

# THE CHURCH

## A House Founded on Four Pillars

*Acts of the Apostles 2:42*

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***The model for the Church is the mother-community of Jerusalem, the Church founded on Peter and the Apostles***, which today, through her bishops *in communion* with the Successor of Peter, continues to be the custodian, proclaimer and interpreter of the Word (cf. *LG*, n. 13).

### **1. The Point of Departure: *the Church in the Minds of Today's Young People***

It seems to me to be my duty to begin this paper that I have been requested to give on the Church in the Acts of the Apostles with a quotation from the *Preparatory Document of the XV Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment'*. When speaking about the new generations this document offers the following picture, which on the one hand is realistic and on the other is challenging if we really want to ensure that young people discover and experience the Church as their mother:

Young people, cautious by nature of those who are outside their circle of personal relationships, oftentimes nourish mistrust, indifference or anger towards institutions. This is not just about society but increasingly affects educational institutions and the Church as an institution. They would like the Church to be closer to people and more attentive to social issues, but realize that this will not happen immediately.

All this takes place in a context where sectarian membership and religious practice more and more characterize young people. Though young people are not in open "opposition", they learn to live "without" the God presented by the Gospel and "without" the Church and to rely on alternative and minimally-institutionalized forms of religion and spirituality or to take refuge in sects or religious experiences with a strong affiliation. In many places, the presence of the Church is becoming less widespread and, consequently, more difficult to encounter, while the dominant culture is the bearer of needs oftentimes at odds with Gospel values, whether it be elements of their tradition or the local reality of globalization, which is characterized by consumerism and an overemphasis on the individual.<sup>1</sup>

In 2005, on the occasion of the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second Vatican Council which was an explosive event in the history of the Church at the end of the second millennium and offered a spiritual and pastoral programme to the Church of the third millennium, as the Major Rector I invited the members of my Institute to engage in a rejuvenation of the Church through this gift. One motivation was the perception, above all in certain Western countries, of increasing disaffection in relation to the Church, as though the Church was no longer able to respond to the needs and the questions of the human person of the twenty-first century.

#### *A reading of the Church by Pope Francis*

Outside the community a proclaiming of the gospel, especially that of the resurrection, seems talk that should not be believed; it is seen as a children's story, a myth, a projection of the human desire not to be defeated in the face of the scandal of death. And this is what happens today, amongst young people as well (Lk 24:22-23). One need only think of their detachment from the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> *Preparatory Document of the XV Assembly of the Synod of bishops: 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment'*, I, 2 [The new generations].

Pope Francis addressed this subject in a speech that was one of the first to outline the programme of his papacy. Speaking to the bishops of Brazil on 27 July 2013 in Rio de Janeiro he said:

Here we have to face the difficult mystery of those people who leave the Church, who, under the illusion of alternative ideas, now think that the Church – their Jerusalem – can no longer offer them anything meaningful and important. So they set off on the road alone, with their disappointment. Perhaps the Church appeared too weak, perhaps too distant from their needs, perhaps too poor to respond to their concerns, perhaps too cold, perhaps too caught up with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas, perhaps the world seems to have made the Church a relic of the past, unfit for new questions; perhaps the Church could speak to people in their infancy but not to those come of age. It is a fact that nowadays there are many people like the two disciples of Emmaus; not only those looking for answers in the new religious groups that are sprouting up, but also those who already seem godless, both in theory and in practice.

We should not be surprised if Francis asked himself and we ask ourselves:

Faced with this situation, what are we to do? We need a Church unafraid of going forth into their night. We need a Church capable of meeting them on their way. We need a Church capable of entering into their conversation. We need a Church able to dialogue with those disciples who, having left Jerusalem behind, are wandering aimlessly, alone, with their own disappointment, disillusioned by a Christianity now considered barren, fruitless soil, incapable of generating meaning.

After offering a panorama of situations, attitudes, and the search for shortcuts by people to discover the meaning of life and happiness, Francis went on:

From this point of view, we need a Church capable of walking at people's side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey; a Church able to make sense of the "night" contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem; a Church which realizes that the reasons why people leave also contain reasons why they can eventually return. But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture. Jesus warmed the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus.

