



ANNUAL LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
TO THE CONFRERES OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PAUL

**Let us be Transformed by Listening to the Word of God,
in Order to Live as Pauline “Editors”**

Dear brothers.

The XI General Chapter traced a path that will see us all involved for the next six years: «*Let yourselves be transformed, renewing your way of thinking*» (Rom 12:2). *By allowing ourselves to be transformed by listening to the Word of God, in dialogue with the world in profound metamorphosis, we, Pauline ‘editors’, commit ourselves to be artisans of communion to prophetically proclaim the joy of the Gospel*». Precisely starting from this objective, this Letter will suggest some reflections to deepen the journey that we have decided to undertake together. The underlying theme of this process is precisely the objective itself, deepened year after year, without any claim to completeness. It is only a starting point so that every confrere and every community can renew the joy of being Pauline “editors”, apostles who, like Mary, give Jesus Master to the world.

The social and ecclesial context, in which we find ourselves, together with the experience of our communities, presents challenges never before faced and makes us aware that there are no immediate and easy answers. In identifying new paths, much will depend on our working together, according to a synodal style that gives substance to our living in communion with one another, seeking to be people who in different yet unitary ways give substance to the one mission, all members of one body (Cor 12:12-31).

The words of Saint Paul «*Let yourselves be transformed by renewing your way of thinking*» (Rom 12:2), which have guided us like a beacon throughout the preparation for the General Chapter and which now continue to enlighten us, are truly necessary. They interpret the attitude with which to live today as Paulines, not only oriented towards giving vigour to our apostolic realities scattered throughout the world, but above all active in assuming a generative process. In this change of epoch, there is a need for a change of mentality, a new way of thinking, of acting... of living. Preparing ourselves for the General Chapter and during the Chapter days we noticed that not only our apostolic realities are in crisis – a crisis accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic – but also our living together and even more so our identity as consecrated persons. Perhaps we have assumed a mentality that is no longer fruitful, which greatly reduces the vital force of our vocation and apostolic fruitfulness.

It is therefore necessary to let ourselves be transformed! But how? Where to start this process? Who can accompany us on this difficult journey?

This Letter will address the first words of our objective: «*By allowing ourselves to be transformed by listening to the Word of God...*». The transformation, the change of mentality is possible if we listen to the Word of God, if we give the Spirit the opportunity to weave a new plot in us, a new life, a new way of living as apostles as Blessed James Alberione always desired from his children.

I. Signs of Continuous Change

The first step on this journey has to do with the theme of “change”: reality changes and we are all called to change our mentality. As Pope Francis reminds us, «*to change does not mean indulging in the fashions of the moment, but converting one’s way of being and thinking, starting from an attitude of amazement in the face of what does not change and yet is always new! Amazement which is the antidote against repetitive habit and self-referentiality. Amazement carries you forward, makes you change, makes you walk. Habit is repetitive, and self-referentiality makes you look at yourself, hence, in the mirror, to look at yourself*»¹. After all, inactivity leads to death, but even outdated ideas and obsolete ways of living sooner or later present us with the consequences. All of this is an invitation to face our reality by accepting the sense of inadequacy that we sometimes breathe, especially when it comes to being proactive. We are invited to experience a transformation within a communication that changes – and that changes us – and of a Church that continually renews itself.

I.1 Communication Changes and It Changes Us

It is there for all to see that in recent decades, communication has had a unique acceleration in history, above all thanks to digital media, the web and technology which has become a forceful part of everyday life. A change that is not only linear, but also epochal, which has made the new generations of digital natives and the others digital immigrants, all in any case inhabitants of the same communicative culture, thanks to which new existential opportunities have arisen. With it, the way of thinking has changed, increasingly multitasking, interactive, hyper textual, where memory is also expanded or enhanced. We understand each other and we understand the world in a different way, thanks also to big-data or meta-data that bring together information of all kinds, coming from nature, from the animal world... from the cosmos².

