

General Chapter of the Ministers of the Infirm (Camillians)

What is Camillian prophecy today?

Nemi, May 7, 2022

João Braz card. de Aviz

Dear Camillian Brothers, welcome back! I am so happy to be with you today. I greet - also on behalf of Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, our Archbishop-Secretary, and all the collaborators of our Dicastery - the members of the General Council: Fr. Laurent, Fr. Aris, Br. José Ignacio, Fr. Gianfranco and Fr.

In recent years you have traveled a path that was not easy. First, the painful affair of Fr. Renato, during which the paternal intervention of Pope Francis was able to partially alleviate the dismay that those events caused in all of you. Then the painful closure of your International Institute of Health Pastoral Theology. And finally the equally painful death of the Superior General, my friend Fr. Leo. God also manifests himself through these events in the life of a religious family. They were very hard trials, which you were able to go through by strengthening your faith in the charism and your communion among yourselves.

In these first days you have certainly deepened your preparatory documents for the Chapter and enriched yourselves in dialogue with one another, in order to discern together where the Spirit is calling your Order for the coming years.

"What is Camillian prophecy today?"

We began to understand that the note that best characterizes consecrated life, indeed the priority required today, is prophecy, as Pope Francis indicated to us in that famous conversation with the Superiors General on November 29, 2013: "Evangelical radicalism is not only of religious: it is required of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way." And again, "Never must a religious renounce prophecy" - "The prophecy of the Kingdom... the accent must fall on being prophets, and not on playing at being prophets... religious men and women are men and women who illuminate the future."

What does it mean concretely for consecrated persons, and therefore for you Camillians, to be prophets in today's world?

It helps us to recall how prophecy is understood in the Bible. Prophets do not become prophets by their own choice, but by a call from God. This call burns the heart of the one who receives it and from that moment on he can no longer escape the task of prophet. Prophecy is therefore the affirmation of the primacy of God over every other human good. The prophet knows that he is never alone: God does not let him lack his help. The prophet does not speak in his own name, but transmits what he has heard from God in prayer and reflection. The prophet receives from

God the ability to scrutinize the history in which he lives and to interpret events: he is like a sentinel who keeps watch during the night and knows when the dawn is coming (cf. *Is* 21:11-12). He knows God and he knows the men and women with whom he lives. Thus prophets are "mystics and contemplatives," capable of "discovering the signs of God's presence in daily life, (...) who know how to recognize the questions that God and humanity pose" (Letter of the CIVCSVA, *Contemplate*, p. 26).

The prophet is capable of discernment and also of denouncing the evil of sin and injustice, because he is free, he does not have to answer to any other master but God, he has no other interests than those of God. The prophet habitually takes the side of the poor and defenseless because he knows that God himself is on their side.

Prophecy can mean going against the tide with respect to the worldly mentality (which has sometimes entered the Church as well, even in our convents). Being prophets requires creativity and audacity - two other words dear to Pope Francis - to open up and travel together along new roads that our fathers did not travel; to revise the structures that might have worked in the past, but which today no longer correspond to the new dynamism of the mission; to renew the style and models in which the charism of our Institutes was incarnated in the past. It is the "prophecy of evangelical choices" (Letter of the CIVCSVA, *Scrutate*, p. 85) to express also in new forms the potentialities of the charism, the "energies" enclosed in it and not yet fully deployed.

The invitation to live and actualize your charism "in a prophetic way" was addressed directly to you by Pope Francis in that important meeting he had with the Camillian Charismatic Family on May 18, 2019. "In the wake of this mission" - that is, the one that comes from the charism: to relive and bear witness in every time and place to Christ's merciful love for the sick - "you are called to continue your service *in a prophetic manner*. It is a question of looking to the future, open to the new forms of apostolate that the Spirit inspires in you and that the signs of the times and the needs of the world and the Church require. The great gift that you have received is still relevant and necessary even for our times, because it is founded on the charity that will never end (cf. *1 Cor* 13:8). As a living part of the Church, sent to spread the Gospel so that people "may have life and have it in abundance" (*Jn* 10:10), you have the wonderful opportunity to do just that through the gestures of caring for life and of *salus* integrale, so necessary even in our time".

