

## RELATIONS and LINKS

*"Cultivating relationships is not a strategy,  
but the way God has revealed Himself....*

***when our relationships, even in their fragility**  
the grace of Christ, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit.  
we confess by our lives our faith in one triune God."* DS 50

Something is born in our Church and it is born when it is needed. In this hour, when many of our leaderships are fragile and utilitarian, when democracies are weak and polarized (in many cases), when communication is manipulated and dispersed, when borders are relative, when xenophobia is recalcitrant, when the phenomenon of migration is more than on the increase, when in other places the cries of war are deafening, and when in many corners of our world human dignity is still being traded. We can therefore say that "we live in a liquid society", according to the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who coined this concept to refer to a society characterized by instability, fluidity, fragmentation and fragility that make **bonds, relationships and identities** *ephemeral and constantly changing, creating a sense of insecurity and disorientation.*

In these social changes that we are experiencing, it is more difficult to establish personal relationships, to have bonds of trust, to remain a family, to ensure belonging to the institution, that is, "to be and to remain". For this reason, the Synodal Assembly itself has experienced that it is relationships that sustain its vitality and animate its structures. A missionary synodal Church must renew both. DS 49.

Just at this time when we, as Dominican Sisters of Charity of the Presentation, have embarked on new paths of transformation, as a resolute return *"to the sources of the Gospel and of the charism, the common patrimony that makes us sisters"* (HME. C) we are invited to reinvent new forms of relationships, of synodality, of the agora, of the mysticism of the community which always presupposes mysticism, of the symphony of the common; and this invitation has the force of a mobilizing decision which generates a dialogue in which *"listening leads to conversion"* (Synod of Amazonia); the only thing that has the power to transform us is listening as a conversation in the Spirit which teaches us to discern the will of God as missionary disciples. Listening to God, listening to the people, listening to one another as a way of being evangelical in the face of reality, listening that restores the prophetic dimension of the Church.

## Synodality and the conversion of relationships

The insistence of the synodal process is to relearn the art of relationship, which requires among us a community more capable of nurturing a variety of relationships: with God, with creation, and with our brothers and sisters. We need to expand this relational capacity, and for this we need to increase the importance of deep listening. We are called to walk together, valuing otherness and being aware of diversity. And when we ask ourselves **"how?"** we know that the fundamental thing is to make the way of Jesus our own. To make his characteristics, his practices, his gestures, his style of relationships our own. A Church that makes possible the unsuspected of the Kingdom, love to the extreme, so that no bureaucracy or clericalism overshadows the presence of Jesus, the unconditional giving of one's life simply so that there is bread on the table, the word is spoken, and no one is tempted to feel superior to others. The ecclesial fullness to which we are invited is only possible in a spirit of fraternity.

This process begins in each of us as an experience that leads us to the "conversion of relationships," which is far from organizing our lives around our own desires, plans and needs. It is the way of Jesus, evident in the Gospels: "He called them to establish the formative bond of discipleship and to send them out" (Mk 3:14).

I propose three ideas that we must achieve in this process, which should change the way we behave at the community level.

**First,** we must fully embrace the conviction that we belong to others and that others belong to us. **The key is in community**, in being with others, in synergy and networking, in joint search and collective construction. It is about recovering the face of my sister, near or far, not as a threat to the other's being, but as a sister, a companion in being, with whom I must keep the flame of the home burning. Relationships that are woven into everyday life when we try to live the gratuitousness of reciprocity. DS 52

**Second,** in synodality we are called not only to walk together, but above all to learn to meet, work and discern together. This is the challenge of the conversion of relationships, which leads us to seek new ways of "interacting, integrating and making consensual decisions". We become a community of those who truly love one another as Jesus has loved us (cf. Jn 13:34-35) (Ds 34). The call to the conversion of relationships overcomes any sense of favoritism or privilege, because this attitude leads to individualism and exclusive authoritarianism.

**Finally,** the conversion of relationships involves the conviction that our gifts and talents must be shared, not considered as personal assets to be used only for our

own advancement and personal benefit, but also that the gifts of all must be welcomed and appreciated with gratitude (cf. C. 26). In this way we become salt, light and leaven.

### **How can this be achieved?**

The document of the General Chapter of Tours asks us to "promote formation at all levels in order to encourage a change of mentality and to facilitate the transformation of life and mission". Because formation cannot be improvised, we need schools of synodality, schools of communion in which we recognize ourselves as different but necessary, as sisters of one another, living freely together and participating in this plan of salvation in the Congregation.

