



Magnifica Fraternitas: Religious Brotherhood as Icon of a Synodal Church

Dear Brothers,

I wish I could be standing among you today, but I am glad this pre-recorded video allows me to send my warm greetings as you celebrate our shared brotherhood and explore the rich witness of the Religious Brother in the Church. Even as I watch from a distance, your gathering—bringing together Brothers from twelve different congregations—is already speaking louder than words. In a culture often divided by individualism, your presence together is a luminous witness, proving that true fraternity is alive, necessary, and deeply needed in our world.

This magnetic quality of our shared life sits right at the heart of the Gospel. Thinking about the early Christian community in Jerusalem, Pope Francis reminded us during a General Audience that the way those first believers lived together acted like a natural magnet, drawing so many people to the Lord. As he put it, this genuine fraternity—living together and truly caring for one another—is what makes the Gospel believable. It shows the world the beauty of a life transformed by love, which speaks far louder than any clever argument ever could.

And this is precisely why our vocation as Religious Brothers serves as such a vivid icon for a synodal Church. Synodality isn't just about structures or governance; it's a lifestyle. It means walking side by side, listening deeply, and carrying one another's burdens. We don't just teach this path—we embody it by our very way of life. Our identity doesn't come from rank or status, but from the radical equality of our shared baptism, showing the wider Church what happens when listening comes before speaking and true community fuels our mission.

Of course, living out this witness means stepping beyond the borders of our own individual charisms. Each of our twelve congregations carries a rich, beautiful story into that room today, but our common calling asks us to step forward as one family. When Pope Francis visited Gozo, he gave us a vision that hits close to home: our mission only bears real fruit when we labor together in deep friendship. When people see a community built on genuine love and quick forgiveness, they are naturally drawn to the light of Christ.

That's why I've chosen to title this message *Magnifica Fraternitas*. I want us to look at our vocation not as something forgotten or peripheral, but as an

essential, indispensable gift for the Church today. Our brotherhood offers a magnificent grace as the Church navigates her synodal path and seeks healing from clericalism. By simply living our calling, we offer a concrete model for the entire People of God—proving that it is truly possible to be a Church that is authentically fraternal rather than rigidly hierarchical; a Church where we listen, share life as equals, and witness to the Gospel with real, contagious joy.

Brotherhood as the Antidote to Clericalism and Exclusion

Now that we've seen the magnetic power of our shared life, let's look directly at how *Magnifica Fraternitas* addresses some of the deepest struggles within the Church today. If the Church is trying to break free from structures of domination, elitism, and division, our vocation offers a practical, living remedy. Long before we ever preach a sermon or write a paper, the simple reality of how we live as Brothers deconstructs the barriers on the synodal path through three profound areas of our life.

First, your gathering in that hall right now as Tutti Fratelli—Brothers from twelve different congregations, spanning multiple languages, generations, and cultures—is a truly prophetic sign of radical inclusion. Show me a single photograph of your group today; that image alone would speak louder than words. It proves that brotherhood can bridge deep cultural, institutional, and social divides. Whether our religious institutes are large and well-known or small and modest, you are sitting together on equal footing—showing a divided Church that genuine relational equality isn't just a pious dream, but a lived reality.

Second, the vocation of the Religious Brother unmask and directly challenges the persistent temptation of clericalism and sacred elitism. Because our calling is non-ordained by its very nature, it offers a gentle yet uncompromising critique of hierarchical power. Look around that room—there are no titles, no ecclesiastical ranks, and no special privileges. By stepping away from the pursuit of clerical power, the name 'Brother' points everyone back to the core truth of the Gospel: that real authority in God's Kingdom is measured strictly by service, and that true spiritual fruitfulness springs from humility.

Finally, our life reclaims the fundamental dignity of our common Baptism. In the structure of the Church, Brothers hold no elevated ecclesiastical status. Our consecrated life rests entirely on that foundational sacrament shared by every single Christian: our Baptism. By anchoring our identity strictly in being children of God and brothers to one another, we remind the entire Church that baptismal dignity comes before—and sits far above—any office or hierarchy. In doing so, we dismantle rigid mindsets and offer a clear model of what it really means to walk together as equals on this synodal journey.

Brotherhood as Synodality in Practice

If our non-clerical identity gives us the theological answer to clericalism, our daily life together gives us the practical blueprint for synodality. People often discuss synodality in abstract theological terms, leaving many in the Church asking, "What does this actually look like in real life?" The answer is happening right in our local communities. Our life together—our shared prayer, sitting down for simple meals at a common table, our honest conversations, working side-by-side, and yes, even our disagreements and reconciliations—isn't just a private lifestyle choice. It is synodality in motion. When we engage in communal discernment and live out our daily routine, we offer the Church a concrete, time-tested experience of what it means to walk together as sisters and brothers.

This lived experience offers two vital lessons for the Church's synodal journey:

First, mutual listening and shared responsibility are built right into the routine of a Brother's life. We are called to listen actively to one another—not just to spoken opinions, but to what remains unsaid, discerning the Spirit through each other's joys and struggles. Real community life requires genuine discussion and reflection. When a community makes a major decision, it isn't just because a superior issued a command from on high; it comes from genuine, sometimes challenging, communal discernment. Every Brother shares ownership of the community's life and mission, offering a working template for parishes, dioceses, and synodal gatherings everywhere.

Second, Religious Brotherhood offers a refreshingly evangelical alternative to top-down, authoritarian leadership. In a brotherhood, authority is simply an act of humble service. The Brother who serves as local superior sits at the exact same dining table, eats the same food, lives in the same simple room, and does his share of the household chores. There are no elevated thrones or special perks. We practice circular accountability, where even the superior is answerable to his Brothers in trust and mutual respect. And when his term ends, he simply steps back into the ranks and takes up whatever humble ministry is assigned next. That seamless transition shows the wider Church that authority is a temporary trust, not a permanent promotion.

