



ANNUAL LETTER FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL  
TO THE BROTHERS OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PAUL

## **A “SYNODAL CONGREGATION”**

*at the service of the Gospel in the culture of communication*

Dear brothers,

I greet you all and wish that the grace and light of Jesus Master may always accompany you all.

This letter comes at a time when the Covid-19 emergency is still on-going. What is evident is that the pandemic, which unfortunately is claiming so many lives throughout the world, is also causing strong repercussions in society, in the economy, in lifestyles, in institutions and in the Church, without of course leaving our Congregation immune to it.

Similar pandemics, as we know, have occurred periodically in human history, but the globalized condition of the contemporary world makes this event new and unique. Pope Francis, reflecting on this reality in the light of the episode of the storm calmed by Jesus (Mk 4:35-41), said: *«We realized that we were in the same boat, all fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and necessary, all called to row together, all in need of comforting each other. In this boat... we're all in it»*. Then he noted: *«Just as those disciples who speak with one voice and in anguish say: 'We are lost' (v. 38), so too we have realized that we cannot go ahead on our own, but only together»*<sup>1</sup>.

Pope Francis' call to walk together introduces us into the reflection in this letter which is precisely on synodality, a “style of Church” on which he has been insisting since the beginning of his pontificate and which he put as a programmatic commitment when he declared: *«The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium»*<sup>2</sup>.

From the perspective of the Pauline charism, our Founder already used to say, *«we must do good to those who live today»*<sup>3</sup>. And today we have a world affected not only by the pandemic, but also by many other situations of suffering and uncertainty caused by the so-called “change of epoch”. A time characterized by non-linear but, definitely, epochal changes, in which the way of living, of relating, of communicating and elaborating thought, of relating among human generations and of understanding and living faith and science are rapidly changing<sup>4</sup>. A time also marked by many other situations of hardship: economic and spiritual impoverishment, social exclusion and religious fanaticism on the one hand and relativism on the other, unemployment, family crisis, environmental degra-

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Momento straordinario di preghiera in tempo di epidemia*, 27 March 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Talk during the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

<sup>3</sup> James Alberione, *Alle Figlie di San Paolo. Spiegazione delle costituzioni*, 275.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Discourse to the Roman Curia offering Christmas Wishes*, 21 December 2019.

dation, violence in its various forms, many people in situations of abandonment, migration due to situations of war and poverty, etc..

Obviously, the proposal to deepen the theme of synodality is justified not only by the difficult times in which we live, but also by the value of “walking together”, certainly, in the positive situations that exist in the world, in the Church and in our Congregation. The turbulence that we are going through in this phase of history urges us to value even more of living and working in synergy.

The purpose of this letter is to offer some food for thought on synodality, starting from the consideration that this is an essential aspect of the life of the Church and that we, as a Congregation, are also called to enter into this “way of being Church” to respond to the questions that the contemporary world raises for our specific life and mission.

In this perspective we begin our reflection by addressing the importance of synodality in the life of the Church and, later, of communication as an indispensable resource for the effectiveness of the synodal journey. We will then present Jesus as the first point of reference for synodality and Saint Paul as an example of a disciple who knew how to live and work in synergy with others. Finally, we will try to situate the Congregation in this horizon, giving an account of its hopes and difficulties, and to present the Word and the Eucharist as nourishment for the journey. What follows are just a few considerations on the theme of synodality, without the pretension of exhausting this complex subject, which therefore remains open to further reflection and discussion.

## **I. Synodality, a challenge for our time**

Starting from the origin of the word “synod”, we find the Greek terms *syn* (“together”) and *odòs* (“walk”), which give us the meaning of “walking together”. A concept easy to express in words, but not easy to put into practice. This “walking”, of course, does not refer to the way a parliamentary assembly or a trade union operates, where everyone wants to let the interests of their own group or even their individual interests prevail, but rather as the people of God called to let themselves be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. In fact, «to be truly “synodal” is to advance in harmony under the inspiration of the Spirit»<sup>5</sup>.

Let us recall that from the earliest centuries of the Church’s history, ecclesial assemblies convened at various levels (diocesan, provincial or regional, patriarchal, universal) to discern the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral issues that came up from time to time were designated by the word “synod” with a specific meaning<sup>6</sup>. Many aspects emerge from this long history that can be object of study and reflection.

The theme of synodality was taken up emphatically after Vatican Council II by Pope Paul VI, who established the Synod of Bishops for the universal Church<sup>7</sup>. Later, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis continued this tradition, convening various Synods.

In recent years, Pope Francis has been insisting on the need to take steps ahead, increasingly optimizing the synodal journey and trying to clarify the understanding of the term “synod”, which cannot be reduced to the idea of meetings of cardinals and bishops. The synod, as such, is a much broader concept than collegiality. “Collegiality” concerns the episcopate, the College of which the Pope as successor of Peter is the head<sup>8</sup>. On the

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<sup>5</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, *Le funzioni sinodali della Chiesa: l'importanza della comunione tra i Vescovi*, in *L'Osservatore romano*, 24 January 1996, 4.

<sup>6</sup> International Theological Commission *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, no. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops with the *Motu Proprio Apostolica sollicitudo*, published on 15 September 1965.

<sup>8</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality...* op.cit. no.7.

other hand, the term “synodality” highlights that the faithful must also be involved and are all actors and protagonists, each according to his own function. In other words, synodality involves the whole Church in its wealth of ministries.

It is true that the synodality is a subject still to be thoroughly studied at the ecclesial level, which is why Pope Francis has convoked a Synod of Bishops on this particular theme for the year 2022. The aspect that we wish to emphasize in this letter is, rather, the synodality as a “method”, seeking also a meaning to this praxis, which must also encourage us Paulines to assume a style of life that values each person, that motivates each one to feel truly part of the “body”, that stimulates co-responsibility, that makes each one truly participate in some way in the Pauline life and mission, where one listens to the other and everyone tries to listen to what the Spirit says. It is process in which communication, which produces sharing and collaboration, is a fundamental factor.

