



"Let yourself be transformed" ... for a synodal journey

(don Rossano Sala sdb¹)

1. The plan for an ecclesial renewal that is being carried out in the current pontificate revolves around certain convictions that are making their way into the ecclesial consciousness and taking shape in its concrete life. They challenge the consecrated life to become prophetically the spokesperson for the changes that are most often envisaged at the level of "dreams" and "thrusts". In fact, it is precisely the consecrated life that anticipates the transformations taking place and shaping its mission with a farsighted vision and courageous practices. It has always been so throughout the history of the Church and this is what we are asked to do today.

The pressing demand to think of ourselves as "outgoing", that is, in a structurally missionary form (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*); the attention to the common habitat that accommodates us all and which requires of us an ecological conversion (cf. *Laudato yes*); the encouragement of the international community towards the construction of a universal fraternity at a time when the processes of globalization are becoming ever more rapid and closer (cf. *Brothers all*) are some of its structural elements. Attention to the poor and the little ones, which becomes concrete towards families and young people (cf. *Amoris laetitia* and *Christus vivit*) marks some of the indispensable attentions of the ecclesial community, which is called to go out of itself to meet others and thus truly become itself.

2. It is precisely on the style of the community of believers - be it at the central level, with the reform of the Curia; at the diocesan level, with the invitation to create a deeper participation; at the parish level, with a renewed capacity for involvement; or at the level of consecrated life, with the repeated and not trivial invitation to resume the courage of its founders - that one of the decisive moves of this pontificate is played out. We can call all this with a name that is always ancient and always new: synodality.

The rediscovery of the synodal style of the Church was one of the qualifying points of the recent Synod on young people: "The fruit of this Synod, the choice that the Spirit has inspired in us through listening and discernment, is to walk with the young, going out towards everyone, so as to bear witness to the love of God. We could describe this process by speaking of synodality for mission, or missionary synodality:" (*Final Document of the Synod, n. 118*). Throughout the synodal journey the young people invited us to walk with them, rather than asking us to do something for them. They asked us to shine in the world as "prophets of fraternity" and this is how they want the Church as such to be.

¹ Professore Ordinario di Teologia pastorale e Pastorale giovanile presso l'Università Pontificia Salesiana, Direttore della Rivista "Note di Pastorale Giovanile", Segretario Speciale al Sinodo sui giovani e metodologo nel cammino di preparazione all'XI Capitolo Generale della Congregazione paolina.

Pope Francis is even more radical when he solemnly declares that "the path of the synodality is the path that God expects of the Church in the third millennium" (cf. *Address for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015*). Consistent with these statements, the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops - which is still in preparation and will take place in October 2022 - will have as its theme the synodality: "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, mission". The time therefore seems ripe for a radical renewal of the life of the Church, which is always at the service of her mission.

3. All this movement cannot leave the consecrated life indifferent. For it is now clear that synodality - which is first of all to be understood as a profound attitude of walking together in communion, sharing and co-responsibility - is a "sign of the times" to be taken up and deepened because "All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients." (*Evangelii gaudium*, n. 120). If then it is true that, as *Christifideles laici* states in n. 55, "In Church Communion the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves," this means that every charism is complete when the mission is lived in the reciprocity of the different vocations.

The Pauline charism also had from the beginning consecrated male members and female members and the presence of lay people who shared the charism. Charism that is never a possession of a specific state of life in the Church, but always a gift of the spirit given to some for the edification of all.

Within a context that inevitably pushes towards individualism and the personal commitment to the mission, the challenge of the Synod invites all consecrated persons to reflect on the communitarian nature of their mission. In the precise conviction that communion is the royal route to evangelization.

4. The "let yourselves be transformed" of Rom 12:2 and the suggestion that we should consider ourselves as "artisans of communion" are to be welcomed exactly in the sense of synodality. And the "instrument of work" that has been woven to accompany the Pauline congregation towards its XI General Chapter focuses on this enormous challenge in its third nucleus, which asks the Pauline congregation to be and become a "synodal congregation" (cf. nn. 18-29). According to a triadic scheme that creates dynamic unity between synodal methodology and Pauline spirituality - 1. To make truth: to recognize our situation; 2. To confront the way: to interpret in the light of faith; 3. To generate life: to identify choices for the future - each religious province is called first of all to focus on its own situation, then to search for the profound reasons and hidden causes and finally to indicate paths of renewal. It is precisely in this area of synodality that the fundamentals of living and working together in view of the witnessing and evangelising effectiveness of the Pauline mission today are being put to work.