Pope Francis, with the encyclical *Laudato si’*, reminded us that everything is connected, that there is an integral ecology where nature, technology, economy and society are in intimate relationship, forming a single environment. He himself affirms: «*Humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads. We are the beneficiaries of two centuries of enormous waves of change: steam engines, railways, the telegraph, electricity, automobiles, aeroplanes, chemical industries, modern medicine, information technology and, more recently, the digital revolution, robotics, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies. It is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open up before us, for “science and technology are wonderful products of a God-given human creativity which is a gift of God”*»³. Of course, it still remains to be clarified to what extent all this can be considered an indisputable progress, and the price that the planet is paying must be specified, especially when our ecological responsibility is anesthetized.⁴

The communication model has changed, making it increasingly clear that words, like actions, generate changes on a personal and social level. Language not only allows us to describe reality

¹ Pope Francis, *Address to the participants in the meeting promoted by the Coordination of Communication Associations (COPERCOM)*, 31 October 2022.

² Cfr Benanti P., *Tecnologia per l’uomo. Cura e innovazione*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2021.

³ Pope Francis, *Laudato si’*, no. 102.

⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 105.

– and to inform – but it is a form of social action⁵ and allows us to “put in common”, taking up the original meaning of the word *communicatio*. Therefore, communication changes us. Let us change the way we understand and experience our relationships, no longer being concerned only of “messages”, of “cognitive representations”, of “codes”, of “signs”, but above all of “listening”, of “dialogue”, of “recognition”, of “empathy”... of the “encounter” between people. «*If there is no encounter, there is no communication*», recalls Pope Francis. On the same occasion, then, he added that «*meeting, listening and speaking is a sort of “a-b-c” of the good communicator, because it is the dynamic that underlies all good communication*»⁶. Communication is “being with others” and “for others”. And this is a transformative process: knowing the other, taking care of the dialogue, I change my way of thinking, a change takes place in me, a transformation, my own identity is redefined in a new way⁷. We can say that the closer we are to each other the more we are able to face challenges that are bigger than us and the most striking example is the Covid-19 pandemic. No one can do without the other because we are not self-sufficient individuals, but fortunately people looking for other persons.

1.2 A Church that Renews Itself

The continuous change of the social context in which we live – characterized by a rapidly changing culture of communication – is not only the result of new inventions, of discoveries that add up to other discoveries. Today the change is more profound: it is a change of epoch, as Pope Francis reminds us⁸. We are all involved in it. Of all the signs that describe it, one seems particularly interesting and common to many ecclesial realities: the difficulty of handing down the faith from one generation to the next. It is not the young generations that are in crisis, but adults and their way of living and believing⁹. The identity of the adult as the one who generates, even to faith, is undermined above all in the society of well-being, characterized by the myth of perennial youth. Therefore, the family enters into crisis, the place of maturity and mutual gift, but also the ecclesial community when it is no longer able to generate faith. Of course, it is not by repeating the past that one changes course. Something more is needed, because it is a question of carrying out a profound pastoral conversion¹⁰: it is not enough to reorganize the many activities. In this era, people are needed who take care of what is essential, that is of life in its entirety, especially when it is wounded, when questions arise that are not easy to find an answer to, when new challenges ask for new answers. In this sense, a new pastoral mentality is needed for the Church of tomorrow¹¹, one that is attentive to people to where and how they live, rather than being predisposed to resist change for fear of dying or

⁵ Turrise A.-Biscaldi A., *Parole di prossimità. La comunicazione al servizio dell'uomo*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2021, p. 25.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Address to the participants in the meeting promoted by the Coordination of Communication Associations (COPERCOM)*, 31 October 2022.

⁷ Turrise A.-Biscaldi A., *Parole di prossimità. La comunicazione al servizio dell'uomo*, op. cit., p. 44.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2019.

⁹ Cfr Matteo A., *La Chiesa che verrà*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2022, pp. 33ff.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 27.