We know that the synodal experience is not entirely new in our Congregation. It is enough to recall our General and Provincial Chapters or Regional Assemblies, which are privileged moments of encounter, promoting communion, common reflection and co-responsibility in decisions. Also the structures of government, at their various levels, according to our rules with the respective Councils, are concrete expressions that promote this common journey. In the same way international bodies, in the field of the apostolate and formation, are spaces to grow in unity as a Congregation.

The great challenge is – albeit a difficult one – to move from an “occasional synodality” to a “synodal style” as a Congregation; that is, to transform the synodality into a method of prayer, thought, planning, and common realization, so that our message can reach our interlocutors effectively.

## **2. With the Church, the people of God on journey**

When we speak of synodal journey we are referring first of all to walking together as the People of God. We are the Church and, as a Congregation, we want to walk with the Church in the footsteps of our Founder, for whom *«the Pauline Family reflects the Church in its members, in its activities, in its apostolate, in its mission»*<sup>9</sup>. Taking the theme of synodality as an object of reflection, we want to be in tune with the ecclesial magisterium which, in recent years, reaffirms the need to join forces to face the great pastoral challenges in this “change of epoch”.

Walking together, but in view of what? The mission is one of the main reasons. Synodality, in fact, is essentially oriented towards the mission<sup>10</sup>, and the Church’s mission is to evangelize. *«Evangelizing, in fact, is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her most profound identity»*<sup>11</sup>. However, evangelizing is not a solitary action, even though personal testimony certainly has an important role. *«Evangelizing is never an individual and isolated act for anyone, but a truly ecclesial act»*<sup>12</sup>. In our case in particular, we need to join forces to carry out our mission of evangelizing with the current languages in the complex universe of communication.

A style of synodal Church aims at promoting participation and co-responsibility in view of evangelization, encouraging the experience of sharing, which begins first of all in the individual communities<sup>13</sup>. Each community is called to live the Gospel from within, in

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<sup>9</sup> James Alberione, *To Sister Disciples of the Divine Master*, VIII - 1963, 163.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops *Youth, Faith and Vocation Discernment*, Final Document, no. 125.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 60.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *op. cit.* no. 128.

openness to God and to others, in dialogue, in communion, overcoming every temptation of being self-referential in order to discover new ways of evangelization.

In this regard, our Constitutions are clear when they state that our apostolate is “eminently communitarian” and that, therefore, fraternal collaboration and friendship must be cultivated to correspond to the common vocation<sup>14</sup>. All this makes us think to what extent the synodal style, that is, the practice of walking together, is truly present in our communities in view of the evangelization. Certainly this question leads us, first of all, to an aspect of the synodal journey which we believe it is important to explore in greater depth: human relations, a reality closely linked to the sphere of communication.

### **3. Synodality and communication**

The theme of synodality necessarily brings us into the sphere of human relations, without which it is impossible to follow an authentic “synodal lifestyle”. It is difficult to “walk together” if a sincere and mature human relationship is lacking. This means that behind the “synodal style” there is communication in its deepest human sense.

If communication is lacking, which is expressed concretely in openness to God and to the other – be it this “other” one or more interlocutors – an effective synodal journey is impossible. Communication has an indispensable role in it, which certainly manifests itself in language, behaviour, attitudes and choices; where listening, speaking, silence, dialogue and discernment come into play. Let us briefly mention all these aspects.

#### **a) Listening**

Communication is not a marginal element in the synodal journey and depends to a great extent on the personal commitment of each one, which sometimes could be tiring, because communicating is not always easy. In fact, it is not always easy to share what we really think and feel, also because of the fear that, by exposing ourselves, sometimes we may cause disagreements or conflicts.

In this regard, where there is conflict, it cannot be ignored or concealed, but has to be accepted. If we ignore it we may become trapped and lose the right perspective, we may limit our horizons and reality itself may become fragmented. When we stop at the conflictual situation, we lose the sense of the profound unity of reality<sup>15</sup>.

The synodal journey is a process where there is a common effort to go beyond conflicts, also because the enemy of communication is not so much divergence or possible conflicts, but rather indifference. This is that attitude associated with insensitivity and coldness, which leads to closing of human relations and hinders sharing.

On the contrary, a synodal journey requires openness and attention that leads to “listening”. «A synodal Church is a Church that listens, in the awareness that listening “is more than hearing”. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn»<sup>16</sup>. In this perspective, we need to free our minds and hearts from prejudices and stereotypes, mainly about people we already know: when we think we already know who the other person is and what he wants, then we really find it hard to listen to him seriously<sup>17</sup>.

In a fruitful synodal journey, the attitude of listening to the other prevails, considering that this “other” is not only the one with whom I sympathize the most or who thinks exactly like me. This “other” refers to all those with whom I am in contact or engaged

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. *Constitutions and Directory of the Society of St Paul*, art. 15.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 226.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, *Talk during the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, *Speech at the beginning of the Synod dedicated to young people*, 3 October 2018.

and who, although different from me, believe in the same values and have heard God's call to the same ideal of life.

## **b) Dialogue**

Once free from prejudices, it is time to establish a dialogue – which rightly means being convinced that the other has something to say –, it is to make room for his point of view, his suggestions. Dialogue ensues from listening<sup>18</sup> that is, precisely, that process which sets in motion a journey of coming closer and that tries to unite what is divided or, in other cases, to strengthen the positive links already present in relationships.

Dialogue is not about fighting in a war of ideas, but rather about listening and trying to understand. Honest and transparent criticism is constructive and helps, while unnecessary chatter, rumours, superficial deductions or prejudices, which instead block it, do not. Dialogue does not mean giving up one's own ideas, but abandoning the claim that they are unique and absolute<sup>19</sup>. If we are not willing to give up something, it will be difficult to create harmony. *Dialogue «does not level but appeals to what is most proper and original in the interlocutors, stimulating the ability to deal with difference not as a reason for conflict but as a mutual gift, that is, taking beyond the logic of opposition, towards the logic of convergence»*<sup>20</sup>.

We can say that today dialogue can be developed in the present or in the digital environment, an important space of communication that also helps people to get closer to each other. However, as is often and rightly said, the multiplication of technical possibilities does not necessarily guarantee an improvement in our ability to communicate, in the sense of sharing and creating communion. In order to ensure dialogue it is not enough that we are connected or that each person expresses his or her own opinion, even if the possibility of expressing oneself freely is an indispensable first step. We need to feel the presence of the interlocutor and give time for the exchange which, in this process, would lose much of its effectiveness if it were reduced to digital connection alone.

