino*, 2008, San Paolo, pp. 121-122. [English version: *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> W. J. Chaminade, *Answers to 7 questions or difficulties...*, CLVI.153 [2].

*according to their rank and condition. **Union without confusion**, was the motto. The ideas and conditions of the times, when the word **Equality** was scribbled on all every wall, favored this manner of grouping in which there was nothing inimical to the spirit of Christianity. The sodalists were exhorted to be of assistance one to the other, the rich aiding the poor, and the strong the weak. Father Chaminade loved to point out this characteristic, to his more fervent disciples as an image of the primitive Church.”*  
*We are already aware that this trait of the Sodality was the point of departure in framing Constitutions of the Society of Mary.*<sup>53</sup>

As Fr. Lebon shows, support and mutual aid affected all areas: religious, moral, educational, professional, etc. Intergenerational mutual assistance marked the pedagogy of the Sodality, all having at heart to support the youngest members. Frequent meetings and assemblies strengthen fraternity and make it visible, thus offering an attractive witness, capable of encouraging the Christian life of all.

This strong fraternal spirit, inaugurated in the lay groups, then manifested itself in the other branches, as they were born. It was always a union of diversity.<sup>54</sup> *“All states and all conditions could enter without confusion by a wise organization (...) so that the resulting harmony and edification are never lacking.”*<sup>55</sup> Those terms have aged, but not the concept of uniting together, without confusion, men, and women of diverse origins in age, social extraction, or formation, living according to different states of life and dedicated to all types of missions. That was the situation, which is still to be found in our *Rule*, in No. 12:

*12. There is only one Marianist vocation, but we welcome as our members men of various background and training. All have the same rights and duties as religious. The one Spirit is manifest in a variety of complementary gifts and ministries.*

## **b. A body united**

This fraternal union is not of a sociological order. Blessed Chaminade does not seek first and foremost to create a new model of society, even though he undoubtedly knows that this contributes to it. Above all, he wants to give new strength to the fraternal witness to the Gospel. His motivation is above all ecclesial and missionary.

The deep source of fraternal union is the union of the members with Christ. Belonging to **the Mystical Body of Christ** – of which Christ is the head – creates the unity of the members. The Spirit unites Christians to Christ and to each other. Fraternal love is above all a fruit and a manifestation of Trinitarian love.

*Just as the Holy Spirit is a spirit of union and is the substantial charity of the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity and unites the divine Persons among themselves, so also this Holy Spirit, spreading from the head into the members, being the same, unites the faithful to Jesus Christ. This means they form with*

---

<sup>53</sup> [Lebon, Henri], *The Spirit of Our Foundation*, III – 137, pp. 141-142.

<sup>54</sup> As mentioned, the Daughters of Mary included Mothers, Assistants and Companions, all also Daughters of Mary (Cf. articles 325 to 329 of the 1839 Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary; CL VII.29). Article 330 specifies: “Whatever exterior difference these distinctions place between Religious, they are all equally Daughters of Mary.” The Society of Mary, for its part, included teaching brothers, worker brothers or priests, all religious in the same way.

<sup>55</sup> W. J. Chaminade, CL VII.18 [1-2], “The Institute of the Society of Mary.” Document also taken from *Notebook D*, traditionally dated between 1828 and 1838.

*him a single body and a single person, and all together they have one heart and one soul.*<sup>56</sup>

The image of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ inspired Blessed Chaminade. He expressed it very clearly in the 22nd Meditation of the 1822 Retreat:

*I would hope that union between the members of the Institute<sup>57</sup> was one of the distinctive marks of the Institute.*

*The new members who enter should be animated with the same spirit as the older ones. The grace which unites is a much stronger bond than nature.*

*We must retrace in us the union of the Father with the Son, or the union of the Father with the Son and of the Son with the Father. This is the same as the union of Jesus Christ for us. We must love each other as Jesus Christ has loved us...*

*All the predestined from the beginning of the world should form one same body which we call the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, of which Jesus Christ is the head.... The love of Jesus Christ unites us. Let us ask for this fraternal charity from God.*<sup>58</sup>

Fr. Chaminade liked Saint Paul's image describing the community or the Church as a **body composed of varied members** who complement, help and respect each other (1Cor 12:4-31a), all necessary for each other, from the biggest to the smallest. He also liked the Johannine image of the **vine**: everyone finds his vitality in union with the Vine which is Christ and from this union is born the union between all the members. A significant extract from the 7th letter to the Novice Master is worth reading:

*My respectable Son,*

*In beginning this letter I return to ... the necessity of our union with Jesus Christ. Christians are as truly united to the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ as the branches or shoots are united to the stock of a vine. Jesus Christ himself makes this comparison (Saint John, chapter 15). I am the vine, you are the branches. You who abide in me and I in you, the same bear much fruit, for without me you can do nothing (Jn 15:5). Two consequences immediately follow:*