1. *The prophecy of communion*

Especially in recent years in the Church, and in particular in consecrated life, we are increasingly understanding that communion is what the Holy Spirit asks of all of us and is a necessary condition for the credibility of our evangelical witness and also of our apostolic fruitfulness. We are also learning to call this communion by another name that was not used much before: synodality.

We have already entered the new millennium two decades ago, a true "change of epoch" (Pope Francis at the National Convention of the Italian Church, Florence, November 10, 2015), which requires from all of us a new understanding of what is happening and new ways of proposing the

Gospel as a response to the questions of the men and women of this age. In 2001 Pope Saint John Paul II wrote that a *spirituality of communion* is "the great challenge before us in the millennium that is beginning, if we are to be faithful to God's plan and also respond to the world's deepest expectations" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 43). And in 2015, Pope Francis told us that "the path of *synodality* is the path that God expects of the Church of the third millennium," because the world in which we live "demands of the Church the strengthening of synergies in all areas of her mission" (Pope Francis at the *Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, October 17, 2015).

It seems to me that synodality and communion are the two words that the Holy Spirit is telling us through the mouth of Peter today in order to continue to be faithful to the mandate received from Christ: "Go, evangelize all peoples" (*Mt 28:19*).

The challenge to make the spirituality of communion the way of life of this millennium is then made explicit by Pope Francis as follows: "we feel the challenge to discover and transmit the 'mystique' of living together, of mixing, of meeting, of taking each other in our arms, of supporting each other, of participating in this somewhat chaotic tide that can be transformed into a true experience of fraternity, into a caravan of solidarity, into a holy pilgrimage (...)" (*Evangelii gaudium* 87).

The principle of synodality, to which Pope Francis calls the whole Church, also applies perfectly to the consecrated life. This is well explained by a beautiful document of the International Theological Commission: "Synodality in the life and mission of the Church", dated March 2, 2018, which in n. 74 suggests "the involvement in the synodal life of the Church of communities of consecrated life, movements and new ecclesial communities. All these realities (...) can offer significant experiences of synodal articulation of the life of communion and dynamics of community discernment implemented within them, along with stimuli in identifying new ways of evangelization."

Communion among us in the charismatic community

A first area in which to revive communion and the style of synodality is the internal life of an Institute.

We know of Orders and Congregations that are organized in a rigidly centralized form, in which every choice and orientation is decided by the central government and the territorial articulations are totally dependent and mere executors of the decisions of the center. Even the representative bodies envisaged by the Constitutions, such as Chapters or Assemblies, are sometimes manipulated and reduced to approving decisions already taken previously. This leads to anachronistic and even ridiculous forms of exercise of supreme authority and total dependence of local superiors and communities on the central government. The consequences are predictable and even known.

In other institutions, the opposite occurs. The legitimate demand for subsidiarity and decentralization on the part of the territorial organizations can be combined with a certain impatience with the central government and, as a result, encourage centrifugal thrusts and demands

for autonomy that end up weakening or even breaking the unity of the single family. At the beginning, the reasons may be good and understandable, such as: "Rome doesn't know our real situation", "only we have the correct vision of the local reality", "the center doesn't understand us, doesn't listen to us", "we can't conform to central decisions that are valid for everyone", etc. Sometimes there are also attitudes that are not exempt from this. At times, individualistic attitudes or the excessive protagonism of some local superiors are not exempt. In this case, too, we see the effects: the central government is reduced to a mere "spiritual inspirer" or provider of useful services; decisions taken collegially do not find acceptance and implementation at the local levels; each territorial articulation decides on management and apostolic choices in an autocratic manner; it can happen that a part experiences economic difficulties or shortage of personnel, and does not receive support from the rest of the Institute.

This second approach is also harmful. We have seen entire provinces ask to become independent from the rest of the Congregation and therefore break away and become autonomous institutes. Or Institutes that no longer recognize themselves in the one shared apostolic project, each going its own way and ending up losing the family spirit and the authentic life of the charism.

