

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

**Consecrated by God the Trinity,
As a Prophetic Community
of Brothers impassioned for God
and for the Poor**

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*The word of the LORD came to me thus:
Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I dedicated you,
a prophet to the nations I appointed you.
“Ah, Lord GOD!” I said, “I know not how to speak;
I am too young.”
But the LORD answered me, Say not,
“I am too young.”
To whomever I send you, you shall go;
whatever I command you, you shall speak
(Jeremiah 1: 5-7).*

*For now the LORD has spoken who formed me
as his servant from the womb,
That Jacob may be brought back to him
and Israel gathered to him;
And I am made glorious in the sight of the LORD,
and my God is now my strength!
It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant,
to raise up the tribes of Jacob,
and restore the survivors of Israel;
I will make you a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth
(Isaiah 49: 5-6).*

*But when (God), who from my mother’s womb
had set me apart and called me through his grace, was
pleased to reveal his Son to me,
so that I might proclaim him...
(Galatians 1: 15-16).*

Brothers,

Like Jeremiah and Isaiah in these parallel texts, and as Paul appropriated from them, we, too have been called by God from our mother's womb, in spite of our limitations and weaknesses, to be bearers of his Word and to make visible the tenderness of maternal love. This call reveals itself as pure gratuity. There are no logical reasons, nor even moral reasons, that we have merited this. God in his mysterious design wanted it to be so. He is our strength, and our mission, thanks to the international nature of our Institute, which has no borders and is aimed at a multitude of nations, races, cultures and religions. As our Founder intuited, our mission is to be instruments of salvation for young people, especially those who are victims of poverty, lacking in love or in search of meaning in their lives. The *God who wants all to be saved* is counting on us to realize this project of unconditional and disproportionate love. Salvation, which as Paul tells us, is revealed fully in Jesus, his Son, whose mission we are called to continue and whose message we are called to proclaim.

It is in this sense that we can say that we are called to be prophets. Prophets for the young who ought to discover the God who loves them through our affection, interest and approachability. As Saint John Baptist de La Salle reminded us: *You must consider the obligation you have to win their hearts as one of the principal means to lead them to live in a Christian manner. Often reflect that if you fail to use this means, you will drive them away from God instead of drawing them to him* (Meditation 115.3).

Prophets who journey with these young people, not so much as teachers of truths, but rather as companions who accompany them as their older brothers. Prophets who listen and understand the language of young people and who at the same time are the language of God for them and bearers of his love.

It is true that God the Trinity has consecrated us so that we are prophets for them. God did this at our baptism as affirmed by Vatican II, *the holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name* (cf. Hebrews 13: 15) (Lumen Gentium 12). He has reinforced this call on us by means of our religious consecration, in which our procuring the glory of the Trinity, through our ministry of human and Christian education, has become the final and most important objective of our lives. The Father has called us to continue the mission of the Son with the light and the strength of the Spirit.

In the Creed we affirm that the Spirit *spoke through the prophets*. We can also say absolutely that he not only spoke, but that he continues to speak through prophets. Our vocation is an invitation to continue this prophetic mission. The Founder sensed this very well as we can see in his Meditation for the third Sunday of Advent, which is based on the writings of Saint Peter, when he stated that *no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the Holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God* (2 Peter 1: 21). The Founder wrote: *It is also by the movement*

of the Spirit of God that all those who today proclaim his kingdom continue to speak. But if God makes use of persons to announce the truths of Christianity to others and to prepare their hearts to be docile to these truths, it is God alone, as the Wise Man says, who must guide their steps and impart to their hearts the docility they need in order to welcome these holy truths that he is making known to them (Meditation 3.2).

I am aware that to speak of the Brother as a prophet may give rise to a certain amount of rejection, because we tend to question those who speak of justice yet live inconsistently or because prophecy can be reduced to the political arena, with no openness to the dimension of mystery and mysticism. Therefore, we should be very clear that it is not owing to our decision that we are created prophets, nor do we want to be called such or believe that we are worthy of this name. The prophet always responds to God's initiative and not to his own personal ideas. It is precisely for that reason, because we have felt God's call despite our limitations and weaknesses, that we should carry his message, not owing to our own merit, but because of grace. Not because we are better than others, but simply because we have been freely called by God to share and to be witnesses of his passionate love for humankind.