## **c) Word and Silence**

Two attitudes must necessarily be integrated into the process of dialogue: speech and silence. It is not enough, of course, to express words; we must also speak with courage and *parresia*, integrating *freedom, truth and charity*<sup>21</sup>. Silence is indispensable for listening, that fruitful and welcoming silence which puts us in harmony with the inner and outer world.

Silence is the attitude that helps us to get to know each other better, that allows us to understand more clearly what we wish to say or what we expect from each other and that allows us to choose how to express ourselves. Silence also allows the other person to speak and express themselves. In this way a space of mutual listening is opened up and a fuller human relationship becomes possible<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Dialogue: from the Greek *dià-lègein*, to link what is separate, to unite by the word two distinct subjects (Cf. AA.VV., *Identità multiculturale e multireligiosa. La costruzione di una cittadinanza pluralistica*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2004, p. 46).

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, Message for the 48th World Communications Day. “*Communication at the service of an authentic culture of encounter*”, 1 June 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Giacomo Panteghini, *Quale comunicazione nella Chiesa? Una Chiesa tra ideali di comunione e problemi di comunicazione*, EDB, Bologna 1993, p. 140.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, *Discourse at the beginning of the Synod dedicated to young people*, 3 October 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the 46th World Communications Day. “Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization”*, 20 May 2012.

Word and silence are two aspects which give value and meaning to communication and which must balance and follow one another in order to generate authentic dialogue and profound closeness with the interlocutor. Only through a process of dialogue – in which word and silence are integrated – is common discernment possible, a work necessary to make the right choices and make appropriate decisions.

#### **d) Discernment**

Listening, silence, frankness in speaking and openness in listening are fundamental attitudes, so that the synodal journey may truly be a process of discernment<sup>23</sup>. And when we speak of discernment, we want to emphasize, as we have already said above, that a synodal journey is not a parliament, but a journey made by brothers who seek together to listen to what the Spirit says.

In fact, *«it is not a matter of engaging in a debate in which one interlocutor tries to outdo the others or counter their positions with blunt arguments, but of expressing with respect what is felt in conscience suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful in view of community discernment, open at the same time to grasp what in the positions of others is suggested by the same Spirit “for the common good” (cf. 1 Cor 12:7)»*<sup>24</sup>.

The synodal journey is an itinerary in which communication has a great importance, that is, in the perspective of faith which is based on the certainty that God speaks in history, in the events of life, in the people we meet and who speak to us. It is in Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life that the Father reveals Himself, that the Spirit is given to us and that we will first of all find the inspiration for the synodal journey. From him, model of generative communication – which saves, frees and creates communion – we learn to be true men of relationships in order to make the Synod a way of being Church in view of the mission.

### **4. Jesus: Master in the synodal journey**

In a Trinitarian perspective, Jesus is our first point of reference in the synodal journey. Indeed, the synodal journey is a journey of faith which is sustained above all in the communion of love between the three divine Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and in their communication with us<sup>25</sup>. God is relationship. In the same way, the human person, God’s image and likeness, is relationship. God, in the Christian faith, is a God who walks with man and, in this journey, speaks, listens and dialogues and invites man to a personal, free and responsible relationship with him.

It is appropriate to bear in mind that the whole Bible is an act of communication of God which is realized in the history of the people on the journey from Abraham, the father in faith, to reach Jesus, the Word made flesh (cf. Heb 1:1-2), its summit. Even though the written word is important, the Christian faith is not a religion of the book but of the Word of God, not of a written and mute word, but above all of the Word made flesh and living<sup>26</sup>. The Church’s mission is to evangelize, aware that Jesus himself is “the eternal Gospel”<sup>27</sup>. In Jesus the Paschal Mystery is realized: a God who becomes flesh, dies on the cross out of love, rises and lives forever!

Jesus not only indicates a “path” to follow, he not only motivates us to a synodal journey, but he presents himself to his disciples as the “way”, a term that appears in John’s

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<sup>23</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, *Discourse at the beginning of the Synod dedicated to young*, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> International Theological Commission, op. cit., no. 111

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Social Communications*, 4 June 2000, no. 3.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 7.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 11.

Gospel and which is at the basis of our Pauline spirituality. In fact, when Thomas asks the question «*Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?*» Jesus answers: «*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*»(Jn 14:6).

Jesus reveals himself as “the way” that leads to the Father. He is the way of God to man and of man to God. He is the evangelizing pilgrim who proclaims the Good News of the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk 9:11), a pilgrimage that does not happen alone but united to the Father and the Holy Spirit, together with so many men and women, his contemporaries.

The journey of following Jesus – even though at the beginning it always involves a personal response of adherence – is not, however, a solitary journey, but one to be made together. Already the early Church was aware that she belonged to the “way of the Lord” and that her members were “disciples of the Way”. Jesus is the path (*odòs*) that the first Christian communities followed together (*syn*) (cf. Acts 9:1-2; 19:9.23; 22:4; 24:14.22), seeking to live and bear witness to the Gospel.

Jesus himself as “way” becomes a way of life to be assimilated by his disciples<sup>28</sup>. From this point of view, Fr. Alberione would say that to be a disciple is to establish oneself in Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life; it is to conform to him; it is to live Jesus Christ as he is presented in the Gospel<sup>29</sup>, which is equivalent to “being holy”<sup>30</sup>. A holiness that is reflected in the holiness of Jesus and which, among other things, is visible in his living communication with God the Father, with his disciples and with the people he meets, a communication that generates life for all those who accept his message.

Later we will try to present some aspects that we find in Jesus and that help us to walk together, but we will do so starting from the eminent person of the Apostle Paul, our first reference point as Paulines in following Jesus. Inspired by the Gospel Saint Paul indicates some concrete attitudes which favour a fruitful and necessary communication for making the synodal journey.