This push towards fragmentation can also derive from a certain mentality that we see in social life, of countries and groups that claim so much their own identity and distinction, that they want to be interested only in their own good and avoid solidarity with others, perhaps more fragile. It is as if a member of our body, noticing that the rest of the organism is becoming old and sick, were to say: it is better if I detach myself and think for myself, before I come to a bad end along with the rest of the body! Pope Francis has told us many times: "No one is saved alone!".

The old saying: "Unity is strength" is more relevant than ever. It is precisely the current conditions of fragility that many Institutes are experiencing, and which you also know, that should convince us of the urgency of banding together even more strongly. If the great bankers of the world unite to increase their profits, if the most important companies agree to better control the global market, will not we, who have chosen to work for the Kingdom of God, do the same?

In an Institute of consecrated life, it is the same blood that circulates among all the members, that of the one charism, transmitted by the founder and incarnated by the different generations, before and beyond geographical, cultural or linguistic distinctions or the diversity of the forms in which the charism is incarnated. A religious feels above all a member of the one body that is the Institute. Thus, having in mind the good of the entire body, of the one family, he assumes the project and the vision chosen and shared by all, while implementing it in his own particular sphere.

In the same perspective, the circulation of goods and persons among the entire body of the Institute also becomes natural. This, too, is a prophecy for our multicultural and multi-ethnic world: the establishment of communities composed of religious of different geographical origins will become increasingly normal, not only in central governments but in every part of an Institute. We will thus give positive witness that among us "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (cf. *Gal* 3:28): each one ready to go wherever apostolic needs and common discernment require.

Here, too, I quote a part of Pope Francis' message in his meeting with you on May 18, 2019: "I encourage you always to cultivate *communion* among yourselves, in that *synodal style* that I have

proposed to the whole Church, listening to one another (...). Be ever more aware that 'it is in communion, even if it costs effort, that a charism reveals itself authentically and mysteriously fruitful' (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 130)".

Communion *ad extra*

Therefore, spirituality of communion and synodality, applied to consecrated life, can also be expressed with a word that has been emerging for some years: *inter-congregationality*. It is a reality that is becoming incarnate, a harbinger of hope and an incubator of vital and innovative experiences. It is already mentioned in the Apostolic Exhortation "Vita consecrata" (1996) when it exhorts us to live communion by cultivating "mutual collaboration among the various Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life" (*Vita consecrata* 52) and further on when it places "inter-congregational collaboration" among the ways in which consecrated life today can maintain its prophetic force and be an evangelical leaven and an innovative cultural proposal (*Vita consecrata* 80). Even more explicit is what we read in the instruction "Starting Afresh from Christ" of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (2002): "The communion which consecrated men and women are called to live goes far beyond their own religious family or Institute. By opening themselves to communion with other Institutes and other forms of consecration, they can broaden their communion, rediscover their common Gospel roots and at the same time grasp more clearly the beauty of their own identity in the variety of their charism, as branches of the one vine" (n. 30).

We all remember Pope Francis' inspiring exhortation opening the Year of Consecrated Life in November 2014: "I also expect communion to grow among the members of the different Institutes. Might not this year be an opportunity to step out more courageously from the confines of one's own Institute to work out together, locally and globally, common projects of formation, evangelization, and social interventions? In this way a real prophetic witness can be offered more effectively. Communion and the encounter between different charisms and vocations is a path of hope. No one builds the future by isolating himself, nor by his own strength alone, but by recognizing himself in the truth of a communion that is always open to encounter, dialogue, listening, mutual help and preserves us from the disease of self-referentiality" (Pope Francis Letter *To All Consecrated Persons*, November 21, 2014).

It is not just a matter of joining forces and collaborating on common initiatives because we are forced to do so by external circumstances: the reduction in numbers of a single Institute (the advanced age of its members and few new entries), the scarcity of economic resources, the complexity of the social environments where we provide our services. You yourselves are well aware of the complexity of the world of health and illness, where you mainly operate, the vastness of the needs and the difficulty in providing effective responses. These "thorns" of the present situation can certainly stimulate us, but we want to do so above all in order to be able to give a better witness to the Gospel and to the precept of mutual love, which is the badge by which we will be recognized as true disciples of Christ (cf. *Jn* 13:35).