In fact, prophets are imbued with a double passion – a passion for God and for his people. God's passion which sends them out and of which they are spokespersons. The passion for the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor and exploited with whom they identify and whom they love profoundly. *For the prophets God is first and most im-*

portant; they are men of contemplative prayer that help us to look at life with the eyes of God. Based on this experience of God they analyze the historic realities to discern the signs of the times, that is to say, the grace-filled events through which God moves through history or by which history opens itself to God's plan. Prophets are champions up to the point of giving their own lives for the cause of the poor, the weak, the marginalized...: the prophet joins his fate to the cause of the very poor and stays involved to the very end (Jesús Sartre). We are called to follow their steps and make our own this double passion that ought to propel our lives: God and the poor.

The call to be prophets should include both our personal life and our community life. Today there is much talk about the prophetic community, because the witness of a group is more convincing than that of an individual and because in community we can make our own the gifts of each Brother. But possibly the more important theological reason is that, in community, by the quality and depth of our fraternal affection, we repeat the relationships of knowledge and love that are at the heart of the Trinity. For myself a wonderful model of a prophetic community is that of the Brothers of Turón, united in death as martyrs in the prime of their young lives, and which they had accepted voluntarily in the months prior to their martyrdom, the challenge of being there together despite the imminent danger. Each one of our communities should make their own the sentiments to which Saint Paul invites us: *You are members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone* (Ephesians 2: 20).

In these reflections on the prophetic dimension of the Brother, as in previous Pastoral Letters starting in 2007, the Meditations of the Founder will accompany us, especially two of them, in which he urges us to live our vocation as Brothers with an ardent zeal – that zeal that burned in the heart of the prophets and in Jesus (Meditations 201 and 202). And the two meditations in which we are reminded of the obligation we have to reprimand and to correct, and to update in our own lives the anti-establishment and counter-cultural traits proper to the prophet or the provocative language capable of awakening consciences (Meditations 203 and 204). Throughout this letter there will be several citations from these meditations.

I. THE PROPHETIC VOCATION OF THE BROTHER

*Love kindly,
act justly,
and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).*

As religious we are called to exercise a prophetic ministry, along with the People of God, of whom we are a part. This ministry today takes on new force and urgency because we are living in tough times in the history of the Church and society. As Carmelite Ciro García tells us: *We are living in an epoch that some have compared to exile. Just as Israel found itself deprived of all its security (the temple, the place of God's presence), also in consecrated life, especially in the West, we have lost many points of security and the passage for searching has been opened. Exile is also a spiritual experience: "I went out calling you, and you were gone" (John of the Cross); an*

occasion to take up again the path of consecration and the mission with renewed hope.

As religious we are called to be mystics and prophets. Mystical experience allows us to feel God's indwelling in the deepest part of our being. We can recall how our last General Chapter made a serious call to us to improve our interior life. Prophetic experience, for its part, is a call that comes to us from outside and it demands the realization of a transforming action in history in accordance with God's plan. *Vita Consecrata* presents the prophet Elijah to us, as a prototype of our prophetic dimension, *a courageous prophet and friend of God. He lived in God's presence and contemplated his passing by in silence; he interceded for the people and boldly announced God's will; he defended God's sovereignty and came to the defense of the poor against the powerful of the world* (cf. 1 Kings 18-19) (VC 84). God and the people, or in Lasallian terms, the Trinity and the young who are poor.

The Founder also proposes the prophet Elijah to us as a model to imitate, when he invites us to remove children and the young from anything that could offend God: *That is why, following the example of the prophet Elijah, you must show your zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of your disciples. "I have been roused with a very great zeal for the Lord God of armies," he says, "because the children of Israel have broken the covenant which they had made with God." If you have zeal for the children for whom you have responsibility, and if you have committed yourselves to keep them from sin, which is your duty, you must take on this spirit of the prophet Elijah when they fall into some fault, and driven by this same*

holy ardor that roused this prophet, you must say to your disciples: I am so zealous for the glory of my God that I cannot see you renounce the covenant you made with him in baptism, nor the dignity of children of God which you received in that sacrament (Meditation 202.1).

As Dolores Aleixandre tells us, the process lived by Elijah could be a paradigm for consecrated life. Moving from place to place like he did:

- *From lofty places to lower places:* from addressing the king to going out to the widow's house: from sanctuaries to the vineyard: from the top of the mountain to places of injustice.
- *From sufficiency to receptivity:* Elijah's passing through the desert, his lying down under the shrub and complaining of tiredness – from this we learn to get up and continue on the journey.
- *From imperatives to pleas:* from arrogant attitudes to stages of reciprocity, receiving, learning.
- *From triumph to the experience of limits:* these limits indicate to us that we are in a time of Grace because what is born of poverty is tied to the Gospel.
- *From prominence to the shadows:* when Elijah feels alone, he receives from God the lesson that there are many people that are also faithful to him.