¹¹ «The new pastoral mentality that we need will then have to trigger processes thanks to which the Christian community rediscovers its original vocation to be an authentic and concrete space of communion, of sharing, of participation, of communication, of recognition of the equal dignity of each person, of hospitality, of diversity, of dialogue between generations, of celebration of life in all its phases and ages, of reconciliation and mourning with the challenging side of human existence and, above all, in contact, for anyone, with God-Love made present in the generous closeness of brothers and sisters in Christ» (Matteo A., *The Church to come*, op. cit., p. 155).

seeing a pastoral work coming to an end. In this sense, the Church, having people at heart, also has the task of meeting those who have learned to live without God¹²: and today there are many. But how?

If, as an example, we look at the path taken by the Church in the first century, we realize that one of the first challenges faced and overcome was that of choosing a language and a vocabulary to “tell” the Gospel which is Jesus Christ. The evangelists did not limit themselves to using Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic, but they valued images, symbols, concepts to tell of the unedited life, of the teaching, of the death and resurrection of Jesus inside and outside the Jewish environment. And so, the transmission of the faith has travelled a special path, a cultural process made possible through the choice of a language accessible to Jews and pagans, embracing the entire Roman Empire. We can say that communication creates the conditions for faith and the life of the Church to continue over time, to be handed down from generation to generation, involving ever new peoples, peoples that today we will call by the name of “generation Z”¹³. Today, we find ourselves in the same situation as the evangelists: it is necessary to tell the Gospel considering that the language after two thousand years ago is digital grammar, that of the web, a cultural transition that is only just beginning. In this sense, together with the whole Church, we too Paulines are called to participate in a change of mentality, of language, of evangelization... of life and therefore be generative, available to contribute to the formation of new processes of transmission of the faith to the generations of today and tomorrow. We are called to be true “editors” of the Word, that is, to give the Saviour to today’s world¹⁴.

2. Let us be Transformed... by the Word

The communicative environment, the social environment and the ecclesial reality are therefore constantly changing. However, there is another place that speaks to us of transformation: it is the Word of God. All the characters we meet in the Bible take a path that does not leave them as before. The Word describes people’s souls, shows their questions, fears, love, infidelities, the courage of a people... all aspects that over time change for better or for worse. That is why approaching Scripture means entering a living and continuously changing world and knowing a narrative plot that involves the reader first-hand. But how does transformation come about for those who meet God? Two biblical events can help us: that of Abraham and that which narrates the encounter between Mary Magdalene and the Risen One.

2.1 From an Individual to a Person: Abraham

In the biblical story of Abraham, we have a clear example of where the Word spoken by God leads. The story of Abraham, called to leave his land and to abandon his kinship (Gen 12:1), shows us what God does in the life of this patriarch. It is the book of Genesis that brings

¹² Riccardi A., *La Chiesa brucia. Crisi e futuro del cristianesimo*, Editori Laterza, Bari-Roma 2021, pp. 108-117.

¹³ The Generation Z, in short Gen Z, it is the generation of those born between 1997 and 2012. Very young, they are between 8 and 23 years old in 2020 and are the first to have not known a world without technologies and digital environments, which cannot but affect how they live everyday life, consumption and expectations towards work.

¹⁴ Cfr *Editorial Guidelines. Identity, contents and interlocutors of the Pauline apostolate*, 2018, no. 1.2.

us into the different situations that Abraham experiences after God's call. He no longer learns to live as a solitary being, but as a man in relationship: with God and with Sarah. The center of his life will become the Other and the other; he will change his way of existing.

Abraham at the beginning of this journey thinks and acts as an individual. The episode that reveals this identity of him is found in Gen 12:11-16. Precisely to avoid unpleasant consequences on the part of the Egyptians, Abraham decides to consider Sarah, his wife, as a "sister" giving her to the pharaoh. And the author of Genesis concludes: «*Because of her, he treated Abram well, and he received flocks and herds and asses, male and female slaves, donkeys and camels*» (Gen 12:16). A fact that reveals how the relationship with Sara was still one-way; on the contrary, in the situation in which she finds herself, Sara is in fact only a danger.

From this moment on God will lead Abraham to face a new exodus to leave his way of life withdrawn in on himself, worried about not dying, about losing his life¹⁵ – for which he is willing to sacrifice his wife Sarah – and enter into a new existence where the relationship with a "you" is the basis, the one that will lead him to be a person capable of choosing the good of the other, removing his sick gaze from himself.