## 5. Paul: Synodal Apostle

Let us begin with the fact that Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, changed from a persecutor to a follower of the “Way” (cf. Gal 1:11-12; 1:23), to the point of saying: «*I no longer live, but Christ lives in me*» (Gal 2:20). The turning point caused by the revelation of the Risen One radically changed his heart and mind as an observant Pharisee and, in a special way, his way of relating to people, especially Christians.

After meeting Jesus and receiving baptism, Paul approached the “followers of the Way” because he no longer saw them as “dissidents” or enemies, but as brothers; no longer as a threat, but as companions in the same mission. In fact, Saint Paul is not a solitary apostle. As Pope Francis himself said, «*the apostle Paul, the greatest missionary in the history of the Church, helps us to “make Synod”, to “walk together”*»<sup>31</sup>.

Sometimes we Paulines consider the Apostle above all in his missionary dimension, in his apostolic activity, as a preacher and writer, as an apostle who tries to use all the instruments of communication of his time for the proclamation of the Gospel. While all these are undoubtedly relevant references for our mission, we do not always give the

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<sup>28</sup>Cf. James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei* I, 87.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. James Alberione, *Carissimi in san Paolo*, Edizioni Paoline, Roma 1971, p. 264.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Annual Letter of the Superior General. “*Holiness: A Way of Life*”, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily at the Opening Mass of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon*, 6 October 2019.

same importance to the fact that, in this work, he creates relationships, builds communion, walks with and in the Church.

As a concrete case of synodal experience we can mention the Council of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:1-35), the first Council of the Church, of which Paul is one of the main protagonists. In this “synod”, which had Peter as its head – and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit! (cf. Acts 15:28) –, the participants, after discussion and discernment, make important decisions regarding the mission of the nascent Church.

It is certain that Paul participates actively in this Council, but we learn from him that the synodality is not only a resource for resolving occasional issues, as is the case here. Observing Paul in general in his work of evangelization, we discover that the synodality for him is a true and proper method of living and acting as a Christian.

Despite the difficulties, he tries to work together, in teams, by “networking”, with various collaborators, men and women, showing with his pastoral practice that the Christian community is built and established as a community of relationships. There are many passages in Paul’s life where we can observe him from this perspective. But it is important to realize that behind this ability to work in synergy there are attitudes that arise from the heart of the Gospel and that are indispensable for building bridges and walking together.

### **a) Humility: the bridge to relationships**

Starting from the principle that synodality is a journey of relationships (with God and with others), we learn from the Apostle Paul that it is not possible to make it without openness to the other and that there is no openness without humility. We learn from Paul that humility is the virtue necessary to detach oneself from self, which allows one to approach others sincerely<sup>32</sup>. It is one of the basic conditions for every human relationship, which enables listening and dialogue.

The Letter to the Philippians enlightens us in this regard. In the exhortation preceding the Christological hymn of Phil 2:6-11, the Letter to the Philippians presents a strong exhortation to the members of the Christian community to unity and indicates humility as an attitude to achieve this goal: «*Do nothing out of rivalry or vainglory, but with humility, consider others superior to yourselves*»(Phil 2:3).

As the hymn itself makes clear, however, this humility must be modelled on that of Christ who, with his Incarnation, descends from his “divine condition” and “empties himself”; on the humility of the one who, being equal to God, chooses to share human life and destiny until death on a cross<sup>33</sup>, and thus takes the last place in the world and, precisely with this radical humility, redeems us<sup>34</sup>.

In fact, we can say that Jesus in the Incarnation shows a very strong form of synodality, the matrix of every other ecclesial synodality: it consists in his coming, coming down, coming closer, sharing in all the human condition “except sin” (Heb 4:15). In more explicit terms: the emptying of Jesus brings him closer to men and women in their concrete situations, made up of joy and hope, sorrow and anguish. A tangible closeness in service: «*The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many*»(Mk 10:45).

From the awareness of this humility, “Saul” becomes “Paul”, whose name means “little”<sup>35</sup>. The arrogant Saul becomes «*Paul, servant of Jesus Christ*» (Rom 1:1). From Paul –

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<sup>32</sup>Cf. Rinaldo Fabris, *Lettera ai Filippesi. Struttura, commento e attualizzazione*, EDB, Bologna 1983, p. 62.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Rinaldo Fabris, *Lettera ai Filippesi*, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 35.

<sup>35</sup> Rinaldo Fabris, *Paolo. L’apostolo delle genti*, Paoline, Milano 1997, p. 32.

who in weakness feels strong! (cf. 2 Cor 12:10) – we learn that if we do not “empty ourselves” of pride, arrogance, the craze for knowing everything, prejudice, etc., it is difficult to approach people and make a journey together.

Humility, inspired by that of Jesus, is a necessary attitude to open ourselves to the other. Our Founder understood well the importance of humility: *«Hold it as a basic principle: Which is the (most important) virtue for you as individuals and as groups and for the whole Community? It is humility. And the first virtue is humility, the second humility, the third humility; and if you ask me this a hundred and a thousand times, I will answer you as many times: humility»*<sup>36</sup>.

Humility is the virtue that allows us to descend into our own “humus”<sup>37</sup>, that leads us to our own personal human reality, that makes us touch and accept our limits. Once we are aware of our reality, with all its limits, it is possible to welcome our brother with his defects and limitations. In fact, if we do not recognize and accept our limits, if we do not try to do this exercise of poverty<sup>38</sup>, which Jesus and Paul show us through their testimony, it will be very difficult to recognize and accept the limits of those with whom we relate and to approach them in a sincere way.

### **b) From love to “artisans of communion”**

From the Apostle Paul we learn that there is no synodal journey without love, that love manifested in Jesus, who becomes humble, who makes us come out of ourselves to give life. Indeed, humility is based on love, it is a style of manifestation of love<sup>39</sup> which comes from God, which is gratuitous and which finds its realization in relationships with one’s neighbour (cf. Rom 13:8-10)<sup>40</sup>. Saint Paul had learned from the Master that love is part of the identity of the Christian and, therefore, he could say: *«owe nothing to anyone except love for one another; for he who loves another has fulfilled the law»* (Rom 13:8).