2. *The health prophecy*

The world in which you exercise your ministry is especially that of promoting health and caring for the sick and the poor.

Here you are masters, because of the experience gathered over so many centuries of incarnating the charism in every part of the world, and because of the competence that is recognized in you. Do not think that, following the closure of your international Institute "Camillianum", the task of continuing to express the completeness of the charism that the founder transmitted to you and that the Church has recognized has been diminished: assisting the sick in body and spirit and teaching others how to serve them. You can and must continue to do so, inspired by those who have preceded you and by the experience you have gained, perhaps by spreading the "new school of charity" begun by Saint Camillus to many more places.

You are well aware of the many difficult challenges to your ministry, some of them new compared to the past, and different for each place in the world where you are present. I mention only one of them here, by way of example.

In recent decades we have come to understand the enormous impact that environmental changes have on the living conditions and health of people, especially the poorest and most fragile, who suffer the greatest consequences. The *Laudato si' Platform*, promoted by the Holy See through the Dicastery for Integral Human Development, will undoubtedly see you engaged in collaborating on many initiatives to "care for our common home," in the holistic perspective of integral ecology suggested by Pope Francis. As you Camillians are the specialists in this broad, multidimensional vision of care, you will be able to contribute to this planetary project of healing relationships with God the Creator, with our neighbors, and with the earth.

It seems to me that it is no longer enough just to continue to repeat what those who have gone before you have done well for the benefit of the poor and the sick. Every organism must necessarily change and transform itself in order to continue to be itself and to grow. New questions and new needs require new answers. Certainly, there may be a fear of no longer being able to sustain the works already begun and taking the risk of starting new ones: "we are few, we have little strength and few resources"... But when Saint Camillus began, did he not have before him equally great and difficult challenges and obstacles? At that time, his own life and that of his companions was at risk. Where did he find courage, whom did he trust? "Courage pusillanimous, go forth, that I may help you, for this is my work and not yours!" he heard himself said by the Crucified One.

In deciding which apostolic works to leave behind and which new ones to undertake, it may be useful to take as a starting point and criterion for discernment not primarily economic or efficiency evaluations, which we must prudently consider, but rather: what are the most urgent needs of the sick in this part of the world in which we operate and at this time? To which of these needs is no one giving an adequate response?

I am always surprised when I read the Gospel episode of the healing of blind Bartimaeus. Hearing him cry out, Jesus calls him and asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" (*Mk* 10:51). It seems so obvious to everyone that he cried out to ask for his sight back! But Jesus does not impose

his healing power: he gives him the word, he makes him the protagonist, he puts him at the center of the scene, giving him the dignity of expressing himself his expectations and his request for healing.

It is true, you are few and with few resources. But do we still believe that to those who seek the Kingdom of God, the Father will not lack the necessary, indeed He will give in abundance? Do we place more trust in Providence or in bank accounts? The challenges you face in your efforts to witness to Christ's merciful love for the sick are many and very complex. One certainly successful strategy of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:29-37) in coming to the aid of the wounded man was to involve others in his work of care. He understood that he could not do everything on his own, that his good will and the correctness of the first aid intervention would not be enough to ensure a complete and lasting response to the serious need of the wounded man. So he involved others, in this case the hotelier. His example can inspire you to seek and implement synergies with those who, like you, want to respond to the needs of the sick and the poor: the other members of the Camillian Charismatic Family, the organizations of the Church and society that operate in the same areas, the many people of good will who share the values of solidarity and care.

Dear Brothers! I repeat again the words of Pope Francis: "The great gift you have received is still relevant and necessary even for this age of ours." May the Holy Spirit inspire you and help you to creatively revive and actualize the charism that Saint Camillus has transmitted to you, for the good of the Church and of those who suffer.