*1. Without this union the branches cannot bear fruit. ...*

*2. By means of this union the branches bear much fruit. ... Admirable union, divine union of Christians, and above all of religious with Jesus Christ! With him they form only a single and same body, a single and same vine. Jesus is the stock; we are the branches, From this divine stock, grace spreads itself into us like an exquisite sap and becomes our food, our growth, and our fruitfulness. What an abundance of fruit has been produced by the apostles, the martyrs, the saints, the true religious, and the fervent Christians! ...*

*The beauty of the Mystical Body of Jesus exists:*

*1. in the just proportion which exists between the members who compose it and the natural order in which each of them is placed, as we see it in the natural body. (...)*

*2. in the variety of the functions of each member. What deformity is brought to this beautiful body by those who, although they should be feet, wish to take on*

---

<sup>56</sup> Idem, CL VII.18 [1-2], "The Institute of the Society of Mary." Document also taken from *Notebook D*, traditionally dated between 1828 and 1838.

<sup>56</sup> Idem, "6th Letter to a Master of Novices", CLVII.17 [42], Text written in 1834-1835.

<sup>57</sup> For Fr. Chaminade, "the Institute" generally designates the two religious congregations. Here, it is possible that this is the case or that he speaks only of the Society of Mary.

<sup>58</sup> W. J. Chaminade, "Retreat of 1822, 22nd Meditation," CL VI.22 [259]-[261].

*the functions of the hands! Should they expect to be moved by the Holy Spirit who animates the body?*

*3. Its beauty consists above all in the holiness of the head who governs it, of the Spirit who animates it, and the communion of goods and troubles which exists among the members and the head... (...)*

*[We have the] duty to do everything and to suffer everything in order to preserve the union of all the members and never to break this. This duty should extend itself to preserving the union among all the members of the Society of Mary, and especially in the same community.<sup>59</sup>*

The 6th and 7th Letters to a Master of Novices are two key documents for understanding the ecclesiology that underlies the thought of Fr. Chaminade. It is a vision of great theological, spiritual, and pastoral depth. It is this last aspect that particularly interested him. Our Founder was not a theoretician; he sought answers to the practical questions that would arise. He wanted to be able to rely on reliable theological data and recognized authors. Our Founder read and studied a lot, selecting his readings very carefully; even in the busiest times, he never sacrificed this activity.

The type of fraternity that the Founder wished to see grow among his disciples arose from his contemplation of the Church and the needs of the mission. To seek only an efficient organization, a sympathetic atmosphere, or even a type of life attractive to vocations, we would go astray: such was not the aspiration of Blessed William Joseph. He wanted to offer to as many people as possible, by making it attractive, the visible witness of an authentically evangelical life giving them access to eternal beatitude. This reality occupied a large place in the thought of his time, whereas it is very neglected today. Now that our lives are longer, would eternity feel shorter and less worthy of our attention? Father Chaminade was not indifferent to earthly happiness, but he certainly considered it more as a fruit than as a primary end. *“But strive first for the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well,”* the Gospel tells us (Mt 6,33). Fraternal joy was for him a useful, and therefore important, instrument at the service of the mission, to make the Gospel and the Gospel life attractive.

### **c. The mixed composition**

Our **mixed composition** is also related to this conception of a body united in the diversity of its members, each having a function necessary for the whole body.

Above all, we must remember one of the fundamental principles of Fr. Chaminade:

*In what concerns the organization and the government, I always have in mind approaching as much as possible the organization and government of the Catholic Church. The more we will get away from this plan, the less will there be solidarity and stability in the Society.”<sup>60</sup>*

It is in this perspective that the Society of Mary is composed of clerics and laymen and that their responsibilities are varied.

The 1971 Chapter also highlights another aspect of mixed composition:

*8.14. In founding the Society of Mary, Father. Chaminade sought to attract men from all walks of life. Faithful to its tradition, the Society of Mary reflects the composition of the Church by having priests and lay religious; it also attempts to reflect the composition of civil society by maintaining an explicit openness to all classes of persons without distinction of occupation, race, or social origin.*

---

<sup>59</sup> Idem, “7th Letter to a Master of Novices”, CL VII.17 [47... 51], Text written in 1834-1835.

<sup>60</sup> Idem, Letter No. 557, November 6, 1830, to Bro. Clouzet, Saint-Remy.

8.15 *It was the mind of the Founder that each religious, according to his condition and profession, to be an apostle in his own milieu. [In view of an] apostolate of "like by like."*

A double influence makes itself felt and comes together in the mixed composition, that of the Church and that of the society in which the congregation is incarnated: each of the two has its own logic, so neither is eliminated by the other. This can result in certain tensions, depending on the influence that dominates the interpretation of each brother. Some desire a rather spiritual Society of Mary, and probably also more hierarchical, others accentuating, on the contrary, its incarnation in society, at the risk of a certain dilution within it.