It is interesting that Paul, when he refers to charisms and community as a body, always points to love as its foundation. In the Letter to the Romans, for example, after describing the community as a body made up of many members with different gifts, he alludes to love as “not hypocritical” (Rom 12:9-10), “without masks”<sup>41</sup>, which leads to sincere and authentic relationships. The same in the First Letter to the Corinthians when – after speaking of the gifts of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11) and of the community as the body of Christ with its various members (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-30) – he presents love as the gift for which all must aspire (cf. 1 Cor 14:1)<sup>42</sup>.

Love, which always has as its reference point the generous and unconditional love of Jesus, is truly the force that leads to reconciliation, to fraternity, to communion, which unites people despite their differences. It is from this lived love that *«a patient community is born, a community that serves, that does not become proud, that does not become irritated, that believes everything, hopes everything, and endures everything;»* in it everyone is spoken well of, everyone is trusted, everyone is esteemed<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 817.

<sup>37</sup> *«Humility has the same root as “humus” (earth, soil). Humility is awareness of one’s own ontological and existential poverty, it stands in contrast to pride and its fruits of arrogance and presumption. According to all spiritual masters humility is the foundation, the earthly, the humus, of all the virtues»* (cf. <http://www.casalanteri.it/Files/FSSSpUmilt.pdf>).

<sup>38</sup> The term “humility” from the Greek word *tapeinophrosyne* evokes “feeling poor” (cf. Rinaldo Fabris, *Lettera ai Filippesi*, op. cit., p. 62).

<sup>39</sup> Idem.

<sup>40</sup> Antonio Pitta, *Lettera ai Romani. Nuova versione, introduzione e commento*, Paoline, Milano 2001, p. 432.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. nota a Rm 12,9 ne *La Bibbia. Via, Verità e Vita*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi) 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Antonio Pitta, *Lettera ai Romani*, op. cit., p. 431.

<sup>43</sup> Carlo Maria Martini, *L’utopia alla prova di una comunità*, Centro Ambrosiano, Milano 2014, p. 83.

Once he had assumed love as the supreme law, the Apostle Paul became a true “artisan of communion”, that is, he began the difficult but rewarding work of uniting people around the Gospel, forming communities, a work that required patience, creativity and perseverance. Paul knew well what an artisan was, as he worked as an artisan<sup>44</sup> making tents and curtains and other items in leather<sup>45</sup>.

Paul was aware of the demands of this way of doing things. Despite the difficulties and some conflicts, he always tried to overcome them and motivate communities to look ahead, united around the same goal of living and witnessing to the Gospel. His way of being, through listening, dialogue, discernment – attitudes that certainly demanded humility and love – was a true inspiration for Christians on their synodal journey.

## **6. A Congregation on the journey**

So far we have made some reference to the importance of synodality, emphasizing communication as an indispensable aspect of this way of being Church. We then presented Jesus as the “way”, which becomes the foundation for a synodal way of life, and the Apostle Paul as a man of relationships, who shows us humility and love as two attitudes, which he learned from the Master and which led him to be an “artisan of communion”. Now we will try to take a closer look into our Pauline life to see, in fact, at what stage we are in making our Congregation “synodal”.

Obviously, our Founder never used the term “synodality”, in the sense in which we understand it in these reflections, also because it is an idea that was born in the context of the Church after Vatican Council II. We know, however, how he insisted, on various occasions, on the need for a harmonious community life in harmony with the Church, for the good of Pauline life and mission itself. A community life that seeks unity. In fact, for him common life *«means unity of thought, unity of works, unity of speech, unity of feelings, unity of purpose. All must contribute to the principal goal and the secondary goal: personal sanctification and the apostolate»*<sup>46</sup>.

We know how difficult it is to live the dimension of unity in today’s world, in which individualism, narcissism, indifference towards others, attitudes that often enter even within our communities, are hindering the success of “community life”. There is a constant challenge to regain the meaning of “walking together”.

Just as the Church, as a whole, is called to work in synodal synergy with the ministries and charisms present in her life to discern the ways of evangelization by listening to the voice of the Spirit<sup>47</sup>, so too, within our congregation, we are called to do the same, that is, to live in unity, despite the diversity of gifts, in view of the mission of evangelization in the culture of communication.

Let us present below some aspects of our Pauline life, trying to evaluate them in the light of what we have discussed above, but always with the desire of discovering those horizons that would lead us to be a “synodal congregation”. These are observations which, though with some critical remarks about our reality, are full of hope.

### **a) Responsibility of everyone**

Even if synodality is a journey made together, the effectiveness of this process depends largely on the good will of each person to take this way of being Church seriously.

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<sup>44</sup> Rinaldo Fabris, *Tutto per il Vangelo. La personalità, il pensiero, la metodologia di Paolo di Tarso*, San Paolo, Ciniello Balsamo (Mi) 2008, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Giuseppe Barboglio, *Paolo di Tarso e le origini cristiane*, Cittadella, Assisi 1985, p. 54.

<sup>46</sup> James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 540.

<sup>47</sup> International Theological Commission. *The Synodality*, op. cit. no. 53.

As I pointed out in my previous Annual Letters, which had as their theme each year one of the four wheels of the Pauline cart, the synodality also depends largely on the individual person, so that it can be lived and made concrete.

Those letters had highlighted that it is above all on the individual that the quality of relationships (with God, with others, with oneself), fidelity to the evangelical counsels, spiritual life and integral formation, and the cultivation of study in the sense of “studiousness”<sup>48</sup> depend... commitment to the apostolate with zeal and creativity, the practice of poverty, etc..

Likewise, with regard to the synodality, we can well say that it depends on the commitment of each person, on his openness of mind, on the effort to listen and dialogue, to overcome possible conflicts of the past, on his ability to forgive, to have an overall vision of the mission. In the final analysis, it depends on each person wanting to “walk together”.

If we do not move from the individualistic “I” to the “ecclesial we” or the “community and congregational we” it will be difficult to walk together. As our Founder said: *«Personal selfishness destroys community life; social, political, and family selfishness even destroys institutions, or at least condemns them to sterility»*<sup>49</sup>.