I would like all of us to ask ourselves today: are we still a Church capable of warming hearts? A Church capable of leading people back to Jerusalem? Of bringing them home? Jerusalem is where our roots are: Scripture, catechesis, sacraments, community, friendship with the Lord, Mary and the apostles... Are we still able to speak of these roots in a way that will revive a sense of wonder at their beauty?

Many people have left because they were promised something more *lofty*, more *powerful*, and *faster*. But what is more lofty than the love revealed in Jerusalem? Nothing is more lofty than the abasement of the Cross, since there we truly approach the height of love! Are we still capable of demonstrating this truth to those who think that the apex of life is to be found elsewhere? Do we know anything *more powerful* than the strength hidden within the weakness of love, goodness, truth and beauty?

People today are attracted by things that are *faster and faster*: rapid Internet connections, speedy cars and planes, instant relationships. But at the same time we see a desperate need for calmness, I would even say slowness. *Is the Church still able to move slowly: to take the time to listen, to have the patience to mend and reassemble?* Or is the Church herself caught up in the frantic pursuit of efficiency? Dear brothers, let us recover the calm to be able to walk at the same pace as our pilgrims, keeping alongside them, remaining close to them, enabling them to speak of the disappointments present in their hearts and to let us address them. They want to forget Jerusalem, where they have their sources, but eventually they will experience thirst. *We need a Church capable of accompanying them on the road back to Jerusalem! A Church capable of helping them to rediscover the glorious and joyful things that are spoken of Jerusalem, and to understand that she is my Mother, our Mother, and that we are not orphans! We were born in her...* We need a Church that kindles hearts and warms them. We

need a Church capable of restoring citizenship to her many children who are journeying, as it were, in an exodus.

## 2. The Framework: *the Church of the Acts of the Apostles (2:42-47)*

The Church, a community of believers, was born from the Easter of Christ and is called to bear witness to the ‘good news’, the Gospel of Jesus, Christ who was crucified and rose again. She is therefore a community which, after overcoming the scandal of the cross, came together again, and those who accepted apostolic witness came to belong to the community of believers.

Luke in the Acts of the Apostles points out to us not only what the Christians in Jerusalem did. He also offers us a paradigm of the characteristics of a community that intends to refer to the Easter of Christ. In the first of the so-termed ‘summaries’, which provide a portrait of the nascent Church, the fundamental features of Church life emerge. For this reason, this page has become paradigmatic for all Christian communities. There are four features which mark out believers (v. 42) and they are: assiduous adherence to the *teaching of the apostles*, that is to say recognising that they need to learn to live as Christians; ‘*communion*’: the word *koinonía* – which occurs only here in the work of Luke – should be understood as that union of hearts that is also expressed in a real sharing of material goods; the ‘*sharing of bread*’: this act, which was typical of Jews when they began a ritual meal, by now refers to the Eucharist, the ‘memorial’; and, lastly, *prayer*.

Thus the first Christian community is totally open to the gift of the Spirit which can work wonders ‘through’ the apostles (v. 43) inside it. This account allows us to see the atmosphere of joy and simplicity that arises from a life of intense fraternal charity (v. 44) and unanimous prayer (vv. 46-47a). And this is that much more surprising because the text does not conceal hardships and persecution. One is not dealing, therefore, with a utopian picture; in it, rather, one needs to know how to see the *ideal model* to which to conform oneself. The style of life adopted by the nascent Church is, in itself, eloquent and radiant witness – evangelisation that prepares the spirits of many people to receive the grace of God (v. 47).

Given that this is a paradigmatic text and thus a text that provides a programme for the whole of the Church, indeed for all Christian communities, it is important for us to draw near to this text, in particular to 2:42 where Luke outlines the architecture which is based upon four ideal pillars: ‘And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers’.

**2.1.** Hence first of all the **apostolic didaché**, that is to say *the preaching of the Word of God*. The apostle Paul, indeed, warns us that ‘faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ’ (Rm 10:17).

In showing that the first community ‘devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching’, Luke wants to emphasise the unique place and role of the Twelve: the faith of the Church is born and deepens through reference to the teaching of a group made up of those who directly witnessed the life and the teaching of the Lord.

The apostles and the community think anew about the words and actions of Jesus, about the whole of his pre-paschal experience, in the light of the resurrection, and guided by the Spirit they refer to Scripture or the event of Jesus in order to understand the present and the new developments that require a response on the part of the Christian message. Listening to the Word requires a serious and ongoing commitment and not a personal interpretation to the disadvantage of that community which says that it refers to the Twelve.