There is a second illness that Abraham, this time together with Sarah, has to face: Sarah is sterile and consequently Abraham cannot become a father. He will become one only after the visit of three men to Mamre (Gen 18:1-15). This scene, well-constructed with attention to detail – gestures, words, actions... – is a true demonstration of the sacredness of oriental hospitality towards strangers. Everything indicates a truly extraordinary hospitality, a welcome that will heal them by putting all their best energies into motion: true hospitality, in fact, is always active. However, reading the text carefully, at a certain point the three characters simply become "the Lord": in vv. 9-10 from the plural we pass into the singular: «*But the Lord said to Abraham: "Why did Sarah laugh and say: 'Will I really be able to give birth while I am old?' Is there perhaps something impossible for the Lord? At the appointed time I will come back to you in a year and Sarah will have a son"*» (Gen 18:13-14). When, then, do they become parents? When they welcome the Lord, when they enter into a relationship with God. Only with this relationship do God's promise and Abraham's desire to be a father become possible. In fact, it was not enough for Abraham to be the father of Ishmael, thanks to Agar – taken in the meantime as a bride to remedy the impossibility of Sarah having children. Fatherhood as well as motherhood become possible only, thanks to the intervention of God, thanks to the welcome of the three guests. This exercise of welcoming God will teach Abraham to welcome Sarah, the one who will give birth to Isaac, the son of the promise, and the more he looks at his wife the more he will see in her God's extraordinary way of acting, the one who goes beyond the given limits from nature. Ultimately it is a question of being welcoming because the stronger the welcome is – and the deeper the relationship with the three guests, with the Lord – the more productive persons we become.

2.2 From Death to Life: Mary Magdalene's Encounter with the Risen Jesus

There is a second passage that allows us to glimpse how the encounter with God leads to a transformation, in this case from death to life. It is the pericope of the Gospel according to John in which Mary Magdalene meets the Risen One (Jn 20:1-18). On the first day of the week

¹⁵ Neher A., *L'esilio della parola. Dal silenzio biblico al silenzio di Auschwitz*, Marietti, Casale Monferrato (AL) 1983, pp.124-134.181-200.

– Sunday – Mary of Magdala goes to the tomb and finds it empty. She runs and goes to Peter and John to warn them and she goes back there with them: out there, she is crying. None of them had yet understood the Scripture, that is, that Jesus had to rise again (Jn 20:9). The two disciples return home and only she remains near the tomb.

Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb expecting to find the dead body of Jesus and she did not find it. This “certainty” of Magdalene is emblematic because she describes our way of seeing or foreseeing tomorrow: we proceed according to the logic of cause and effect and thus we move thinking we know in advance what we will see. Indeed, death puts an end to everything and what will remain will be only the memory of the past.

However, the passage from the Gospel according to John does not end here. Other verses await us: the facts go differently. Just as she weeps, as she says to the two angels «*they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they put him*» (Jn 20:13), she begins an unexpected dialogue with the Risen Jesus which culminates with two words: «*Mary*» and «*Rabbouni – Teacher*» (Jn 20:16). A dialogue! Yes, because this is what it is about, an encounter which for Mary is a true manifestation: the one who was dead now lives. To understand the intensity of the scene we will have to go back to the moment in which another Mary, Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus, had anointed Jesus and poured on him the perfume of love (Jn 12:1-8). Now it is precisely Love that calls her by her name. And so, she who thought she would find a dead man meets her beloved alive. Here the decisive passage takes place for her, a change of perspective, for which she begins a new relationship with Jesus. What she experiences is really a passage, an Easter. She passes from her one way of understanding and knowing Jesus to a new and equally concrete one. This meeting will make her the first witness, the apostle among the apostles, together with the Twelve and Mary the Mother of Jesus.

2.3 The Word Changes Us

Two passages, two episodes, two ways of being transformed. But can the Word we have just encountered produce the same transformation in us? The basic question is whether the Word has something to tell us or, better, whether we give the Word of God the possibility to make us live in a new way.