## **b) Living and working in synergy**

Synodality requires everyone to value living and working together. Even though we have made our religious profession in the knowledge that *«the persons who make up the community constitute its fundamental value, and the community’s goal is to give them fraternal help towards their sanctification through their dedication to the apostolate»*<sup>50</sup>, in practice, however, we see that it is not always easy to remain faithful in this regard.

It is certainly beautiful to see that, in some places, despite the difficulties, the confreres try to overcome conflicts and, considering the common good, live the consecrated life and work together in spite of differences. On the other hand, there are realities where it is still difficult to walk together. Usually this happens where there are obstacles to overcome regarding negative experiences of the past, often in the area of human relationships.

But there are also difficulties where there is too “commercialistic” a vision of the Pauline apostolate and where a strictly pyramidal and authoritarian vision prevails at the decision-making level. We need, then, to return to the deep roots for which we are in the Pauline consecrated life. We need to see to what extent we allow ourselves to be guided by the logic of the Gospel and not by a commercial logic.

The challenge of walking together is for everyone and at all levels: General, provincial, regional and local government. The theme of synodality leads us to examine carefully how we work in our Councils and in the different instances of planning and decision-making. At the level of General Government we ask ourselves, for example, how we work in the various international bodies (SIF, CTIA, Pauline Spirituality Centre, St Pauls Biblical Centre, SOBICAIN) and in continental bodies (CIDEP, GEC, CAP-ESW). Within the Circumscriptions, we must ask ourselves to what extent it is possible to work as a team for vocation promotion, formation, apostolate, administration, economy, etc..

But we also have to think about how to develop collaboration between the different sectors, such as the apostolate<sup>51</sup> and formation, considering that in Pauline life formation

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<sup>48</sup>Cf. *Annual Letter of the Superior General “Study for the Mission”, 2017.*

<sup>49</sup> James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei* I, 382.

<sup>50</sup> *Constitutions and Directory of the Society of St Paul*, art. 17

<sup>51</sup> *It is evident that the development and fruitfulness of the apostolate do not depend only on the adoption of the means that technical and scientific progress provides from time to time for the service of the Gospel, but above all on the*

(initial and ongoing) is in view of the mission. What can be done so that these two dimensions of our life can be increasingly integrated with the aim of forming “communicating and consecrated apostles” who live and proclaim the Gospel in the complex universe of communication today?

Another important aspect of the synodal journey concerns inter-generational relations, that is, the effort to walk together while keeping alive the dialogue between generations. It is indispensable to pursue a harmonious journey, where there is openness to listening, a journey in which young people value the past, history, what has already been done and built, etc., and adults and the elderly are open to the new things that young people bring, to their dreams, to their doubts, but above all that they are credible witnesses of the Gospel and of Pauline life.

Here is a luminous passage from Pope Francis regarding the inter-generational dimension: *«If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands»*<sup>52</sup>.

Finally, working in synergy also makes us think of our lay collaborators. It is important to see those who work with us not as rivals or competitors, but as human resources that join us to carry out the Pauline mission. We have before us Saint Paul as example of an apostle who knew how to work with his collaborators. We must all walk together – Paulines and lay people – seeking the common good, even though this journey can be tiring sometimes. An African proverb already known and repeated a few times by Pope Francis says: *«If you want to go quickly, go alone, but if you want to go far, go accompanied»*.

### **c) The service of authority**

Obviously, the role of authority does not disappear in the synodal journey, but it requires a more evangelical self-understanding that goes beyond the pyramidal, centralizing and unidirectional vision. What is needed is the testimony of the exercise of a “horizontal” type of authority, which walks together with the brothers, helping them to grow in fidelity to the Gospel and to the charism.

Authority has an important role in the synodal journey, but it must be understood from the perspective of service (*diakonia*), considering that the Church is not a place of relations of power, exercised by those who stand high above those who stand low. In this way, in fact, it would be no different from other human organizations and political systems. We must begin with the teaching of the Master, who said to his disciples: *«You know that the rulers of nations lord it over them and the leaders oppress them. Among you it will not be so; but whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be the first among you will be your slave»* (Mt 20:25-27).

The theme of synodality leads us to review how authority is exercised in all areas in our congregation. It is necessary to evaluate whether, in fact, authority promotes the growth of fraternal life through the service of listening and dialogue, whether it seeks to create a climate favourable to sharing and co-responsibility, whether it favours the par-

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person of the apostle who carries out the mission: *«The apostolate is a fruit, and the fruit comes from the plant: if the plant is healthy, the fruit will be abundant; but if the plant is sick, the fruit will either be lacking or scarce»* (cf. Annual Letter of the Superior General. “Apostles communicators. For a culture of encounter”, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, no. 199.

icipation of all in the affairs of all<sup>53</sup>. We are servants, not masters. And we know well the sad outcome when someone has acted as master.

We cannot forget that since «*the Second Vatican Council, on the basis of many ecclesial documents, the passage from a patriarchal, personalistic and pyramidal style of authority to a more liberal and fraternal one has been welcomed; and therefore from a model of obedience with strong disciplinary and juridical accents to another with a community and apostolic dimension (that is, with a view to the mission), with a more careful appreciation of people, dialogue and co-responsibility*»<sup>54</sup>.

We know that it is not easy to exercise the service of authority, especially in our time. Therefore, those who are engaged in this service also need help, understanding and prayer. On the other hand, we need an authority that listens to everyone and that is a true animator of the Synodal journey, considering that its service is not only of an implementing agent of collective decisions but, having heard the members' opinions and after necessary discernment, a concluding word is expected from it, which then commits everyone to putting into practice the decisions taken<sup>55</sup>.

#### **d) The apostolic organization**

Our mission is to evangelize and the synodality, as we have already said, is in view of this objective. A synodal journey in the perspective of our specific mission must seek to promote work in synergy and unity, established on the basis of a single apostolic project, also prepared synodally.

With regard to the apostolate, the Founder has already insisted: «*Let the apostolate be united, for the whole Congregation. One Centre: all there, firmly, without letting ourselves be guided by petty interests or particular views: all this must disappear in the common, universal good. There is a universal good to be achieved, which is to be put before any private good: this is an obligation, not advice; it is a religious obligation*»<sup>56</sup>.