The Church today continues this teaching through the *kérygma*, that is to say the primary and fundamental message that Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of his public ministry: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand’ (Mk 1:15). The apostles announced the inauguration of the kingdom of God and thus of the decisive intervention of God in human history, proclaiming

the death and the resurrection of Christ: ‘And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).

In the Church there echoes the *catechesis*: its purpose is to deepen in a Christian ‘the mystery of Christ in the light of God’s word, so that the whole of a person’s humanity is impregnated by that word’ (John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*, n. 20). But the summit of preaching is the *homily* which still today for many Christians is the primary moment of the encounter with the Word of God. In this act, the minister should also transform himself into a prophet. Indeed, in a clear, incisive and substantial language, and with authoritativeness, he must not only ‘proclaim the admirable works of God in the history of salvation’: he must also actualise them in the times and moments lived by his listeners, and thereby make open in their hearts the question of conversion and the commitment of their lives: ‘What must we do?’ (Acts 2:37).

**Preaching, catechesis and the homily pre-suppose, therefore, reading and understanding, explaining and interpreting, and an involvement of the mind and the heart.** *In preaching, a dual movement is engaged in.* With the first, one goes back to the roots of the holy texts, of the events and of the sayings that generated the history of salvation, in order to understand them in terms of their meaning and their message. With the second movement one returns to the present, to today lived by those who listen and read, always in the light of Christ who is the luminous thread destined to unite Holy Scripture. This is what Christ himself did on the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus in the company of two of his disciples. It is what the deacon Philip did on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza when with the Ethiopian functionary he engaged in that emblematic dialogue: ‘Do you understand what you are reading?...How can I, unless someone guides me?’ (Acts 8:30-31). And the destination is full encounter with Christ in the sacrament. Thus emerges the second pillar that holds up the Church, the house of the divine word.

**2.2.** The second pillar that holds up the Church is *koinonía*, fraternal communion, another name for *agápe*, that is to say Christian love, which is expressed in the sharing or pooling of material goods. Communion is not at all an idealisation of the poor or poverty. The ideal is that everyone should have what they need to live and that those who do not have this can rely on the solidarity and generosity of other people.

As Jesus observed, to become his brothers and sisters one has to ‘hear the word of God and do it’ (Lk 8:21). **Authentic listening is obeying and working, it is bringing forth justice and love in life, it is offering – in existence and society – witness along the lines of the appeal of the prophets, an appeal that constantly united the Word of God and life, faith and rectitude, worship and social engagement.** This is what Jesus emphasised on a number of occasions, starting with the famous warning in the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven’ (Mt 7:21). In this sentence, we seem to encounter an echo of the divine words offered by Isaiah: ‘this people draw near with their mouth, and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me’ (29:13). These warnings also concern the Churches when they are not faithful to obedient listening to the Word of God. Therefore, it must be already visible and legible on the face and the hands of a believer, as was indicated by St. Gregory the Great who saw in St. Benedict and other great men of God witnesses to communion with God and with their brothers and sisters: the Word of God made life. A righteous and faithful man does not only ‘explain’ the Scriptures: he also ‘arranges’ them in front of everybody as a living and practised reality. It is for this reason that *viva lectio, vita bonorum*: the lives of the good is a living reading/lesson of the Word of God.

**2.3.** The third pillar of the spiritual building of the Church is the **sharing of bread**. This refers to the ritual act of the beginning of a shared meal: the father of a family or the head of the group takes the bread in his hands, gives thanks to God, breaks the bread and distributes it to those who are present. This is a meal that is characterised by joy and simplicity of the heart.

The scene of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35) once again provides an example and reproduces what takes place every day in our churches: the homily of Jesus on Moses and the prophets is replaced at the table by the sharing of the Eucharistic bread. This is the moment of the intimate dialogue of God with His people; it is the act of the new covenant sealed in the blood of Christ (Lk 22:20); it is the supreme work of the Word which is offered as food in his immolated body; and it is the source and the culminating point of the life and the mission of the Church. The gospel account of the Last Supper, the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ, when it is proclaimed in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the calling upon the Holy Spirit becomes an event and sacrament. It is for this reason that the Second Vatican Council, in a passage of strong intensity, declared: ‘The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body’ (DV, n. 21). One should, therefore, bring to the centre of the Christian life ‘the liturgy of the word and the Eucharistic liturgy, [which] are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship’ (SC, n. 56).