To avoid that Manichaeism, it may be useful to remember the decisive interview of Father Chaminade with Jean-Baptiste Lalanne, as the latter recounted it, many years later.<sup>61</sup>

*A person can be a religious while looking like a secular person. The wicked will take less offense; it will be more difficult for them to place obstacles in the path. The world and the Church will not be less edified. Therefore, let us form a religious association with the three vows of religion, but without a name, habit, or civil existence insofar as possible: nova bella elegit Dominus [The Lord has chosen new ways of fighting (Judg 5:8, Vulgate)]. Let us place the entire venture under the protection of Mary Immaculate, to whom her divine Son has reserved the final victory over hell: Et ipsa conteret caput tuum [And she will crush your head (Gen 3:15 Vulgate)]. "Let us, my son," he said with an enthusiasm not usual for him, "in our humility, be the heel of the Woman."*

This text reconciles the two aspects: the foundation is inspired by the very structures of the Church, but manifests itself under secular appearances to make evangelization easier. The end of the story, with its abrupt language, demonstrates that this was not a compromise with the world: Fr. Chaminade burned with ardor for the mission in order to draw the greatest number to Christ.<sup>62</sup>

Our mixed composition is innovative. It strengthens the internal fraternity based on the complementarity of the states of life and the corresponding sensitivities. It also promotes an external fraternity allowing us to approach any man, any woman, by getting as close as possible to his/her life situation and activity.

In this vision, two characteristics of the ecclesial community come into balance and tension: the hierarchical dimension introduced by the priesthood and the fraternal dimension favored above all by the brothers. Each enriches the other and corrects what an overly one-sided vision of his vocation could generate: the priest welcomes the fraternal dimension of the priesthood, and the brother develops the baptismal priesthood. Just as in the Church the laity dominate, the brothers are in the great majority in the Society of Mary and the common baptismal vocation is central. The differences between the states of life are not accentuated, although they must remain to bring their own flavor. There is a single fraternal vocation which will be brought to its full bloom by lay consecrated life for some, priestly for others. Thus, one of the most obvious signs of the call to the priesthood in the Society of Mary is that this call and its realization through ordination will make the religious even more aware of his fraternal identity. It will then be very easy for him to make his priestly action a source of fraternity and unity in the

---

<sup>61</sup> Jean-Baptiste Lalanne, *Historical Note on the Society of Mary of the Sodality of Bordeaux*, 1858, p. 6-7, in CL V.17 [7], pp. 365-366.

<sup>62</sup> On Fr. Chaminade's vision of the Church let us listen to him again: "*The Church is not a purely political body like other societies which are bonded only by a moral union and by external ties--that is to say, by the same laws and the same government. The Mystical Body, whose members are interiorly and truly united by the same Spirit, forms in them a love among and a penchant for, one another.*" CL IV-10-[28] "Enmity," p. 21.

community. If, on the contrary, he is inclined to distinguish, separate, prioritize, and to invite others to do so with him, it will be with much more difficulty that these two dimensions will unite in him, and the unity of the community will require greater efforts to achieve. The spirit of unity and complementarity explains why we generally do not encounter anticlericalism among us, whereas it is easily felt in other congregations of only brothers.

Let us also remember the affirmation of Canon Law (588.1), taken up in *Vita Consecrata* (60):

*According to the traditional doctrine of the Church, the consecrated life by its nature is neither lay nor clerical. For this reason the "lay consecration" of both men and women constitutes a state which in its profession of the evangelical counsels is complete in itself. Consequently, both for the individual and for the Church, it is a value in itself, apart from the sacred ministry.*

I believe the end of this article is worth quoting:

*By living in a special way this aspect of Christian and consecrated life, Religious Brothers are an effective reminder to Religious Priests themselves of the fundamental dimension of brotherhood in Christ, to be lived among themselves and with every man and woman, and they proclaim to all the Lord's words: "And you are all brothers" (Mt 23:8).*

### ***A favorable time for renewal***

When Fr. Chaminade proposes that the Society of Mary imitate the structure of the Church, he makes a proposal rich in spiritual and practical consequences. But pay attention: listening to this proposal, what type of Church are we thinking of? If it is a very hierarchical church, if we imagine the priests far above the lay faithful, teaching them from the height of their dignity, then such a model will do our mixed composition no good and will make our life and mission much more difficult. When we encounter, in a region or a country, such concept of the Church, we must have the lucidity and the courage to free ourselves from it in order to remain faithful to our charism: this is the gift that we offer to this local Church. If that freeing, sought for the sake of fidelity, were to prove impossible, then the inevitable consequences would have to be drawn: it would be a sign that we are not called to work in that country. The Society of Mary must never agree to sacrifice its charism for the benefit of the number of entries into the novitiate. It is a human ambition that Fr. Chaminade would never have tolerated.