- *From the God of the hurricane to the God of silence: silence has a mystical invocation...religious life, filled with words and documents, needs more silence.*

God and the poor, the mystical and prophetic are a call to go to what is essential. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed it so poetically on the threshold of his martyrdom: *Our Church, which during these years has only fought for its own survival, as if it were an absolute finality, is incapable of becoming now a bearer of the Word that must reconcile and redeem mankind and the world. For this reason, ancient words must fade away and fall silent, and our current existence as Christians will only have two aspects: **praying and doing justice among mankind.** All thought, all words, and all organizations on the side of Christianity, must be reborn starting from this prayer and this Christian updating...* (Resistance and submission. Letters and notes from captivity. Sígueme, 2008, page 168).

As Christian educators, we are also called to be prophets. Today more than yesterday, young people need our word and our witness as *ministers of God and ambassadors of Jesus Christ*. They need this because today they have lost many points of reference and the models offered to young people today tend to be superficial. The Italian newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, published on July 31, 2008, stated that among Italian boys, 34.2% of them see soccer players as their models and 31.2% of Italian girls see movie actresses as theirs. Said Alessandro Cavalli, a professor of sociology at the University of Pavia, as he was analyzing the survey, *Professions linked to popularity continue to exercise strong influence and*

the influence of “reality shows” is still being felt: adult life scenes that young people observe nourish fantasy games that, later on, brutally collide with reality.

1. Prophets of the God revealed by Jesus

Prophets are chosen and called by God. *The prophet is a man of God... Chosen, named and sent by God, he must alone transmit God’s message, giving it his own proper form and style* (Luis Alonso Schoekel).

God is the absolute of our lives. Our vocation as Brothers finds in Him its deepest motivation. We yearn for Him and we seek Him, his saving plan gives meaning to what we do, to seek his glory is the object of our existence. Therefore, as North American Sister Sandra Schneiders says: *The mystical forms an integral part of our witness and of our prophetic vocation. In the same way that the prophetic vocation of Jesus was rooted in his intense, contemplative prayer life and was the expression of it, contemplation makes us capable of seeing the world and the people whom we are called to serve, from God’s point of view.* It is about the optic of faith and the action of ardent zeal, which the Founder invites us to and which constitute our spirit.

Last May the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) held its plenary assembly in Rome with the theme of the prophetic-mystical dimension of consecrated life. One of the presenters was a North American rabbi who stated a truth that we should make our own. *The rabbi should not be seen as only a professional, but above all as an*

authentic person who is concretely concerned about others. As you know, this talent of being present can only come from your spiritual life. A life of dedication to others requires constantly to be nourished by the presence of God. In order to sustain persons both in their pain and in their joy, a rabbi should manifest proper strength, which in reality is not all his but God's, in whom he is rooted by faith (Rabbi Arthur Green).

The spirituality of the Exodus should enlighten us with regard to the image of God that we ought to make present with our lives today. Just as during the Exodus the prophets presented to God what formerly had been linked to the Temple, to the Monarchy, to official worship, in a manner that was closer to the people, more familiar and consoling, as father (Isaiah 63: 16), mother (Isaiah 43:3), husband (Isaiah 54: 4-5), older brother (Isaiah 41: 14), so, too should our language and witness make present to young people and to our contemporaries his compassionate face, full of tenderness: *For thus says he who is high and exalted, living eternally, whose name is the Holy One: On high I dwell, and in holiness, and with the crushed and dejected in spirit, To revive the spirits of the dejected, to revive the hearts of the crushed (Isaiah 57: 15).*

But it is above all God's revelation made through Jesus that should propel and motivate us. God's experience as Father is at the very heart of the Gospel. Jesus identified himself with his will, and this will was none other than the Kingdom of God, in which everyone is able to reach full happiness. It is truly about Good News. Unfortunately, we have not always transmitted this face of God and today there are

still some who think along with L. Feuerbach, that *to enrich God man must become poor; so that God becomes everything, man must be nothing*. This has nothing to do with the God revealed by Jesus who, as Paul consoles us so that *we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God* (2 Corinthians 1: 4). The Japanese writer Shusaku Endo, in his novel *The Silence*, when the protagonist is at the point of apostatizing and is lamenting: *Lord, it pains me that you were here always in the silence*. He hears the mouth of God give the next response: *I was not in the silence. I was suffering with you*.