There is no doubt that a lot is linked to the quality of our listening. In fact, listening is one of the first forms of acceptance among people, often the decisive one, because when someone places himself in front of a person in silence – an active silence – he gives space to the other, it gives him the possibility of existing. Listening in depth to biblical events is the necessary exercise not only to know the content and form of every single book that makes up the Bible, but it is the possibility that we give the Word to exist within us, to operate, until «*Christ lives in me*» of Saint Paul (Gal 2:20). In this way, we come to know who spoke it.

The story of the encounter between the Risen One and Mary Magdalene tells us that the resurrection of Jesus changed the life of this woman and of the early Church. Since it is an effective Word, it continues to act, changing the life of us who listen to the words between Mary and Jesus. Of course, we can read our history with the eyes of those who go to the tomb expecting to find a dead person, eyes that see only death, impossible situations with no future... so we do not perceive that something new is flourishing, a bud is blossoming within this change of epoch. Realizing that something is being born is the first step in moving in new directions, in making decisions that are in tune with the new life that is coming. It allows one not to waste energy by resisting change. After all, it is the Word that teaches us to read every

crisis in a fruitful way. Here are some enlightening words from Pope Francis: «*Those who fail to view a crisis in the light of the Gospel simply perform an autopsy on a cadaver*»¹⁶.

When we say that the Word changes us we are also saying that it changes our way of doing, of operating in concrete terms. Let us think again about the theme of hospitality: welcoming, listening, helping, collaborating, forgiving... does it not also change our way of thinking, of reasoning, does it not also change our mentality? The gestures we make therefore have a strong formative and identity value. We ourselves, precisely because we are concretely engaged in the Pauline apostolate, assume as a way of reading and interpreting our religious life which is that of Pauline “editors”, those who as apostles and following the example of Mary give the Saviour to the world. Here is what Blessed James Alberione reminds us: «*The Apostle is one who bears God within and radiates him everywhere. The Apostle is a holy person who stores up treasures; and bestows the surplus on others. The Apostle has a loved-filled heart for God and for men; he cannot restrain and hold back what he feels and thinks. The Apostle is a vessel of election which overflows, and people rush to quench their thirst. The Apostle is a temple of the Holy Trinity which is supremely active in him. In the words of one writer, he is a person who sweats God from his pores with his words, his works, his prayers, his gestures, his attitude; in public and in private; from the whole of his being. Living of God! and giving God!*»¹⁷. The Word, therefore, changes us, makes us new apostles, Pauline “editors” every day... because Christ lives in us.

3. Listening to Our Story

«*[...] I believe that, so as not to lose our bearings, we need to make our own the truth contained in good stories. Stories that build up, not tear down; stories that help us rediscover our roots and the strength needed to move forward together. Amid the cacophony of voices and messages that surround us, we need a human story that can speak of ourselves and of the beauty all around us. A narrative that can regard our world and its happenings with a tender gaze. A narrative that can tell us that we are part of a living and interconnected tapestry. A narrative that can reveal the interweaving of the threads which connect us to one another*»¹⁸. Precisely these words of Pope Francis help us take a further step to grasp how necessary it is to let ourselves be transformed by the Word of God. From the Word but also from the “words” that belong to and describe our Pauline history. Therefore, the story is the key that allows us to open the door to revive the awareness that we are “part of a living tapestry” that is continually renewed. History, therefore, is not a set of dates, but of lives. In fact, life is what primarily interests us and for this very reason it must be supported, loved, promoted, shared... Our mission belongs to a vitality that we have received as a gift from those who preceded us, people like us, fragile like us, but rich in that faith which has made new things sprout, indeed a new “House”, an apostolate which has given voice to the evangelization of the Church.

A lot of time has passed since the beginning, but in this continuous generational change the roots are identical, while only the fruits change according to the seasons, according to the action of the Spirit who fertilizes history by looking at the Father and the Son.

Also for us Paulines, there is a “good story”, as Pope Francis recalls, which speaks of us and “of the beauty all around us”. Not a story full of nostalgia that loves the past as the best time,

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2020.