It happens that this difficulty is encountered in Units still in the process of full establishment. The first priests in these countries may be inclined to identify with the diocesan priests who are well integrated into the local traditions. But what is good for them is not good for us and, while respecting local particularities, it is imperative to find a style of priesthood that is our own, generally less hierarchical, and more fraternal. Successful completion of this delicate step will bring the Unit concerned into its maturity. In this process, the accompaniment of older Units is valuable and should not be neglected by newer Units; their youthful energy should not deceive them: each new step requires careful initiation. Our charism is a natural antidote to clericalism. This is one of the graces that we receive from our mixed composition and that we offer to the Christian people. This is often one of the reasons that makes our communities attractive to them.

The difficulties encountered should not prevent us from noticing that the current evolution of the Church includes several aspects that are very favorable to mixed composition.

One of them comes from the action of Pope Francis who invites the Church to abandon all forms of clericalism. On March 19, 2016, he wrote to Cardinal Marc Ouelette:

*It does us good to remember that the Church is not an elite of priests, of consecrated men, of bishops, but that everyone forms the faithful Holy People*

*of God. To forget this carries many risks and distortions in our own experience, be they personal or communitary, of the ministry that the Church has entrusted to us.*

Let us also think of the new *Constitution* of the Church which shows that ecclesial responsibilities are not linked to the priesthood – except when this is justified –, but to baptism and to personal qualities and skills.<sup>63</sup> For this reason, certain responsibilities of government must be open to the laity.

Synodality is also a great encouragement since it engages all the people of God on a common path, each fully exercising their responsibility as baptized according to their state of life and according to the place they occupy, in a complementarity and a fellowship of all.

*The meaning of the journey to which we are all called is above all that of discovering the face and form of a synodal Church, in which “everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), in order to know what He ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).” The Bishop of Rome, as the principle and foundation of the Church’s unity, asks all the Bishops and all the particular Churches, in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists (cf. LG, no. 23), to enter with confidence and courage into the path of synodality. In this “journeying together,” we ask the Spirit to help us discover how communion, which brings together in unity the variety of gifts, charisms, and ministries, is for the mission: a synodal Church is a Church “going forth,” a missionary Church “whose doors are open” (EG, No. 46).<sup>64</sup>*

*Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church’s ordinary way of living and working. This *modus vivendi et operandi* works through the community listening to the Word and celebrating the Eucharist, the brotherhood of communion and the co-responsibility and participation of the whole People of God in its life and mission, on all levels and distinguishing between various ministries and roles.<sup>65</sup>*

These are openings in which the disciple of Fr. Chaminade feels spontaneously at ease, happy to find there an opportunity to strengthen his specific vocation, and proud to be able to offer it as a significant contribution to the multifaceted life of the Church.

## **V. TWO ICONS OF MARIANIST FRATERNITY: THE COMMUNITY OF PENTECOST AND THE WEDDING AT CANA**

Let us be inspired by two biblical episodes which are two images for our fraternity.

### **1. PENTECOST: REUNITED WITH MARY AND FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

34. The Marianist community aims to be an image of the first community of Jesus’ disciples, united with Mary and filled with the Holy Spirit.

We give ourselves to community life in order to bear witness to God’s love, to attain holiness, and to fulfill our apostolic mission.

---

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Costituzione apostolica Predicate Evangelium*, March 19, 2022, § I.10; II.7.

<sup>64</sup> Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission. Preparatory Document*, No. 15. The quotation inside the text is from Pope Francis, *Speech for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*.

<sup>65</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, 2018, No. 70a.



Here we are again invited by the *Rule of Life* to put ourselves at the school of the community of Jerusalem, this time at its very beginning. Of course, it does not escape us that Article 34 extrapolates the biblical text. In the Acts, the presence of Mary with the disciples is attested only before Pentecost (Acts 1:14), with the eleven and “certain women,” all “constantly devoting themselves to prayer.” The interpretation of the *Rule* does not contradict the biblical given, it interprets it. In fact, it is logical to think that Mary was with the disciples at the time of the reception of the Holy Spirit, and doubtless at certain other times thereafter. The rich iconographic tradition concerning this episode always represents Mary with the disciples at the time of Pentecost.

In the *Rule*, Article 34 opens the chapter on “The Marianist Community,” with the first subtitle “Union in Christ.” The emphasis here is on spiritual union with Mary and with Jesus and its missionary consequences. Article 35 supports this, in a more concrete way, always with reference to Jerusalem and to the text of the Acts, while emphasizing the Marian atmosphere of the community. Fraternal life is both a constitutive part of the mission and its best preparation. The community’s testimony questions, teaches, and influences. Article 37 specifies that “*It is Christ present among us, who gives inspiration and strength to community life and makes it a sign to those around us.*”

Because they are signs that speak, the communities often benefit from many contacts with their neighbors or with their friends or, in connection with the works, with the collaborators or beneficiaries who are there. The fact of living in the work or very close to it favors these contacts. For this reason, this option was often preferred to living in another location. Unfortunately, despite this proximity, the community is often difficult to access from the outside. When this is the case, it must be remedied so that the community once again becomes an effective sign, opening times of prayer or certain spaces of encounter.