**2.4.** The last pillar that keeps up the spiritual edifice of the Church is **prayer**, composed, as St. Paul observed, of ‘psalms, hymns, spiritual canticles’ (Col 3:16). The Judeo-Christian community of Jerusalem expressed itself through communal worship. In Acts 3:1, Luke says that the group of Christians was assiduous and united in taking part in the liturgy of the temple.

The *Liturgy of the Hours*, naturally, has a privileged place; it is the quintessential prayer of the Church, intended to rhythm the days and the times of the Christian year, offering, above all with the Psalter, the daily spiritual food of the faithful.

Side by side with it and with communal celebrations of the Word, tradition introduced the practice of the *Lectio divina*, a prayerful reading in the Holy Spirit, capable of opening up to the faithful the treasure of the Word of God but also of creating encounter with Christ, the living word of God.

And as a praying model of the Word of God ideally there comes forth the profile of **Mary**, the mother of the Lord, who ‘kept all these things, pondering them in her heart’ (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51), that is to say, as the original Greek says, finding the deep crux that unites events, acts and things, which are apparently disjoined, in the great design of God.

The text of the Acts of the Apostles calls upon our communities which themselves were also born from the Easter of Christ. The quadruple perseverance calls on our communities to ascertain the place that they give to listening to the Word, to the practice of the Communion of goods, to breaking Bread, and to Prayers.

### **3. A Concrete Answer: the Church of the Second Vatican Council**

I would like to say that it is specifically this model of the Church of the Acts of the Apostles that the Second Vatican Council wanted to create in modern times so as to be faithful to the Lord Jesus, but also to the ‘signs of the times’. And Pope Francis has explicitly wanted to connect his historic project for the Church – as emerges from *Evangelii Gaudium* and from the Bull for the Jubilee Year of Mercy – with the Church of the Second Vatican Council and the Church of Aparecida.

#### *Lumen Gentium*

But let us ask whether *Lumen Gentium* still has something to say to us, whether the frame of reference has changed, whether the approaches of *Lumen Gentium* are also valid today? *Lumen Gentium* reminds us that the Church is called to reflect the splendour of Christ, that she is the ‘light of the nations’, and that her purpose is to illuminate humanity. It is certainly the case that the conditions in which the Church finds herself playing her inevitable role are different today. The Church is no longer in that stage of history when science and the human conscience were not able to

answer many questions and the Church therefore had to play a substitute role. However, she has the task of illumining humanity with the Gospel. The Church does not halt at beholding herself; she always refers to Christ, from whom comes her life and of whom she knows she must be a living mirror, and to the Spirit who gives her this knowledge and leads her through Christ to the Father. Here the words of the then Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, the Archbishop of Milan, come to our aid: 'The Church does not exist to be very beautiful and to look in the mirror saying: how beautiful I am the bride of Christ; the Church exists *propter nos et propter nostram salutem*...For this reason, she seeks to be up-to-date, ridding herself, if this is needed, of some old regal cloak that has remained on her shoulders, so as to be dressed in more simple forms that are appreciated by modern taste'. And it seems to me that the reforms carried forward by Pope Francis aim at this.

### *Gaudium et Spes*

But *Gaudium et spes* was already offering certain models that continue to be valid for the task of offering a young image of the Church. The Church exists to be a sign of the Kingdom of God: this is the great message of *Gaudium et Spes*. To make this sign visible and credible, the Church must renew herself and convert, rejuvenate and purify. For this reason, the Church has to examine her fundamental choices: passion for God, which frees her from every conformation to the world; ecclesial fraternity and communion so that she can become in a convincing and attractive way a point of reference for the world; a missionary impetus that helps her to overcome the fear that was felt by the disciples closed in the upper room and leads her to proclaim the Gospel to everyone; the commitment to serve, developing sympathy and solidarity towards everyone; and the choice for the poor, who are her mark of identity, quality and fertility. But more than *Gaudium et Spes*, it is again the *Acts of the Apostles* that offers us the four specific features of a Church that wants to remain faithful to her Lord and to be fertile for the world.