¹⁷ James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, IV, 277-278.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Message for the 54th World Communications Day*, 24 January 2020.

but one that illuminates our origins, when the Pauline life began to exist, to move. Precisely in those days we see, as with a special lens, the strong action of the Spirit, of Grace. We grasp the action of God himself as he involves the young Don Alberione and a few boys. In some ways, this is an exercise that we can repeat on several occasions: even in our time, because in the change of epoch there is something new being born for the Pauline mission.

A completely unique story is that of Blessed Timothy Giaccardo, that young man who in his *Diary* reported some pages of our primitive history, describing what happened in the “House” of Alba at the beginning of the Pauline Family. A *Diary* and not, strictly speaking, a historical document. Yet effective in the intention of showing us an adventure of which we ourselves are part.

There are three episodes that we briefly recall here: the renewal of the religious vows of the first young people which took place on 8 December 1917 – the second historical date of the House after that of its foundation –; the episode of the printing press that goes up in flames, precisely on 26 December 1918; and, finally, the *Pact or Secret of Success* recited together for the first time on 6 January 1919. These three facts are narrated in a completely singular and passionate way and the young Timothy Giaccardo gives ample space to the words spoken by Primo Maestro.

By reading and re-reading these three episodes, we join the journey made by these little protagonists, the first who, listening to the words of Don Alberione and seeing his gestures, have experienced a real process of transformation. The typical transformation of those who answer “yes” to the Lord’s call, but also of those who personally assume a new ideal, an apostolate that no one knew about but necessary for the “new century”. Alberione’s often inspiring words gave shape to the Pauline life, produced in them the awareness that it was a question of consecrating their lives to the Lord for the “good press”. These words led to concrete choices.

- a. This happens when some boys renew their religious vows. It was 8 December 1917. In a simple atmosphere and during the Mass, Don Alberione describes the beauty of the consecration, recalls how necessary it is to commit oneself, speaks of God’s plan, and Timothy Giaccardo adds: «*We were no longer ours, we experienced God, bound to Him, freely His possession, ready to give everything for Him and for the good press. Our life was and felt like we were one. We among us: we with the Father, united, cemented, not pupils of a school but members of a single organism, the first living stones of a majestic building*». So, not pupils but members of a single organism: here is their new family. Reading many pages of the *Diary*, one notices the family spirit that characterized this “House”. The very term “House” expresses it clearly. Not the house of origin but a new family, the one prepared by the Lord for each of them. In this climate everyone learned a new art, a new apostolate. Our beginnings are humble but at the same time show the essential qualities that will later develop. In our DNA as Paulines, we find a special love that unites everyone and that transforms us into brothers, belonging to the same House: «*We among us: we with the Father, united, cemented*».
- b. Even the example that sees Don Alberione as protagonist is contagious. It is about the situation that has arisen when the printing press catches fire. Primo Maestro, awakened during the night, runs to the printing press to free the rooms from the flames. Timothy Giaccardo finds the right words not only to describe the fact but to show it to us. He is painstaking in detail, a narrator who accurately describes the Founder’s face disfigured

by smoke and heat. And he specifies: «It was St Paul who guided and saved him». Don Alberione, with his ardour, shows the boys how much he was involved in trying to put out the fire. The clear and enlightening words that had changed and directed his life as a sixteen-year-old – «Venite ad me omnes» – on the famous night of the turn of the century lived in the Cathedral of Alba, still had such a concrete force as to allow him to overcome the many difficulties like those of a fire. The words of Pope Francis are also true for us: «Even when we tell of evil, we can learn to leave room for redemption; in the midst of evil, we can also recognize the working of goodness and give it space»¹⁹. This is what Timothy Giaccardo did by noting this fire in his *Diary*, showing that the fire that burned there illuminated the way in which Don Alberione sowed in the souls of his boys a life of high tension, hardworking and creative, passionate about evangelization through new means.