The community of disciples gathered with Mary is a model for us. First, it is because of the communion established between Mary and the apostles. Her presence gives their assembly a Marian character that we too want to experience. Secondly, it is because of the spiritual role that Mary exercises at this time. Mary, who received the fullness of the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation, helps the apostles, and each one of us, to make ourselves available to receive him. She collaborates in the action of the Spirit by exercising in our regard a spiritual motherhood which began with the incarnation within her of the Son of God, the new Man; she then contributed to our regeneration. This collaboration was confirmed on Calvary when Jesus called her to be our Mother and asked Saint John, and us after him, to take Mary as Mother. The collaboration reached its full blossoming at Pentecost when Mary brought her human support to the divine work of the Spirit to strengthen our likeness to Christ.

*It is a truth, that Jesus Christ was born of Mary, ex qua natus est Jesus (cf. Mt 1:16)...*

*We have all been conceived in Mary, we are to be born of Mary and formed by Mary to the resemblance of Jesus Christ so we may live only of the life of Jesus Christ, that with Jesus Christ we may be another Jesus, son of Mary. One Christ, with Christ. In keeping with this principle, what devotion to Mary and confidence in Mary the director should inspire in his pupil, and thus through Mary he will obtain even more fully the marks of conformity with Jesus Christ which the Spirit of Jesus Christ will produce...*

*... As the spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Jesus Christ ... will lead us to God with ardor and will unite us with God so intimately that we will be completely one with God. This Spirit will consummate us perfectly to the resemblance of Jesus Christ, who is consummated in his Father...*

... Thus, this same Spirit gives us grace to participate in and render us similar to Jesus Christ resurrected. . .<sup>66</sup>

*Mary was... the first to be conceived in Jesus Christ according to the Spirit, as Jesus Christ was himself conceived according to nature in her virginal womb. That is, Mary was formed interiorly to the resemblance of Jesus Christ, her adorable son, and she was associated thereafter in all his mysteries, both in what they contain as exterior and what they contain as interior, so that her conformity was the most perfect possible--or rather that there was all the "uniformity" possible.*

*So it is that Jesus Christ is the first of the predestined; so it is that there will be no predestined except those who will be conformed to Jesus Christ, and that all the predestined will have been conceived and formed in Mary. Your belly is like a heap of wheat (Song 7:3).<sup>67</sup>*

Finally, thirdly, the community awaits the Holy Spirit as the source of its missionary impulse. He will make of them ardent missionaries, understood by all, united in the same spirit. We want to be united with Mary to receive the Holy Spirit who sends us out on the roads of the world.

## **2. INVITED TOGETHER TO THE WEDDING AT CANA**

Mary's call to the servants at Cana resonates deeply within us: it is associated with the universal character of our mission. This is what Article 10 of our *Rule* recalls.<sup>68</sup> In the letter of August 24, 1839, Blessed Chaminade inserts the "do whatever he tells you" in his commentary on the teaching vow. For this reason, we consider the episode of the Wedding at Cana above all from a missionary point of view. However, we can also see it as an icon of Marianist fraternal life. This is what I would like to comment on now, emphasizing the characteristics of fraternity evident in this Gospel account.

### **a. Brothers in the heart of the world**

The first image of brotherhood is the presence of the community of disciples (John does not use the term apostles here) within the much larger community of wedding guests. The community of disciples is fully united with all, while remaining identifiable. It is the simplest and most universal form of brotherhood: to be with others and to share everything with them without losing our identity. It is very simple, but very important and we must be attentive to it: to be with others by sharing with them joys and sorrows. To be there with our particularity as Christians and religious which is our way of being and of sharing with them. To be there with Jesus and Mary, the "Mother of Jesus," and to find in this communion with them one more reason to be close to everyone in their own way and according to their own style. It is the brotherhood of everyday life, of being next door, of being with. It is the brotherhood of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. The longest period of the life of Jesus which expresses only one thing: his universal friendship towards all of us.

As simple as it is, this form of fraternity delivers several messages. The Gospel does not isolate us, does not separate us, on the contrary, it makes us more eager to be with everyone, it even enriches the way of living fraternity. Celebration is one of the natural frameworks of this fraternal life. It also celebrates the presence of God in our midst. The God of Christians is the

---

<sup>66</sup> W. J. Chaminade, "Manual of Direction," *CL* VII.22 [35-37], pp. 266-270.

<sup>67</sup> Idem, "Principles of Direction", *CL* VII.23 [45], p. 278. These texts are inspired by Jean-Jacques Olier, *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes*, (Paris : Migne, 1856), col. 51.

<sup>68</sup> RL 10. "We find inspiration in Mary's word to the servants at Cana: 'Do whatever He tells you.' We remain open as a Society to all means of evangelization and we dedicate ourselves to the apostolic activities to which Providence calls us, according to the needs of time and place."