***A martyr Church*** that knows how to explain her faith because she is called to be a witness to the Lord who was crucified and rose again. For this reason, the Church is often the bearer of a Gospel that seems to contradict the mentality of the world. In this paradoxical character of hers, which appears very clearly in many speeches of Jesus, lies her prophetic strength and her meaningfulness.

***A liturgical Church*** that celebrates her faith. Liturgy is a true school of holiness because it transforms personal and communal existence into prayer. Even if disaffection in relation to the Church often seems to have its origins in a lack of attractiveness of very many liturgies, one cannot cancel the value or the need for an authentic celebratory life. We must retrieve a sense of the gratuitous and the mysterious, the reasons for celebration, the community dimension. In particular in the Eucharist, the supreme sacrament of the love of Christ and of union with him. As De Lubac said: 'the Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church'. This confers upon the Sunday Eucharist a primary importance.

***An evangelising Church***. Tertullian said that 'you are not born a Christian; you become one'. This 'is a statement that is of especial contemporary relevance because today we are in pervasive processes of deChristianisation that generate indifference and agnosticism. The usual pathways for the transmission of the faith are in a significant number of cases impracticable. One cannot take for granted that Jesus Christ and his Gospel are known. There is therefore a need for a renewed first proclaiming of the faith'. The task is to train disciples who love Christ; men and women who make the Gospel their programme for life and who are aware of the responsibility that they have 'towards the world'.

***A diaconal Church*** that knows that her mission is to serve the people of God and the world. This requires learning to serve; being attentive to the needs of other people, knowing how to take the first steps towards people, and adopting generous commitments. Christians are called to help people to defeat disappointment and apathy, to be joyful about the beautiful realities of life, to activate a capacity to dream of a future on the human scale, to invent new relationships between people and

between States, to respect nature, and to put an end to war forever. To defeat the scepticism that can be found amongst believers themselves through the optimism of the risen Christ. A diaconal Church that supports the poorest. When hope animates the life of a person who is poor, God and man have already been encountered. This is because only with the help of God can a poor person hope where there is no future. The hope of the poor is already faith that lives. Today's prophets are also aware of this.

#### **4. Rejuvenating the Church: *the Salesian Mission***

Today more than yesterday we are called to rejuvenate the Church, but it must be clear to us that even if the verb that has been used here could lead one to think of a kind of cosmetic 'lifting' operation (which is so present today in the contemporary culture of the ephemeral and the image) and not in the sense of the renovating force of the Spirit (cf. *LG*, n. 4), here we are talking about the commitment to graft new energies onto the Church, as the Spirit does, in order to make her more beautiful and attractive. To achieve this we have to do what the Lord Jesus does: love the Church and act for her.

*Rejuvenating the Church* means making her return to her origins. Like the Church of the Acts of the Apostles, of the Letters of St. Paul and of the Apocalypse, she lives by the strength of Easter and the power of Pentecost, she realises the truth of Christ and the freedom of the Spirit, and she remembers 'the love of the first times'. A Church that is courageous in witness, that makes people experience the beauty of the celebration of salvation in the liturgy, and is committed to service for the poorest.

*Rejuvenating the Church*, therefore, is to make her a home for young people. The Church will be young only if there are young people in her. The theme of this pastoral year is therefore an invitation to make the Church young and to make young people the Church.

#### *The experience of Don Bosco*

In practical terms, how did Don Bosco live the Church and following in his footsteps how have the Salesians lived the Church? How have they made the Church attractive for the young people of their time? Don Bosco knew how to live faithfulness to the Lord Jesus as he experienced every day the painful ecclesial reality of his time. His living sense of the Church was principally an approach and an experience of cooperation with all his energies and resources for the good of the Church. Don Bosco expressed his love for the Church through a simple but profound triad: love for Jesus Christ, present principally in the Eucharist, which is the central action of the Church; devotion to Mary, Mother and Model of the Church; and fidelity to the Pope, the Successor of St. Peter and the centre of unity of the Church. These are three elements that are inseparable and which illuminate each other and find their convergence in the person of Christ. The dream of Don Bosco, called 'of the two pillars', was an immediate and evocative exemplification of these dynamic forces, of the three 'loves' of Don Bosco that build up the Church. The Church of Don Bosco has a Eucharistic form, a Marian figure and a Petrine foundation. As the Salesian Family, we work with the Church and for the Church; we try to 'feel *cum Ecclesia*'; we belong to the Church; we live in the Church; and we are the Church. We have received from our Father Don Bosco a special sensitivity towards that capacity of the Church to construct 'unity and communion between all the forces that work for the Kingdom'. The Salesian spirit makes us centres of communion of many other forces and builders and promoters of the Church amongst young people. For this reason, we must express and manifest a singular love for the Church through dynamic and responsible faithfulness to her teachings, a generous effort of communion and cooperation with all of her members, and above all else with an unconditional commitment to open the Church to young people and young people to the Church.