Jesus understood his mission as a service in which people have priority and he welcomed them with tenderness and respect. Jesus not only spoke about God but he revealed God by communicating his own experience as Son, he was the presence of God in history. As Carmelite Brazilian Carlos Mesters tells us: *The point on which Jesus insisted was principally the rebuilding of community life. The objective of the proclamation of the Kingdom is to reconstruct the fabric of human relationships, rebuild community, the image of the face of God. Everything else, laws, norms, images, catechesis, all of this must make reference to this central value, the expression of the equality of two loves: God and neighbor*.

2. Prophets of fraternity

Precisely because in the Gospel human relationships should reflect the face of God, our fraternity constitutes one of the elements in which our prophetic dimension should appear

more clearly. But also because of the fact that we are going through today in the world a tremendous crisis on the family level, which translates into loneliness and the lack of a group of reference. For that reason the need for feeling welcomed, appreciated, and listened to and the need for authentic models is on the rise everywhere, especially on the part of young people. *Therefore one of the great signs today that consecrated life can offer, as a poor and humble evangelical sign, is simply that of a home: that where consecrated persons are there is a house that is open, welcoming, fraternal, as a sign of communion in the Church* (Ciro García).

The document *Vita Consecrata* presents to us a sign of fraternity as one of the fundamental elements of our life. Fraternity inspired in the relationship of Jesus with his apostles, inspired also in the first Christian community, but above all, a fraternity that we should live in the image of the Trinity. *The Church is essentially a mystery of communion, “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The fraternal life seeks to reflect the depth and richness of this mystery, taking shape as a human community in which the Trinity dwells, in order to extend in history the gifts of communion proper to the three divine Persons* (VC 41).

We can see in that statement great concurrence with the thought of our Founder when, on one hand, he asks to *deepen within yourself the spirit that in community you should live anew the spirit of the first Christians, who were all of one heart and one soul* (Meditation 113.2). On the other hand, he presents the Trinity to us as the model to follow: *Jesus Christ asked of his Eternal Father for his holy apostles...great*

union among themselves. He desires that this union be so close and stable that it resemble the union among the three Divine Persons. It will not be exactly the same, because the three Divine Persons have only one essence, but the union among the apostles would participate in the union of the Trinity in such a way that their union of mind and heart, desired by Jesus Christ for them, would have the same effect as the essential union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They would all have the same convictions, the same will, the same affections, the same maxims and practices (Meditation 39.3).

Our vow of chastity is a prophetic word of fraternity, because starting from a profound love for Christ it opens the heart to the dimensions of the world. No one can remain outside. In a world where borders are created, where immigrants are rejected, a world in which the circle of relationships is more and more limited, where we live in a culture of control, our universal love, open and unconditional, is one of the best ways of making visible the face of God and his universal plan of salvation. Through our chastity we ought to work so that in our human relationships we can go from separation, division, hatred or indifference to union, fraternity, love and interest in others.

Chastity is measured by the ability to give ourselves to others. Otherwise material self-restraint may survive, but the heart would not be truly chaste since it would remain oppressed, mutilated, diminished...Our love for God is called to express itself and to complete itself in love for others. One cannot have a healthy relationship with God without having healthy relationships with others. Therefore chastity should

lead us to the experience of friendship. We ought not to love only with our own capacity to love but with the capacity that the gift of the Spirit creates within us. As John Paul II said, we should love *as Christ himself did, placing in the hearts of humans the human and divine tenderness that He brought*. We could identify our vow of chastity with the call that the prophet Micah makes to us: *love tenderly* (Micah 6: 8).

3. Prophets of the Word

The ministry of the Word is essential in the prophetic vocation and there is always a link between the prophet and the Word of God that he is to transmit: Yahweh touched the mouth of Jeremiah and a lighted coal purified the lips of Isaiah, Ezekiel ate a scroll that contained God's message...The prophet is a man of the Word in which God is revealed to him and he also reveals his saving plan. The prophetic character of religious life requires us to be instruments of God's plan, anticipating with our lives the values of the Kingdom. To do this, we must listen to the Word, pray the Word and seek clarification about the Word with our contemporaries. In that we are mediators between God, whose word we hear and welcome, and our brothers and sisters, who seek to satiate their infinite hunger.