God of the covenant, of weddings, and he desires to establish this covenant with everyone, personally and collectively. Mary is present with us and supports God's plans and those of human beings to come closer to each other and to God. She lived this brotherhood in Nazareth and wherever God's plans led her, in all times and all places.

### **b. Fraternal solidarity: opening the eyes, the mind and the heart**

When Mary realizes the shortage, which she will then express to her Son by saying to him: “They have no more wine,” she introduces us to a second form of fraternity. This no longer consists only in being with but also in entering into empathy with others through the eyes, the ears, the heart and the mind. This attitude makes it possible to see reality from the experience of others. By putting oneself in their shoes, it becomes possible to understand their situation and the impact it has on them. Many times, because we remain too distant to experience it, the situation of others remains hidden from us and difficult to understand. Many attitudes of indifference start from there.

Clearly, Mary is deeply touched by what she sees. She understands the serious consequences this can have on this couple if the celebration goes wrong: what should be the founding experience of their lives will be marked by the hurt of not having been able to offer the welcome they wanted to their guests, and we know how sensitive this point is in the Middle East. This failure can cause desolation, disappointment and shame in a moment that should be dedicated to joy, with the worry of having lost part of their reputation with those who are closest to them.

It is also possible that this "fault" had other "culprits" than the organizers. According to studies reported by the biblical scholar Raymond Brown, it seems that at that time, the guests were responsible for bringing the wine to the wedding, each one with a share.<sup>69</sup>

Some therefore seem not to have fulfilled their duty. Would it not be, precisely, Jesus and his disciples that the poverty of their condition could prevent from incurring such an expense? This would then give Mary one more reason to be alarmed. But in the end, this problem, whether it is related to them or not, is likely to generate embarrassment, shame, and undoubtedly tensions. This must not happen on such an occasion. Mary knows it, she understands it and she acts.

Living fraternity in the manner of Mary means putting oneself in the place of others, understanding their situation and how to come to their aid. “They have no wine”; they have no accommodation, the house is too small; they don't have enough to feed their families; it is war, they have no peace, they are in danger; their child is sick, he is not healthy, they cannot treat him; they have no love and their family is divided; ... Understanding life with the gaze, the heart and the mind of others is the first step towards changing the world. Then, like Mary, we can intercede and then act.

What Mary sees are also our own shortfalls: shortfalls of the wine of brotherhood; shortages caused by our habits of overconsumption, forgetful of others; indifference to the sufferings of our neighbors and to their cries; ... “They have no wine” then becomes, on Mary's part, an invitation to a burst of humaneness: “Wake up! Open your eyes, your heart, your mind and your hands.”

### **c. Break the silence of ignorance and indifference**

But the fraternity of Mary is further accentuated at the moment of her dialogue with Jesus. The action takes place in two acts. The first is to speak with her Son and let herself be inspired by him, despite the apparent difficulties; the second is to call others to answer calls addressed to them.

---

<sup>69</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *Giovanni. Commento al Vangelo spirituale*, (Assisi: Cittadella, 1979) 3rd ed, p. 132.

Mary does not content herself with seeing: she speaks to her Son and entrusts the matter to him. Mary breaks the silence, she speaks. Immense distress will never find a solution until someone breaks the silence. During the winter of 1954, in France, when the temperature reached  $-15^{\circ}$  Celsius [ $+5^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit], a priest, Abbé Pierre, went on radio and television to shout his indignation for the suffering and death of many homeless people. His appeal had an immense impact and provoked a wave of national solidarity. As long as no one broke the silence, that suffering was ignored and neglected. That day began what Abbé Pierre called “the insurrection of kindness.” Mary at Cana began the insurrection of kindness by alerting not only her Son but the servants. To speak, to make known, to denounce is an act of fraternity. Mary did it.

Mary turned to her Son, no doubt with the idea that he would find a solution. As many commentators point out, however, it is quite unlikely that Mary intended to ask for a miracle: Jesus had never performed one. But she entrusts the case to him, with the idea, no doubt, that he will do something. She relies on his active compassion.

#### **d. Let yourself be challenged by the Master of time and history**

Unexpectedly, Jesus, far from seeming to support Mary's request, initially brings resistance to it. “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” (2.4). At first glance, the answer seems to be: “No, don't count on me.” But the greatness of Mary is to persevere. She does not stop. Jesus' answer puts the situation and Mary's request in their context: he is the master of history, it is up to him to decide whether he should act, inspired by the Father who determines the hour, the time and how to do it. “Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.” (Jn 4:34); “whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise” (Jn 5:19); “My Father is still working, and I also am working” (Jn 5:17); “The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me” (Jn 5:36); “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (Jn 6:38); “the Father who dwells in me does his works.” (Jn 14:10).

Jesus reserves the authority to decide when and how. Later, he will also say to “his brothers” (Jn 7:3): “My time has not yet come, but your time is always here” (Jn 7:6). Mary must pass from the time of men, determined according to their understanding, their limited and sometimes erroneous judgment, to that of God, to the time of the Father manifested by Jesus. This is our task still today: in the current challenges, to reread our situation and our actions according to the perspective and the will of God. To pass from our time “which is always here,” to that of God which must be discerned and welcomed.