Communication is an indispensable reality in the apostolic organization. In fact, considering communication as the centre of our institutional charism, we cannot be content with having a pastoral project in this area, but it is also necessary that the relational dimension becomes an integral part of the Project itself. We have been convinced during the *2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publishers*<sup>57</sup> that the publisher of today and of the future is a man of relationships: internal and external. This leads us to assume more and more the identity of the Pauline as a man of communication, who is capable of taking care of relationships<sup>58</sup>.

It is not enough to broadcast through our means of communication the beautiful messages of Pope Francis on the synodality. We also need to see how we practise it within our communities and our apostolic activity, and what we do when our structures hinder such a journey. To what extent are the various apostolic activities integrated into the Apostolic Project of the Circumscription? What do we need more in order to work better in synergy?

In this perspective it seems that our document *Service of Authority in the Society of St. Paul. Manual* – which is still an important reference for our apostolate – will need to be

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. CIVCSVA, *Il servizio dell'autorità e l'obbedienza*, 11 maggio 2008, no. 20.

<sup>54</sup> *Service of Authority in the Society of St. Paul. Manual*, no. 011.3.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Constitutions and Directory of the Society of St. Paul*, art. 43.

<sup>56</sup> James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 1190.

<sup>57</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Aetatis novae*, no. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Federico Badaloni, *Ripensare il ruolo dell'editore, oggi*, in *Atti del 2° Seminario Internazionale degli Editori Paolini*, Società San Paolo – Casa generalizia, Roma 2018, p. 191.

updated in the near future, so as to promote simpler, more effective and more motivating apostolic structures.

### e) With the Church, an outgoing Congregation

It is true that we are Church and with the Church we want to be an outgoing Congregation<sup>59</sup>. However, it must not be a going out into the world without direction and without meaning<sup>60</sup>, but together, with a clear pastoral plan, with a feasible apostolic project, in an organization that is participatory. The objective of participatory processes in the apostolic organization motivated by the synodal journey is not in view of the internal structure, that is, they do not find motivation in themselves, but in the missionary dream of reaching everyone with the message of the Gospel. This is so for the Pauline mission which, according to our Founder and in the spirit of the Apostle Paul, must extend to everything and to everyone<sup>61</sup>.

Obviously, when Fr. Alberione said that we must reach everyone, he had in mind the mass communication. There was an underlying desire to reach an ever-greater number of people with the Gospel: adults, young people, children, and among these in a particular way the distant, the non-Christians, the non-Catholics, and the suffering.

It is true that we want to reach everyone, but in the context of today's society, especially with the advent of digital technologies, communication is changing and the strategies to reach "everyone" need to be re-examined. That is, it is becoming increasingly difficult to reach everyone at the same time. It is important to bear in mind that *«there is a progressive communication, which is made of little steps, appropriate for the people, situations, environments, and problems that we want to face with greater urgency»*<sup>62</sup>.

In the face of the changes, it is increasingly urgent to join forces to discover how we want to reach our interlocutors, with what content, with what means, with what strategies. We need to walk together to carry on the already consolidated apostolate in the field of printing, but also to enter more effectively into the digital environment, so as to be true "digital pastors" through the internet, social media, web-radio and web-tv, smartphones and Apps that new technologies make available to us. It is also necessary to join forces to carry on many other Pauline initiatives, such as the Centres of Studies in Communication, the bookstores understood as centres of evangelization, cultural centres, courses and other initiatives in the biblical field, such as the Biblical Festival, the Bible Quiz, etc.. All these are privileged spaces not only to provide content but above all to create relationships.

It is important not to be afraid of facing the new realities in communication that open up on the horizon. In this regard, what Saint John Paul II said almost at the end of his pontificate is very relevant: *«Do not be afraid of new technologies! They are "among the wonderful things"—"Inter mirifica"— that God has made available to us to discover, use, make known the truth, even the truth about our dignity and our destiny as His children, heirs of His eternal Kingdom. Do not be afraid of the world's opposition! Jesus assured us "I have conquered the world!" (Jn 16:33). Do not even be afraid of your weakness and inadequacy! The divine Master said: "I am with you always until the end of the world" (Mt 28:20)»*<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> X General Chapter of the Society of St. Paul, *Chapter declaration*. "Evangelize today in joy as apostles communicators and as consecrated men", p. 61.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangeli gaudium*, no. 46.

<sup>61</sup> James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 1328.

<sup>62</sup> Dario Edoardo Viganò, *Di quali modelli di comunicazione ha bisogno oggi la Chiesa nel mondo*, in *Atti del 2° Seminario Internazionale degli Editori Paolini*, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>63</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter. "The Rapid Development", 24 January 2005, no. 14.

These considerations make us take seriously that «every change in communication helps us to reflect on the totality of our Pauline life. If communication changes, the constitutive elements of our entire Pauline life must also adjust to the change»<sup>64</sup>. This awareness certainly reminds us of that “pastoral and missionary conversion”<sup>65</sup> of which Pope Francis speaks, and to make this journey synodally. To make, that is, a journey together that leads us to overcome the temptation of a pastoral ministry of self-preservation, of “this is how it has always been done”,<sup>66</sup> looking for innovations in the field of communication in order to engage them with courage and creativity to reach today’s men and women in their concrete reality.

## 7. Word and the Eucharist: nourishment for the journey

I do not want to prolong, but we cannot finish this letter without making a reference to the nourishment that sustains us on this synodal journey, that is, the Word of God and the Eucharist. Let us remember that «the Word and the Eucharist belong so intimately to each other that one cannot be understood without the other: the Word of God becomes sacramental flesh in the Eucharistic event. The Eucharist opens us to the understanding of the Sacred Scripture, just as Sacred Scripture in turn illuminates and explains the Eucharistic Mystery»<sup>67</sup>.

The account of the disciples of Emmaus in Luke’s Gospel (cf. Lk 24:13-35) is a living icon of the Church as the People of God, guided along the way by the Risen Lord who enlightens them with his Word and nourishes them with the Bread of Life<sup>68</sup>. Just like those disciples, we too can feel the living presence of Jesus in his Word and in the Eucharist as a Congregation on the journey.