It is about a Word that is also revealed through prophetic gestures which ought to lead to reflection and the conscious effort to initiate a journey of conversion. Today we give much importance to this symbolic dimension, because words are easily devalued and concrete witness is more convincing. *True prophecy is born of God, from friendship with*

him, from attentive listening to his word in the different circumstances of history. Prophets feel in their hearts a burning desire for the holiness of God and, having heard his word in the dialogue of prayer, they proclaim that word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin (VC 84).

Surely we have all experienced the transforming force of the Word in our existential journey and we ought to thank the Founder for the centrality of the Word in our spiritual and apostolic life. A Word that invites us to incarnate it in our existence, being coherent with what we teach. Therefore the Word invites us to follow the example of Jesus whose word was backed up by his actions. *Your zeal for the children who are under your guidance would be very imperfect if you exercised it only by instructing them; it will only become perfect if you practice yourselves what you are teaching them. Example makes a much greater impression on the mind and heart than words, especially for children, since they do not yet have minds sufficiently able to reflect, and they ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers. They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than what they hear told to them, above all when the teachers' words are not in harmony with their actions (Meditation 202.3).*

But this is about a Word that we should make our own, in a personal and unique way. It is a transmitted word that takes on a personal appropriation. It is the material that each one needs to give form to. Here it is not worth copying models and neither should we impose our own model. Jeremiah presents the Lord to us as the one who molds us.

In this sense the narrative of Eduardo Galeano may be enlightening for us when he speaks about the style of the Indians of Northwest America: *On the shores of another sea, another potter is retiring in his later years. His eyes are clouded, his hands tremble, it's time to say goodbye. Then the initiation ceremony occurs: the old potter offers to the young potter his best piece of work. So tradition has it among the Indians of Northwest America: the artist who is going away gives his masterpiece to the artist who is just beginning his work. And the young potter does not keep that perfect vessel to contemplate and admire, but he smashes it on the ground, and it breaks into a thousand little pieces. He picks up the pieces and incorporates them into his own clay.*

4. Prophets of the poor

As the Brazilian theologian María Clara Lucchetti Bingermer tells us: *Every time there is an infringement against justice, Love suffers. Faced with the suffering of the innocent, God who is love, cannot but dive in and be at the side of the weakest, the oppressed, suffering with them. Only in that way can it be stated that love is the ultimate sense of history, stronger than death. Only in that way can it be stated that God is love.* This God who identifies with the suffering of the innocent, with the poverty of the dispossessed, with the hopelessness of those who find no meaning in their lives, it is that God that we must make present with our lives, as the prophets did and above all as Jesus did. But to do this we must see reality with God's eyes, and for this we need to encounter Him, because as Thomas Merton tells us: *in contemplative prayer, we pass from the center of our*

own being to the very being of God where we see ourselves and our world with clearness, simplicity, and truth that is not accessible in any other way.

We have the privilege of having come into existence for the poor who, like Saint Lawrence, the Founder considered as the greatest treasure of the Church: *Let us admire how great the faith of this saint was, since it led him to look upon the poor as the treasures of the Church, that is, as being the most precious and valuable part in the Church, having the closest relationship with Jesus Christ. Let us share this saint's attitude, we to whom God has entrusted the most valuable portion of his treasures* (Meditation 154.1).

Therefore the reality of our current society cannot leave us indifferent when we know, for example, that every three seconds a child dies somewhere in the world. This is a hard and cold fact, but it is also real. This means that this year, according to the NGO “*Save the Children*,” 9.5 million children will die. We cannot be unaware that today children belong to what is being called *the lost generation*, made up of young people who are out of work – the number in 2009 increased to 13%, representing 81 million young people, many of whom will never have a work experience in their lives (OIT report, August 12, 2010). We cannot remain indifferent when we see that migration laws are getting tougher and many times even the most fundamental human rights are not recognized. We cannot keep quiet when we know that hunger is on the increase in the world and that wars and terrorism continue to claim victims and that the number of excluded is on the rise. Neither can we

set aside the fact that many young people do not find meaning in their lives and live in solitude.

