



"Endeavour to become a saints." (Blessed James Alberione)

"Let yourself be transformed" ... in the Pauline Fraternal Life

(sr Tosca Ferrante, Apostoline Sisters)

In the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis has strongly and decisively reaffirmed that the only possible way for a universal brotherhood is the awareness that "God is love; whoever remains in love remains in God and God remains in him". (IGv 4.16).

Therefore, the brotherhood, even within our communities, is rooted in a reality that goes far beyond voluntarism, and goes to the essence of our consecrated life: the awareness of having been loved and of being, by nature and by grace, witnesses of love.

All of this requires, as the theme of the General Chapter rightly underlined, following the reliable word of our Father St. Paul, the willingness to allow oneself to be renewed in the mind, and to let the Spirit pervade it in order to tune it with the heart, the physical forces, and life.

Called to be "artisans of communion" is precisely figured in this continuous process of remodelling one's own life, and by reflection that of our communities, assuming the contours of a joyful, serene face, intent on proclaiming, in the vision that belongs to our vocational baggage, the beauty of the Gospel in the vast and populated space, as that of communication.

I have come upon this small reflection that I think may help our reflection:

"The house finally had a roof. It was small but it was new. And those three inside it were really comfortable. It's strange when you think that you can build a house over a hole. It takes commitment, and strength, and effort, it takes words and silence, and memory. But you can." (B. MASINI, *Si Può*, Carthusia, Milan, 2014).

The crisis that our communities have been going through for several years now, even before being linked to the apostolic dimension, is a crisis of brotherhood, of community life that often fails to say and give something meaningful. Sometimes we find ourselves in spaces where indifference, mutism, and resignation seem to reign supreme.

Yet it is possible to build Pauline brotherhood even in this difficult time of life: it takes commitment, desire, the ability to raise our gaze, words, silence, memory, and the ability to get out of our space and to look at the faces of those outside our communities who look at us with hope and expect from us words and gestures of solidarity, of fraternity, and of care.

All this requires *concrete steps* to be taken now, and soon! People, and we with them, perhaps, are disoriented, seized by fear of the future, and alone. We can and must, be able to say words of encouragement to these people, we can because it is a gift that we have received in our Pauline vocation.

Apostolate and fraternal life go hand in hand, not on parallel tracks, but as communicating vases that feed and enrich each other.

With respect to brotherhood, I will dwell briefly on two words that I consider necessary to make our being together qualitatively meaningful.

THE SENSE OF **BELONGING**

An Italian songwriter and singer, Giorgio Gaber, in one of his lyrics that has this very word as its title, says:

*"Belonging. It is not the effort of a civilized person to be together. It is not the comfort of a normal benevolence. Belonging is to have others within oneself. [...] It is not a casual gathering of people, it is not the consent to an apparent grouping: belonging is to have others within oneself. [...] it is much more than personal salvation, it is the hope of every man who is ill and it is not enough for him to be polite. It is that vigour that is felt if you are part of something that in itself overwhelms all personal selfishness with that more vital air that is truly contagious. [...] I would be certain to change my life if I could begin to say **we**".*

Evidently he wasn't thinking about our communities when he composed this song, but I really do find some characteristics that are already present in our realities, others that need to be strengthened, and others that need to be revived and lived.

- *Hold others within oneself*: means taking care of those who are around us, of the often painful realities that are present in our communities, our apostolic works, etc.;
- *it is that vigour that is felt if you are part of something that overcomes selfishness and becomes contagious*: it expresses the ability to dream together, to believe in a future that is still possible because the foundation of our being together is a gift of the Spirit;
- *I would be sure to change my life if I could begin to say **we***: the possibility of we is expressed in our community life, in the vows we have taken, in our prayers together, etc... How much loneliness outside our communities, how much selfishness, individualism and how many possibilities we have to ensure that all this does not get in our realities that sometimes, unfortunately, are suffering precisely for these reasons.

HOLINESS

Blessed Alberione expressed himself in this way about common life:

"There is community life when we seek holiness together, where there is union of thoughts, of hearts, of works, and prayers, where there is assistance for old age, for the sick... community life is an organism, not a mechanism; where the individual serves the whole, and everything serves everyone".

His perspective is interesting because, even before being involved in doing things together, the brotherhood is part of the journey of holiness that is expressed in a personal and communitarian integration of thoughts, feelings, actions, life of prayer, etc... The organism which is the community life, speaks of dynamism, growth, future, hope, commitment, suffering, energy and old age, vigour and wisdom....

To be credible witnesses today, with the Pauline colour and stamp, means precisely to proclaim and give Jesus to the world starting from witnessing him in our way of being together, in telling with life that individual differences can generate bridges and not walls; that the value of life depends not on industriousness but on the sacredness of life itself, etc..

It is about experiencing a substantial change: from love as a feeling to love as a choice of life. Only love as a choice of life is capable of giving life and giving life to those who are around us, near us, and far...

The Dutch writer Etty Hillesum, a Jewish victim of the Holocaust, said:

"It's not the events that count in life; it's only what you become through the events that counts."

I think this is the path of conversion to which we are invited: to become better and better what we are called to be: until Christ is formed in us. And this journey is precious, meaningful and credible only if live together in fraternity:

"How sublime is the community life! Considered externally and materially we will always have something to say; but, taken in its truth, in its depth and intimacy and in the encounter of all with Christ, then it is of such value, of such preciousness...". (Blessed James Alberione).

Wish you all a transformed and transforming life!