At the school of Mary, fraternity must be transformed by the encounter with her Son, in particular by means of prayer. The example of Mary tells us that it is by this means that the ability to serve according to God's desires is born, in this dialogue where Jesus encourages us or corrects us: “my Hour has not come.” We can believe Mary, “the servant of the Lord”: she knows how to listen and respond, her whole being and her whole life tell us so. She entered into the hour of her Son, through her attentive listening and her collaboration enlightened by faith. She thus arrives at the Hour of his Passion-glorification, these two inseparable moments in Saint John, when the will of the Father and of the Son are fully revealed. It is then also that Mary will receive a full revelation of her vocation and of her place in the plans of the Father and the Son. This is the culmination of his human service. She will fully become the Woman destined to serve the projects of the Father with her Son and her definitive “Yes” will make her fully enter into her vocation of maternity with regard to all men, with regard to the Mystical Body of her Son.

Mary probably cannot understand all this at Cana. Today we are given the whole itinerary of Christ's life and all his teaching. At Cana, she does not know them yet; we are privileged in

comparison to her at that moment. However, she allowed herself to be guided by God, by the intuition of her intelligence enlightened by faith, and she moved on to her second commitment to fraternity.

**e. Do whatever he tells you**

Mary's other commitment is to speak to the servants and associate them with her request to her Son. Those servants represent us, all the disciples of his Son. Mary focuses their attention on him and on his word and, in a few words, she shows them three attitudes: listening, obedience, and action. The Servant trains the servants and tells them her own method: listen, obey, act: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

Encouraged by Mary, the servants carry out his instruction perfectly. At the word of Jesus, they fill the jars to the brim. We can admire their promptness and their generosity which manifests itself twice. They act immediately and fully, "to the brim," and beyond the reasonable limits of their service: "Now draw some out and take it to the chief steward." Their response to such a strange request is an act of trusting collaboration with Mary and Jesus. Their listening and their obedience allow them to know whence comes this good wine, kept until the end. They know their fraternal contribution to this event and the conditions that caused it to produce such abundance. By doing their part with generosity, they allowed God to do his and thus he "revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him" (2:11b). By their generous and obedient action, the servants opened the door to a much greater grace. Not only human needs have been met, but even more so those of the soul. God did much more than the essential, he responded to the real lack in a superabundant way. The wine of the new marriage is offered beyond that which had been planned. This is the form of collaboration that God expects of us. From human fraternal solidarity, God brings forth the new wine of his grace, the source of a new life and of a new fraternal union. This is the fruit he expects from our fraternal action.

Brotherhood is contagious and spreads. Mary's empathy provokes the collaboration of the servants and allows the birth of a new fraternity which is the work of God. Such is the strength of our humble acts of fellowship and daily service. Mary calls us to build fraternity with her and to collaborate each according to his talents as good servants. Following Mary's advice, in the innumerable needs and shortfalls of today, let us do all that he tells us, so that from our human fraternity God can bring to birth that which he is accomplishing thanks to the wine of the new marriage. May our humble service enable him to manifest his glory so that many may believe in him.

**f. To know, to love, to serve**

Mary's fraternal attitude consists in seeing, understanding, and acting. Her attitude can be read according to the Chaminadian trilogy: to know, to love, to serve. She sees and understands, her heart is moved and filled with compassion, and she acts according to what her mind and her heart have told her. She does this without in any way postponing her response and her action, like her immediate "Yes" to the Annunciation, which was immediately translated into the service of the Visitation. Its greatness is to immediately go to the heart of the event and to respond immediately with one's whole being: mind, heart and will; from head to heart and from heart to hands: it's always her way of doing things; this is the greatness of her testimony. Each "Yes" opens and provokes the following one. She always takes the shortest path: that of "Yes" to the will of God.

## AND NOW...

At the end of this journey, what should we remember?

Above all, let us be very aware of the critical need to build fraternity today. This urgent appeal always risks taking a back seat to our concerns. From this current need flows our particular duty to work actively at it, according to our vocation and with the means proper to our religious life.

### *Ten convictions for a Marianist fraternal commitment*

To inspire us on this path, let's take up some of the convictions that have emerged through our reflection.

The aspiration, the call and the capacity to live fraternity are inscribed in the heart of every human being, everywhere, in all places and all cultures, whatever their faith. The construction of fraternity is a common objective and a privileged ground for encounter among all. By giving it a new meaning, this immense context opens up a vast space of opportunity for Christian and religious fraternity.

Religions have the duty to facilitate fraternity among all and to oppose all that is contrary to it. Everyone's contribution is necessary and irreplaceable. The meetings in Assisi (1986, 2011, 2016) and Abu Dhabi (2019; cf. FT 5, 285) offer us inspiration.