## *A pedagogy to educate young people to be the Church*

At this point we ask ourselves: which pedagogy, which strategy, should we have to make young people fall in love with the Church? How can we educate young people to be the Church? Together with witness – which is the most eloquent language – there is an urgent need to promote amongst young people a journey of faith that leads them to meet Christ personally, to live sacramental life, and to locate themselves – in an increasingly aware way – inside the Church; to know her and love her, to become committed inside her and to live for her. One of the areas of the journey of faith of young people concerns growth towards an intense belonging to the Church; the Salesian spirituality of young people also proposes an experience of ecclesial communion. This is the fundamental commitment of the Christian community and in concrete terms of our educational communities; attention paid to the journey of faith of young people expresses the motherhood of the Church which, as Pope Francis says, ‘generates, breastfeeds, makes grow, corrects, nourishes, and takes by the hand’.

This requires certain specific choices:

- ✓ ***First of all making the Church known to young people.*** We need to help young people to overcome a partial picture of the Church which, indeed, is often seen only in relation to its institutional aspect, as though it were a social or political organisation similar to others, or identified with the hierarchy, or in opposite fashion reduced to being a purely spiritual, individual and ideal reality.
- ✓ ***Making a sense of being the Church grow in young people.*** This is a matter of developing in young people a sense of belonging to the Church. We belong to the Church and the Church belongs to us. We have been called by Jesus to form his family and to continue together his mission in history. A clear consciousness of our own Christian identity cannot exist without a living sense of belonging to a Christian community.
- ✓ ***Generating experience of the Church in young people.*** A sense of being the Church and of belonging to the Church is not created in an abstract form, but, rather, it is achieved through experience of Christian life in the various situations of a person, beginning with the family, which was rightly called by Paul VI the domestic Church, and continuing in parishes, in which is normally achieved an experience of communion of faith, of hope and of charity. In our case, we generate an experience of the Church with young people in various kinds of Pastoral Educational Communities which must be a sign of faith, schools of faith, centres of communion and participation, ‘to the point of being able to become an experience of the Church’ (Constitution, n. 47).
- ✓ ***Making young people find their vocation in the Church.*** The journey of education in faith must help a move from good inclinations of the mind to solid beliefs, and thus to a total giving of oneself to God and other people. This is what loving the Church and giving oneself to her means. Love for the Church is also expressed in this capacity to allow oneself to be gripped by Christ, to the point of forgoing one’s own interests and projects and making oneself totally available to him in order to continue in one’s own person his work of building the Kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

In the wish to respond with Salesian joy, courage and professionalism to the next synod on ‘Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment’, I express the hope and wish that the pastoral project for this year will help everyone to love, to follow and to imitate Jesus with the



ardour, the conviction and the faithfulness of those great pillars of the Church, St. Peter and St. Paul.

Thus we will be able to confess publicly our faith and our love like those two saints: ‘Lord you know everything. You know that I love you’ (Jn 21:17), ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’ (Jn 6:68). ‘I know to whom I have given my trust’ (2 Tim 1:12). ‘I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal 2:20). Our faith will then be translated into working charity and will become credible and convincing witness.

I hope that all of us, and especially young people, can reach the destination that St. Therese of the Child Jesus reached: ‘Yes I have found my place in the Church, and this place you gave me, O my God. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and in this way I will be everything and my wishes will be translated into reality’.

May Mary the Helper, the Mother of the Church, teach us to be, and to know how to form happy disciples and joyous proclaimers of her Son! May she help us to recognise the Church as our Mother, who always generates us and regenerates us in faith!

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