- c. Another page full of significance is the one in which the first time the *Secret of Success* is recited together, precisely on 6 January 1919. It is a true Pact with the Trinity. Don Alberione is convinced that the Pauline mission is linked to what the Lord does in the House because he is the protagonist, the Narrator who knows the meaning of our history, that of the beginnings as well as of today. Primo Maestro involves young people to enter into a pact with God, a pact that is born of genuine faith, like the one we encounter in the Gospel: «If you had faith as big as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree: “Uproot yourself and go and plant yourself into the sea,” and it would obey you» (Lk 17:6). If there is this faith in God’s action, one can strip oneself of a mentality according to which “the more one knows the more one studies”. Here is what Timothy reports still in his *Diary*: «So it is necessary, for those who come from the Seminary, to strip themselves of the ideas of the Seminary: that is, we know as much as we study; for those who come from home, stripping themselves of the ideas one has of home» (7 January 1919). It is a further qualitative transformation: “stripping oneself” of the idea that everything depends on me and assuming the awareness that only the Lord multiplies our journey of holiness, our apostolic life, the fruitfulness of study, the communion among us...

We have immersed ourselves in three pages of our history. Now, Pope Francis always reminds us, «by immersing ourselves in stories, we can find reasons to heroically face the challenges of life»²⁰. “Heroic motivations” not because we are already heroes, but because they are motivations that help us to live baptism and consecrated life in a “heroic” way, a quality that the Church attributes to the one who is proclaimed “venerable” and therefore on the way to canonization. These and other stories of Pauline life support everyone’s call to holiness, possible only «by letting ourselves be transformed by listening to the Word of God».

4. To Nurture Change

The short journey proposed here is only a starting point and must be constantly nourished in everyday life. In the light of what has emerged here, we offer three reminders, the last three “places” which allow us not to forget that our being Pauline “editors” is an existential context, a living environment, belonging to the life of God, to our vocation as Pauline apostles, for

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

whom every action speaks of what the Spirit generates in us and we with him, like Mary, Mother of the Son of God and Queen of the Apostles.

4.1 Nourishing oneself of the Gospel

In this Letter, we have tried to highlight the priority of letting ourselves be transformed by the Word of God. The social and communicative context in which we live asks us for it. The very path of the Church suggests it to us. Changing mentality, therefore, according to the school of the Word, of Jesus Master. Don Alberione, in a very profound passage which deals with the “Christian mentality”, reminds us of the importance of being *«persons who are nourished by the Gospel, love meditation, do abundant spiritual reading; so that they remember these principles, feel them in their spirit and constitute the soul of their soul, almost a second nature that has superimposed on the first, has penetrated and almost absorbed it. Souls who speak the language of faith in every circumstance... There are people who are so imbued with a Christian principle that their entire theoretical-practical mentality is dominated by it»*²¹. “Nourishing oneself” of the Gospel, therefore, to assimilate the evangelical mentality, the one that emerges above all from the life and words of Jesus. The “second nature” of which the Primo Maestro speaks here, present in those who approach the Word with love, could be described with the image of the “new man” used by the Apostle in various passages of his Letters such as, for example, in the one written to the Ephesians, when he recalls the need to *«be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth»* (Eph 4:23-24).

How can we give birth to something new if we always live with the same mentality? How are we to face the new apostolic challenges if the words “We have always done this way” never die? The Word generates novelty because it is alive, imbued with the Holy Spirit who, in contact with our history, gives birth to something new. But do we allow the Spirit to act? Do we care about our spiritual life, the one animated by the Spirit? Do we nourish ourselves with profound meanings to revive our Pauline vocation? Do we want to abandon the “old man”, the individualistic one, to embrace the “new man”, the one who makes the gift the greatest joy and the way to serve others?

4.2 Life and Relationships

There is a second aspect that emerges from these pages and it is love for life. The three episodes taken from the *Diary* of Blessed Giaccardo remind us of this. The “House” of Alba was inhabited by persons who lived a unique communion and apostolic vitality. This early life is not to be imitated for what it has done – everything has changed in the meantime! – but it must be known because it makes our lives fruitful. It is a place loaded with a “dream” that is incomparable, an idealism that translates into the concreteness of apostolic work, of study, of piety, of common life. The difficulties themselves are faced with faith and courage. When a community is alive it attracts, involves, intrigues... it becomes a vocational proposal. It attracts not because it is perfect but because it is alive, and therefore there is an exchange of love between people, there is forgiveness, mutual help, esteem and a special dose of communion can be glimpsed.