Finally, this internal communion naturally flows out into our apostolic work. In a true brotherhood, mission belongs to the whole community, not to one charismatic individual who manages everything alone. We work as a unified body, balancing strengths and supporting weaknesses. This internal experience makes Brothers uniquely suited for collaborative ministry alongside laywomen, laymen, and those on the margins. Whether in a school, a hospital, or a social center, Brothers don't lead as isolated autocrats. Instead, we create spaces

where staff, students, and families are true partners in the mission—extending the warmth, equality, and joy of our fraternal table out into the wider world.

Brotherhood as an Icon of Universal Humanity

Yet, this gift of *Magnifica Fraternitas* isn't meant for the Church alone. As we look outward to the broader world, we discover a third crucial dimension: Religious Brotherhood as a living icon of our shared humanity in a fractured world. Today, as nations turn inward and societies split along political, economic, and cultural fault lines, our life together serves as a bold, prophetic answer to polarization, nationalism, and hyper-individualism.

When a community of Brothers lives together across differences—or when an international house brings men from opposing nations under one roof to break the same bread—it becomes visible proof that global divisions can be overcome. We show a cynical world that unity doesn't require uniformity, and that human beings can truly belong to one another without losing who they are.

This witness grows even stronger when we look at your gathering today. When Brothers from twelve distinct institutes—wearing different habits, bringing different traditions, and rooted in different spiritual paths—stand side-by-side as *tutti fratelli*, you give the world a powerful sign of universal kinship. Through national networks or inter-congregational gatherings like yours, we show that our distinct charisms aren't private property to be guarded, but shared gifts for the common good. Seeing different religious families join hands reassures both the Church and society that diverse histories can harmoniously come together in a common commitment to brotherhood.

And this witness is lived out through the total gift of every Brother, regardless of his age or active strength. The young Brother pursuing his studies, the middle-aged Brother in the thick of demanding ministry, the Brother taking a needed sabbatical to heal from burnout, the sick Brother in a hospital bed, and the elderly Brother who can no longer carry out active work—each one, simply by living his consecration, helps heal our broken world.

Our human worth isn't measured by economic output or institutional productivity. By honoring and accompanying every Brother through every stage of life, we offer a radical lesson to world leaders, economists, and policymakers. We show them that a truly human society is possible—one built on intrinsic dignity, trust, and solidarity. In a world desperate for healing, our *Magnifica Fraternitas* stands as a quiet, shining icon of what humanity was created to be.

A word of caution: as we celebrate this calling, we must also humbly acknowledge that our gift of fraternity is exceedingly fragile. We hold this

treasure in earthen vessels, and we cannot afford to take it for granted. When we allow division, self-absorption, or bitterness to seep into our daily lives, this gift can easily degrade into a lived "un-fraternity"—a counter-witness that harms our mission and risks becoming our very damnation. A broken or superficial fraternity is not merely an inconvenience; it betrays the Gospel we are called to embody. Recognizing our human weakness demands daily conversion, mutual forgiveness, and total reliance on God's grace to safeguard and renew the sacred bond of our brotherhood.

Sent Forth as *Magnifica Fraternitas*

Dear Brothers, as your Tutti Fratelli assembly comes to a close, you are standing at a wonderful threshold. Over these days together, you have listened, prayed, discussed, and shared your lives. You've felt the quiet strength of your twelve charisms converging as one.

Now, the time has come to be sent forth—not simply returning to routine, but heading back to your local communities and ministries as joyful, bold ambassadors of *Magnifica Fraternitas*.

Our task today is both clear and urgent. As the Church continues her synodal journey, striving to heal from clericalism and rediscover how to walk together, the vocation of the Religious Brother is not a relic of the past or an afterthought. It is an essential, indispensable gift. Our very existence serves as a living roadmap for the whole Church. By reclaiming our baptismal equality, practicing shared leadership, and building communities where listening comes before speaking, we show everyone that a fraternal, synodal Church isn't just an abstract dream—it is already happening among us.

So I leave you with this call: embrace and radiate the attractive joy of our vocation. Be a beacon of hope for a Church seeking renewal and a human family tired of division and isolation. Let your joy be genuine, open, and contagious.

As you pack your bags and head back to your respective corners of the vineyard, remember what lies at the heart of our mission. It isn't our programs, our grand institutions, or our clever arguments that will touch hearts. It is authentic fraternity. Pope Francis reminded us of this in *Evangelii Gaudium* when he wrote that the Church grows not by proselytism, but by attraction. Whenever we meet another person in love, our faith is illuminated, and fraternal love becomes an irresistible invitation to the Gospel.

This is the heart of our calling: evangelization by attraction. Real, forgiving, inclusive brotherhood acts like a magnet in a world longing for real connection. When people look at our communities and see Brothers from different

backgrounds, generations, and cultures living in genuine love and reconciliation, they are drawn to Christ without needing a single forced argument.

My very dear Brothers, go forth and be that magnet. Live your consecration fully, joyfully, and authentically. May our *Magnifica Fraternitas* shine brightly, drawing the Church and the world into the light, warmth, and mercy of God. *Maraming salamat* and may God bless our journey as we proclaim good news: **“We are *Magnifica Fraternitas*!”**

Br. Armin A. Luistro, FSC

References

1. Pope Francis, General Audience (Catechesis on the Acts of the Apostles: "They held all things in common"), Saint Peter's Square, 26 June 2019.
2. Pope Francis, Address at the Prayer Meeting, National Shrine of Ta' Pinu, Gozo, Malta, 2 April 2022.
3. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World), 24 November 2013.