It is opportune to recall the words of our Founder when he affirms that «The Eucharist and the Bible are very well in accord [...] In the Scripture there is the presence of the wisdom of God, so that the Eucharist and the Bible complement each other»;<sup>69</sup> «The Eucharist and the Bible form the apostle of the press. Let these two things remain inseparable and undivided in your hearts»<sup>70</sup>.

In order for the Eucharist and the Word to be, in fact, nourishment for the journey, we need above all to give time to the Lord, to listen to him in the hustle and bustle of every day. We need to dedicate time to celebrate together as a community. Even where there are difficulties due to apostolic commitments, it is indispensable to find some time in the week where the community can come together to live the Eucharist.

The same can be said of the Eucharistic visit. It is certain that the Lord reveals himself in many situations of our day and in many forms, but the “Eucharistic visit”, which Fr. Alberione often called “the visit”, continues to be a privileged moment for the encounter with the Master. In this regard, our Founder guides us in this way: «The ways of making the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament are many, but the first way is to make it (because at times the desire may be lacking); the second way is to make it; the third is still to make it...».<sup>71</sup>

It is true that these moments of prayer cannot be reduced to a mere “routine”, that is, to something formal. It is necessary to transform the Eucharistic celebration and the

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<sup>64</sup> Silvio Sassi, *Introduzione al Seminario*, in *L’Attualizzazione del carisma paolino nel terzo millennio: spiritualità e missione*, Atti del Seminario Internazionale, Società San Paolo – Casa generalizia, Roma 2008, p. 63.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 25.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 347.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 55.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, *The Synodality*, op. cit., no. 16.

<sup>69</sup> James Alberione, *Haec Meditare I*, p. 80.

<sup>70</sup> Idem.

<sup>71</sup> James Alberione, *Haec Meditare II*, p. 178.

visit into strong moments of the day, which help us to be more human, more faithful to our vocation, more relational, more fraternal and credible in following Jesus.

It is salutary that these moments be lived in harmony with all the other dimensions of Pauline life: with the vocation animation, formation, the apostolate, with the reality of the culture of communication and with the concrete situations of the people we are called to serve. May each person give his or her share so that the twofold table of the Word of God and the Eucharist which builds up the community may be the source from which to draw, to revive the gift received, to increase apostolic strength and to overcome anything that creates division<sup>72</sup>.

## 8. Conclusion

Dear brothers, synodality is a way of living the Church and also the Congregation; it is the ecclesial journey in which we are all called to collaborate, considering that we are fellow travellers, indeed “synodal”. In fact, synodality is the expression of the fraternity of the baptized and consecrated in religious life; it is a visible form of communion. Synodality is also the holy assembly that prays and celebrates. It is a journey in which we all together try to listen to Jesus, who died and rose again, who continues to speak today through his Spirit and to indicate where to go, even if sometimes in ways and directions that are often unpredictable<sup>73</sup>.

Synodality is an itinerary in which we always have something to learn. It could be that someone has had some frustrating experiences of synodality in the past. A supposed failure does not justify a refusal to return to the journey again. Living trapped in the negative aspects of the past blocks us, leads us to resignation and a life without perspective and without hope.

In this sense, it is important to see the synodality as a process, which happens in time, considering that time is more important than space. *«Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. On the contrary, giving priority to time enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans»*<sup>74</sup>.

Obviously, in the field of communication, speed is decisive in some aspects. It will be necessary to have the wisdom to discern what is really urgent and what needs more time to allow more people to be involved in the reflection. It takes patience. Just as God has infinite patience with us, we also need patience with our confreres, with the unexpected, with failures, with our limitations, and with the process itself.

Pope Francis reminds us that we are all children of this era and that we need to overcome some temptations typical of this historical period, which disturb our walking together. These include the excessive search for personal spaces of autonomy and distinction, individualism, the inferiority complex, pastoral apathy, sweetish sadness, sterile pessimism, fleeing from the encounter with the other, pastoral worldliness, self-referential ostentation, obsession with appearance, envy, jealousy, the search for power in the community, divisions, slander, defamation and witch-hunting<sup>75</sup>. The synodal journey demands to go beyond these obstacles with humility and love, but also with patience, forgiveness, sacrifice, compassion and many other values that we find in the Gospel.

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<sup>72</sup>Cf. X General Chapter of the Society of St. Paul, *Priority 2.2.*

<sup>73</sup> Pope Francis, Homily at the Opening Mass of the XV General Assembly of Bishops, 3 October 2018.

<sup>74</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 223.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. *Ibidem*, nos. 76-100.

We need conversion. In fact, we need, every day, to «let ourselves be transformed by renewing our way of thinking» (Rom 12:2), which is rightly the biblical passage that should illuminate the XI General Chapter. It is necessary to allow ourselves to be enlightened by the Gospel in order to be true men of relationship, artisans of communion, who give time to listen, to silence, to discernment in order to choose – together – the ways of evangelization. An important fact is that everyone is part of the synodal journey, even our elderly and sick confreres, who in the apostolate of suffering participate intensely, through prayer and sacrifice, in this journey.

This letter, even if with its limitations, wanted to reawaken the commitment to synodality. The future Synod of Bishops on this theme, convoked by Pope Francis, will certainly bring us many new elements to continue our reflection and animate us in this practice. In the meantime, let us do this exercise of walking together. But we cannot forget in this itinerary the local churches and also the Pauline Family: the women's Congregations, the Pauline Institutes of Consecrated Secular Life, the Pauline Cooperators. If we say that the Pauline Family was born of the Eucharist, why are there still difficulties in some places to walk together, to make common projects?

The Holy Spirit is the first to keep the memory of the Master – our Way! – in the hearts of the disciples. He is the one who ensures that the richness and beauty of the Gospel are a source of constant joy and newness<sup>76</sup>. May Mary, Queen of Apostles, teach us to be always docile to the action of the Spirit and, as Mother, may she always be close to us to help us to walk together and to be credible witnesses of the Gospel and prophetic signs in this changing age.

Fraternally.

Rome, 7 June 2020  
Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity



*Valdir José De Castro*  
Fr Valdir José De Castro, SSP  
Superior General

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<sup>76</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily at the Opening Mass of the XV General Assembly of Bishops*, 3 October 2018.