²¹ James Alberione, *Anima e corpo per il Vangelo*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), p. 53.

Do we want to be people who promote life, goodness, esteem, mutual help, forgiveness? Do we take care of the relationship with the Pauline Family, with our collaborators, with the local Church? Does our daily apostolate express the desire to take care of people's lives? Has synodality become our way of thinking and planning of the mission together?

4.3 Listening

Finally, the Word of God allows us to continually turn our gaze to the Master so as not to forget the one who is at the origin of the transformed life. This is why Scripture is daily bread and must be read, meditated on, lived every day. The exercise of listening to the Word in the Eucharist is the first gesture that we make every day to make a gift of our life. It is the door that leads into the room of communion, or rather of the communication that creates the "culture of encounter"²². Listening is not remaining closed in our thoughts, but shifting the epicentre from ourselves to the other, going out to welcome the Other. If our Eucharistic celebrations are habitual and repetitive we will easily be repetitive even in our apostolic realities, unable to hear the people's cry for help. We enter the paschal mystery of Christ if we practice listening, because this is what the Father accomplished when he heard the cry of his people and sent his Son, the one who renewed his life with his death.

Is there in us the will to listen to each other and to listen to today's humanity? Do we value a few moments of silence in the day? Do we dedicate time for the Word to question us and to be our dialogue with Jesus Master? Does apostolic creativity arise from listening to the Word?

By letting ourselves be transformed by listening to the Word of God, we will experience new processes at all levels. We will increasingly value fraternal dialogue, sharing, information but also the places for listening and dialogue that already exist in our communities and in apostolic places: community meetings, apostolic and formation councils, all those many opportunities for think and decide in synodality. This process leads everyone to feel more involved in the life of the community and in the mission. Listening is not wasting time but the premise for creating communion. A synodal mentality, therefore, leads to listening to our collaborators making them feel part of an evangelization project. The same thing is valid for the Pauline Family and the local Church. In particular, listening to the Church is necessary to shape our daily apostolate and respond to the various challenges. Listening with an attentive heart is the first step towards loving our humanity and doing "the charity of truth".

Another aspect should be underlined, always the fruit of this transformation given by the Word, which also involves us in our way of life. I am referring to the theme of "sustainability" at all levels. It is also the fruit of listening, of a discernment that can never end. We can ask ourselves: what helps us to live our mission today? What do we really need to be Pauline "editors"? What must be kept and what must be left out in order to live our mission? Here we well understand the importance of a mentality, of a renewed mentality for deciding and living an apostolate that responds to the real modern challenges within the culture of communication. It is a question of investing, with people and projects, in the new digital frontiers – something which, moreover, already exists in some of our Circumscriptions – without forgetting our history. How many roads open up before us for the mission! Can we remain numb? Can we hide talents and not use them with creativity and love?

²² Pope Francis, *Message for the 51st World Communications Day*, 24 January 2017.

In any case, our journey does not end here because the next step will be to enter into a second theme present in the objective of the Programmatic Document: *«In dialogue with the world in profound metamorphosis...»*.

At the end of this fraternal Letter, the strong invitation that arises from the XI General Chapter – *«allowing ourselves to be transformed by listening to the Word of God...»* – resounds even more as essential for living our mission. It opens us to new, concrete paths that are always at the service of today’s humanity. It allows all of us to be Paulines of the future because we are nourished by a “genetic code” which comes from the Spirit and which always generates new things. Was it not this also the experience of Primo Maestro? Yes, he is the father of the Pauline Family and *«father is the most beautiful name we can give to Don Alberione, because it is a generative title. He was a founder once; he is a father every day. And it is as a father that he listens to and blesses his children and their works»*²³. Yesterday, today and always.

Rome, 8 December 2022

Immaculate Conception of the B.V. Mary



Domenico Soliman
Father Domenico Soliman
Superior General

²³ Carello R., *Il padre del futuro. Don Alberione e la sfida del cambiamento*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2021, p. 14.