In his message for January 1st of this year, Pope Benedict XVI, in looking at the situation that many children experience today, especially in places of conflict, invited us to not extinguish their smiles nor to poison their hearts but to allow ourselves to be questioned by their faces: *Faces hollowed by hunger and disease, faces disfigured by suffering and desperation and the faces of little innocents are a silent appeal to our responsibility: before their helpless plight, all the false justifications of war and violence fall away. We must simply convert to projects of peace, lay down every kind of weapon and strive all together to build a world that is worthier of the human being.*

Our duty is to listen to our prophetic voice and to be present in the very crevices of our society. Our Christianity cannot take refuge in the heart or, as the French thinker said some years ago, *Christianity is not a religion of escape or of withdrawal from the world, but on the contrary it is one of presence in the world. Precisely because God "so loved the world," this story began* (Le Figaro, August 22, 2003), or in the words of the Bishop martyr of Algiers, Bishop Pierre Claverie: *In the current ups and downs of modern times, something is being expressed that is contrary to the Gospel message. Christianity always recovers its strength and truth when it ceases to be too caught up with the "temporal" and it returns to serve the poor and humankind in tireless "subversion."* (La Croix, Friday, January 26, 2001).

We must be realists, but the little we have we should place in service of others. We cannot change the world overnight. But with our words and gestures we can always be welcoming and loving – as Jesus was when he embraced street children, touched lepers welcomed sinners with kindness, blessed the small, the infirm and the needy.

Our vows of association for the service of the poor and of poverty are a prophetic word in favor of the small and the excluded. Our vow of poverty has to do with the coming of the Kingdom. Service of the poor does not come from a kind of generosity added to the object of the vow of poverty, it is an integral part of it. To live in poverty means, in a positive way, to feel grasped and possessed by the God's will and to spend oneself totally so that "*the Kingdom come,*" especially about those who hope for it the most and who are its principal targets: the abandoned and the marginalized. We could also identify our vow of poverty with the call made to us by the prophet Micah: *act justly* (Micah 6: 8).

This idea is reinforced by what is today our first vow: *Association for the educational service of the poor*. We have associated ourselves in favor of them. As Brother Michel Sauvage said: *The Lord led De La Salle from commitment to commitment and he led his disciples to take on fully the mission of the Son of Man, participating in his incarnation among the poor, in obedience and in abandonment to the Father, for the service of the young who are poor and abandoned*. To be prophets of the poor means to make history with them, to free them from their dehumanizing situation, to give them hope and freedom, to announce to them the sav-

ing message of Jesus, from within, aware that *what is not taken on is not saved*.

5. Prophets of humanity

We start from the fact that we are part of the Church which presents herself as an *expert in humanity* (Paul VI). Therefore, humanism, which should characterize the Church in her members and institutions, is not something that we can take or leave, give importance to or not, but it is a fundamental dimension and an integral part of our prophetic identity, since we are called to be the memory of the historic presence of Jesus, who took on human nature with all its consequences except sin. *For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart* (Gaudium et Spes 22). In the Gospel we can easily discover his humanity reflected in his kindness, sensitivity, compassion, mercy... Humanity that humbled itself, in order to understand better how to relate (cf. Philippians 2: 3-11).

Therefore the first thing is to feel that we are part of our nation and people, with whom we share pain and happiness, doubt and searching. Philippine Sister Judette Gallares, inspired by Sandra Schneiders, tells us that the prophet is part of the people to whom he is sent; he is educated from his very birth in their religious and social wisdom; he is a product of their history, he participates in their prayer forms; he is an heir to their dreams, he is a victim and at times he participates in their sins and errors. The prophet is one with

his people, and for that reason he can speak to God in their name and speak to the people in God's name.

The crisis we are going through today can be described as a crisis of humanity, because it impoverishes the reality of the human being when it reduces human dimensions to just one: *self-fulfillment* consolidated in the ego and in competition, leaving aside *relationships* based on the "we" and solidarity. Like prophets, who deeply love their people and their world, one of our principal missions is to work so that these two fundamental dimensions of the human being can live with one another in a balanced way. As Brazilian economist Celso Furtado tells us: *The challenge that has been raised on the threshold of the 21st century is nothing less than to change the course of civilization, to shift the axis of logic as means in service of accumulation, in a short period of time, towards a logic regarding purposes in function of social well-being, the exercise of freedom and cooperation between nations.*

In the fast-paced society we live in today, many of our contemporaries personally experience the phenomenon of loneliness. Our mission, no matter where we are, is not really our mission but God's mission in which we are instruments. This mission consists, certainly, in bringing the Gospel everywhere, as Matthew tells us, but also in making each person feel loved, respected and appreciated, as Saint John tells us. Saint Paul summed it up very well when he said to the Thessalonians: *With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us* (1 Thessalonians 2: 8).

Such is the zeal that should animate us as well, as our Founder asks of us: *You must in this imitate God to some extent, for he so loved the souls he created that when he saw them involved in sin and unable to be freed from sin by themselves, the zeal and affection that he had for their salvation led him to send his own Son to rescue them from their miserable condition. This is what made Jesus Christ say that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life... The kind of ardent zeal you have for the salvation of those you have to instruct, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education and to procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next* (Meditation 201.3).