Fraternity is at the heart of the teaching of Christ. Jesus is the universal brother, the one who broke down the walls between men, religions, eras, races. The Spirit builds fraternity in the complementarity of gifts and vocations, uniting without standardizing and diversifying without dividing. Christianity is a religion of brotherhood; Christians have a special duty to be an instrument of unity and understanding among all human beings. The universal call to fraternity opens to them a field of encounter and collaboration with all religions, cultures, and all of humanity.

Within the Church, religious are called to fraternal life by vocation. Their testimony and their action are necessary. The fraternal experience of each congregation is inspired by a way of being and acting that comes from its charism received by the Founder and developed by successive generations. These different ways of living fraternity complement and enrich each other. This fraternal vocation is a responsibility for each congregation in the Church and for the world.

Fraternity is the cement and one of the *raison d'être* of spiritual families, allowing each one to grow and act in the harmony and the complementarity of vocations. Within them is fully expressed the fraternal message proper to each charism, in all its variety and richness. Each of these families offers, both as a gift and as a call, a particular and unique image of the Church-fraternity and of the ways by which it can be built.

Mary is by gift and vocation the Mother of unity for the whole human race that Christ brought together in himself by becoming incarnate in her womb. Her presence is a source of fraternity; her waiting for Pentecost with the community of Jerusalem is an illustration of this and a founding moment. Mary facilitates the work of the unifying Holy Spirit; she is the Mother of Christians whom she gathers and unites. It is a grace that many come to seek from her, of all denominations and even religions, beyond historical or ideological separations.

Mary perceives with empathy the human, material, and spiritual needs of humanity. She makes them known with clairvoyance and freedom. She exercises her mediation: she presents these shortfalls to her Son and invites us all to an attitude of active faith which finds a solution in total availability to fraternal service. The child of Mary cannot remain deaf, indifferent, or passive in the face of the sufferings of the world.

The Marianist charism, received and transmitted by our Founders, insists particularly on the fraternal dimension as an essential component of Christian life and witness because it makes these two elements credible and attractive. The Marian nature of the Marianist charism also justifies this insistence: by their fraternal witness Marianists make more explicit the action and presence of Mary, make themselves her missionaries and arouse "love and esteem for [their] vocation" (RL 38). Divisiveness has the opposite effect.

Marianist fraternity is fully expressed in the Marianist Family, which is called to bear witness to Marian fraternity. Diversity is united in complementarity. Baptism is emphasized there as the common source of all vocations and of all missionary commitment. This peculiarity distinguishes the Marianist charism from a more hierarchical or more clerical vision. This specific form, inherited from Blessed Chaminade, contributes to a more synodal vision of Marianist life and mission. The Marianist Family is particularly prepared to live the current orientations of the Church. These latter are a special opportunity and responsibility for all its members.

All these reasons motivate us to value or revalue the call to fraternal life and all the concrete means that contribute to it. Living the fraternal life fully and creatively is an important part of our vocation as religious within the Marianist Family; it is our gift and our witness to the service of the Church and the world. To carry out this mission, we feel called to intensify and multiply the experiences and forms of our fraternal life in the Family. It is a path rich in perspectives, on which we must continue to advance with creativity, audacity, and determination. With the whole Marianist Family, we want to make a Marian contribution in response to the urgency of brotherhood in the world today. It is a responsibility, but above all a grace offered to us.

To support us in this, let us end with two prayers. In the first, attributed to Saint Francis, slightly adapted to our subject and expressed according to the communitarian "us," we ask that our fraternity can be a response to any perceived shortfall. With the second, the Trinitarian prayer which concludes *Fratelli Tutti*, we place ourselves in the momentum desired by the Pope in union with all men and women of good will (FT 6; 8). And let us never forget to invoke Mary, our sister and the Mother of fraternal unity.

***Lord, make us an instrument [of your brotherhood]***

*Where there is hate, let us put love.*

*Where there is offense, let us put forgiveness.*

*Where there is discord, let us put unity.*

*Where there is error let us put the truth.*

*Where there is doubt, let us put faith.*

*Where there is despair, let us put hope.*

*Where there is darkness, let us shine your light.*

*Where there is sadness, let us put joy.*

*O Master, let us seek not so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love, for it is by giving that we receive, it is by forgetting that we find, it is by forgiving that we are forgiven, it is by dying that we are resuscitated to eternal life.*

***O God, Trinity of love,***

*from the profound communion of your divine life,  
pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.*

*Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus,  
in his family of Nazareth,*

*and in the early Christian community.  
Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,  
discovering Christ in each human being,  
recognizing him crucified  
in the sufferings of the abandoned  
and forgotten of our world,  
and risen in each brother or sister  
who makes a new start.  
Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,  
reflected in all the peoples of the earth,  
so that we may discover anew  
that all are important and all are necessary,  
different faces of the one humanity  
that God so loves. Amen. [FT 287]*

Rome, June 12, 2022,  
on the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity

