

TOGETHER WITH JESUS ON THE WAY TO CALVARY

A NEW PARADIGM OF COMMUNITY

Having listened to the formators from the different Configurations, it occurs to me that we need a new paradigm of Passionist Apostolic Community. In continuity with our tradition and in tune with the movement of the Spirit in the Church today, I believe we are being invited to reimagine Passionist religious community as a community of disciples on the Way. In line with this new paradigm, every community is in formation, and every religious is in lifelong formation. That's what it means to be pilgrims on the Way with Jesus.

Today the theme of Synodality¹ is being discussed throughout the Church and there is a new awareness of the Church as the community of disciples walking together with Jesus towards the New Jerusalem. The Gospel portrait of Jesus the pilgrim walking ahead of the disciples and leading them onward to Jerusalem, the place of his glorification, is a powerful image for the life of Christian discipleship (Mark 10, 32). With our gaze firmly fixed on Jesus (Heb. 12, 2), we follow the Way (John 14, 6) that leads to the fullness of life. Passionists are also keenly aware that Jesus' way leads to Calvary and have answered the call to lay down our lives with Jesus for the sake of the Kingdom of God. We do not depend on our own efforts or strength but take our lead and find our strength in Jesus our leader, our guide and companion.

The implications for formation of this new paradigm are profound. As communities on the way into a fuller life with Christ, the old division between initial and ongoing formation no longer captures what is needed. The newly arrived candidates join the community that is on the Way of formation. This implies that every member of the community is growing

¹ CDF, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church", Rome, March 2018.



in knowledge and love of God, knowledge and love of self and others, daily prayer, charity, service of others, dialogue, collaboration, and fraternity.

Because every religious and every community is in formation, they are invited to accompany the newly arrived members as their elder brothers. We walk together and no one is exempt from the ministry of caring for the brothers.

As communities of disciples on the Way, we present to the Church and the world an image of Passionist religious life as:

- i. a community of disciples
- ii. walking the Way with Jesus
- iii. constantly learning from Jesus
- iv. going to Calvary and beyond because like Jesus we are willing to give our lives for God and our friends.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We are called to walk the Way of Jesus; it is his way of living, loving, forgiving, challenging, healing, and changing the world into the Kingdom of God. It is a Way dedicated to seeking and living in the truth, and experiencing the fullness of life. It calls for daily conversion of our emotions, our thinking, decisions and actions (heart, mind and spirit). It is nourished on daily contact with Jesus in the scriptures, the Eucharist and personal prayer. It is lived in daily commitment to compassionate companionship, and service to the people who most need to hear the Good News and to experience the mercy of God.

This is not just an elaborate 21st century version of a pious devotion to the Via Crucis. It is a whole way of life that includes initiation and lifelong commitment to onward movement, and daily growth into Christ. The community of brothers is the context in which we continue to learn about Jesus, his message and his way of life. It is where we meet the brothers we love, serve and forgive one another every day. It is where we experience acceptance, compassion and forgiveness from our brothers. It is together with these brothers that we go to serve the people of God and share with them the Good News.

In the meeting with the formators of MAPRAES the importance of the community as the context of formation was mentioned. Indeed, one

experienced formator insisted that it is really the community that contributes most to the formation of the candidate.

There is an important truth in this view. A community that understands itself to be in permanent formation and spiritual growth is the ideal setting for the formation of newly arrived candidates. The community models the attitude of openness and humility that marks all spiritual growth and encourages the candidate to engage fully in the process of discernment and growth in the spiritual life.

Communities can be helped to develop this style of formative living. The formation of the formators includes an important element of forming formative communities. This way of thinking about community life and formation promises to be very helpful for everyone involved.

However, this is not offered as a “solution” to the troubling issues raised in all our meetings about the shortage of vocations, the difficult questions about motivation, the many problems and inner conflicts experienced by those who want to join us, and the number of departures of newly professed and recently ordained. The attention we give to the strengthening of community life is not merely a means of attracting more and better vocations. It is for the good of the communities. There is no guarantee that communities that are more focused and more committed to their own human and spiritual growth will either attract or hold more candidates.

Each one of us is called to live his religious vocation as fully and as authentically as possible. We do this as individual persons and as members of the community. Our dedication to God, the community and the people will bear fruit for all of us. That fruit may include new vocations.