In the novel *Marianela* by the famous Spanish novelist Benito Pérez Galdós, the protagonist asks the blind person whom she is guiding if he knows how to distinguish between day and night and he answers her: *It is daytime when we you and I are together; it is nighttime when we are apart.* The blind boy, certainly not because of his eyes but because of his inner ability, was capable of sensing the hidden treasure in the battered body of Marianela. We are called to something similar, to be able to see light where others see darkness, to discover treasure behind poor, human appearances. In a word we are called to not close ourselves in on the superficiality of persons, but to be capable of seeing what is valuable so that our eyes lock onto the inner self illuminated by the fire of love. For that reason, as Carmelite Ciro García says: *To become more human as we confront the different types of slavery of our world that demonize the idols*

of our culture is another of the prophetic tasks of consecrated life today. Some of these are easy to recognize: short-term compensation, immediate pleasure, irresponsible and excessive consumerism, individualism, fragmented personal identity, etc. Others appear to be hidden under a “cloak” of goodness: the “I” as the defining center of the ultimate purpose under the ideal of self-fulfillment.

But it is important that we look at our inner self and that we evaluate the human quality of our personal and community relationships and – why not? – of our mission. We cannot give what we do not have. Our consecrated life should be humanizing from the inside. We can ask ourselves along with Father García: *How do we define the quality of our institutions or the success of our apostolic enterprises? If we adopt the culture of marketing and management, we will end up by falling into the nets of their values and idols: efficiency, return, realized objectives, market share. All of that structure knows nothing about the wisdom of the Beatitudes. It functions according to efficiency and not according to fruitfulness.*

Sorrowful humanity should have a special place for us and we must approach it with tenderness and compassion. As Benedict XVI clearly affirms: *Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church’s charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves*

to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a "formation of the heart": they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbor will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6) (Deus Caritas Est, 31).

Along these same lines Italian writer Susana Tamaro, while commenting on the new Vatican Dicastery on Evangelization, said nothing is more important than that men and women of the Church be close to the people, with a humble attitude, eliminating moralism and prejudice, thirst for power and an air of superiority and she added: *What is needed are spiritual fathers and mothers, credible people who have made a journey, who know the complexities and contradictions of life and who, humbly and patiently, know how to accompany persons along their journey, without judging or looking for results. There is nothing new in the spiritual father or mother, but there is something extraordinarily ancient: the thirst of one soul who encounters another soul and offers to help look for water (Corriere della Sera, August 2, 2010).*

As Christians we should be iconoclasts of idols, also of those idols that justify our remoteness from people. I think that association with lay persons opens immense perspectives to us. Together and by association we should be passionate seekers of the Kingdom of God and of the God of

the Kingdom who is the God and Father of Jesus, who wants to make a history of salvation of the history of humankind. Conversion to the God of Jesus happens by being converted to a man who is truly human and who makes present “God’s dream” about history, which the Gospel calls the Kingdom.

6. Prophets of the Kingdom

One of the principal characteristics of the prophetic mission was to respond faithfully to God’s plan, making it present and giving it new energy. This is also our mission which we express especially by our vow of obedience. Like Jesus, our obedience has two poles of attraction – the Father and the Kingdom. To do the Father’s will is to commit ourselves actively to building his Kingdom. God’s plan is a plan of integral freedom for humankind; it is a plan of total love for neighbor, beginning with the marginalized and the helpless and extending to all humankind.

God offers life in abundance to all his children and he makes them brothers and sisters. For Jesus to obey God is to love him by loving all people even giving his life for them. For Jesus love of God and love of neighbor are one thing. There is no obedience of authentic faith except in function of God’s Kingdom. The logic of the Kingdom is not that of the world, since it generates a style of authority that is based on mutual service, leaving aside any trace of domination and it places us in a condition of absolute and unconditional availability to be sent, as were the prophets, to where the needs of the Kingdom are most urgent. Here

also with Micah we can identify our vow of obedience with his call to: *Walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6: 8).

As religious, we are called to make God's plan and that of his Kingdom, the central objective of our mission. This we can do in three different ways, all of them complementary and mutually supportive.