- a. If we put the conversion of relationships at the center of our formation, we might rethink: How do we do religious formation programs for young women? Wouldn't it be better to emphasize helping young women to become familiar with the way of Jesus and to experience his style of relationships, rather than prioritizing the content of the programs? In the same way, their formation process in Christian initiation should be examined in order to accept the sacramentality of relationships that makes them responsible for generously offering their gifts and talents to the Church and the Congregation as an imperative of their baptism, as participants in the common table, witnesses of evangelization and ministers of reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor 5:20).
- b. "Do not be afraid, I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine" (Is 43:1). It is an expression of radical belonging to the One who has chosen us, but over the years we have often experienced the frustration of realizing that some sisters, after their first or final profession, lack the essential bonds that underlie their identity and belonging to the consecrated life: they lack the awareness of having been chosen. We wonder if temporary or final profession has sometimes become a "rite of Christian exodus".
- c. We are challenged to insist on the charismatic spirituality that we are "a group of women united in harmony to consecrate themselves in a special way to the service of God and neighbor" (R. 1). Marie Poussepin asks us to live in heart-to-heart relationship and to form bonds so that her community can be a prophecy in a self-referential, isolated society. For there is no greater prophecy than that of being radically sisters.
- d. The future of synodality in the Congregation depends on the personal and community conversion that we are willing to undertake responsibly. We are

fortunate to be living an extraordinary time in the life of the Church, which is being transformed in the face of the Gospel. Will we sisters be able to rise to the occasion and overcome certain narrow-mindedness that hinders the processes of restructuration? Will we be open to welcome the light that the Holy Spirit offers us? In principle, we all recognize that the Spirit of God has always sought transformation in order to achieve "the renewal of the face of the earth. But often, instead of a constant conversion of heart, we have built walls and barriers between us. In the face of these structures, we must maintain availability and openness in the new provinces and discern together the processes that foster relationships and bonds (cf. GGCC 56, p. 23).

- e. We must strive to dream of a Congregation in which communion, participation and mission are the building of harmoniously united wills, the condition for weaving new forms of relationships, the courage to live outwardly as pilgrims of hope. There will be structural reform when there is attitudinal reform; it is in the holiness of each of its members that authentic transformation takes place. We find the dynamic of holiness in Paul when he tells us: "Take the truth as your girdle, and righteousness as your breastplate; be well shod, ready to carry the gospel of peace" (Eph 6:14-15). When we profess the evangelical counsels in community, according to the charism of Marie Poussepin, we do so in order to "live and die at the service of the Church in the exercise of charity. Mission requires of each of us the availability to respond to mission.

We find in the Exodus that the God who commits Moses to the task of liberation also commits Himself: "I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt, I have heard their cry before their oppressors, I know their sufferings. I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up to a good and spacious land" (Exodus 3:7-8).

- **Where should we look?** Undoubtedly to the face of the Risen Lord, to the Gospel of Easter, which we live in our mission. To the face of the synodal Church, which sends us to journey together to the frontiers, to the face of the most vulnerable brothers and sisters with whom Christ identifies. These faces form the map of conversion that each one of us is called to experience.
- **To whom should we listen?** To the Spirit who teaches us to discern, to the Church who encourages us to cross boundaries, to the Congregation who engages us in processes of restructuration to be faithful to the Gospel and charism, to our sisters with whom we journey and from whom we receive inspiration and support, to the impoverished who cry out for dignity and justice. The Synod Document tells us that when we listen to our brothers and sisters, we

share the same attitude of our God, who listens and reaches out to us, moved by compassion.

- **What do we know?** Faced with the unfathomable richness of Christ's knowledge, we encounter the precariousness of our responses; faced with the broad missionary horizon of the Church, we encounter the limited resources and narrowness of our vision; faced with the urgent calls of the Congregation to transform our life and mission, we encounter our fears, resistance, vulnerability and lack of commitment.
- **Where do we go down?** First, within ourselves, to recognize that if we do not remain attached to Christ as fruitful sap, we will be dry branches (Jn 15). We descend into the heart of the community to examine the bonds that unite us and the relationships that identify us as sisters. We descend into the noise of the world in which we live, with its many contradictions, exclusions and miseries. We descend because we are aware of the poverty we carry, but we carry the hope that shelters all our dreams to make them come true.

**WORKSHOP to be held in communities using the method of Conversation in the Spirit.**

***How can we build fraternal relationships  
that bring hope and bonds of communion  
that foster missionary dynamism?***

Spiritual conversation focuses on the quality of listening as well as the quality of the words spoken. This means paying attention to the spiritual movements within oneself and the other person during the conversation. It requires paying attention to more than just the words spoken. This quality of attention is an act of respect, acceptance, and hospitality toward others as they are. It is an approach that takes seriously what is happening in the hearts of those who are speaking. Two necessary attitudes are fundamental to this process: active listening and speaking from the heart.

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