- **To proclaim:** Not just with words but above all with life, God's unconditional life and his universal plan of salvation for humankind. The Good News that God is Father-Mother and that we are all brothers and sisters. To proclaim that Jesus Christ is the human face of God and the divine face of humans and that he came into the world so that all may have life in abundance. That he is the light and that if we are united to him we will not live in darkness. That the best test of the authenticity of this proclamation is that the poor are evangelized, the sick are cured and demons are expelled, as we can see on each page of the Gospel; that on the last day we will be judged by and on love (Matthew 25: 31 – 46).
- **To denounce:** Everything that is opposed to the divine plan. Like the prophets, to denounce unjust relationships with the poor and false relationships with God in worship that is empty. This denouncement does not have punishment as its purpose but conversion. A denouncement can be a reply. *No, it is not wrong to reply to the Church when you love her; it is wrong to answer her when you feel far from her, alone. No, it is not wrong to respond to sin and deviant things that we see; it is wrong to attribute these to others and to believe that you yourself are innocent, poor, meek...* (Carlos Carreto). The ab-

sence of a response is not necessarily a virtue; rather, it could reflect a loss of vitality and a comfortable kind of conforming. *Where there is creative response, there is life and openness to the new kinds of prophecy* (José Cristo Rey García Paredes).

I believe that we need to place here the two Meditations for the Time of Retreat that the Founder left us on correction (203, 204). In one of them the Founder takes the example of the prophet Nathan in his denouncement of David, as a model of what correction should be like. *The result which the wise reproof of Nathan produced in David ought to make you realize how much good the corrections you give your disciples will profit them, when they are given with gentleness and charity... Take care, above all, that it be charity and zeal for the salvation of the souls of your pupils that lead you to correct them. Show them so much kindness when you give corrections that, though you may cause them some pain, they not only will not be angry at you but will show you gratitude for the good you have done for them, a great regret for their faults, and a firm intention not to commit them again* (Meditation 204.3).

As we can see the Founder insists on the benevolent manner in which we should make these corrections, but at the same time, it is very clear as to the purpose of these corrections, which is none other than to help young people to live with the freedom of God's children, liberated from any kind of slavery. *It is for you who are teachers of those you guide to take all possible care to bring those under your guidance into that liberty of the children of God which Jesus Christ obtained for you by dying for us. To do this you need to have two qualities in your relationship with them. The first is gentleness and*

patience. The second is prudence in your reproofs and corrections (Meditation 203.2).

- **To discern:** The principal characteristic of Lasallian discernment, in contrast to Ignatian discernment which is centered on the person in his deep, inner self, is that here the center is reality, known not just in appearances but in the deepest part of that reality, with the eyes of faith, with the eyes of God. *Do you make use of this light to judge all visible things, and to learn what is true and false about them, what is only apparent and what is substantial? If you act as a disciple of Jesus Christ enlightened by God's spirit, this is the only light that should guide you* (Meditation 44.1). In an interesting study, Brother Miguel Campos presented to the International Assembly on Lasallian Association and Mission in 2006 the steps for Lasallian discernment, based on the process lived by John Baptist de La Salle:
 - That it start from **individual discernment**, whose purpose is to seek “God’s glory” and “the good of the Church” and whose criteria are clearly historical, centered in the God of the poor, attentive to the poor and their teachers, to build up the Church. Here the subject is “I.”
 - That the second movement be **community discernment** from a community associated for and united in a mission. The center and the origin where common history is rooted is the glory of the triune God. If associates and the poor are the relational context of discernment, God present in history is its reason for being. It is God who calls them, gathers them and consecrates them. The obligations of the vows are understood not in function of a privatizing per-

sonal plan of perfection, but in function of the mission. Here the subject is “I-you,” or the Founder and the first Brothers.

- That the culminating point of the awareness of the association of the Brothers, is through **corporative discernment**, which is expressed in the letter that was sent to the Founder at Easter in 1714, that he return to take charge of the Institute. Here the subject is the “we” of the Brothers who felt themselves to be fully associated among themselves.

Through these three movements that should characterize prophetic discernment, we ought to live our mission; as Brother Miguel said it so well, this discernment *invites us to read a larger reality than those of interior consolations and desolations. It exhorts us to consider, to look at social and political reality, to keep in mind educational problems and successes, especially those that have to do with the reality of children and abandoned youth, the children of artisans and the poor, to take seriously the events we experience in history. It is in the light of faith that this critical reflection is open to reading the “signs of the times,” inviting a personal and a community response.*

- **To intercede:** A prophet is always known for his great power of intercession. We can recall the example of Elijah, but possibly the most moving example is that of Jeremiah, when in spite of feeling persecuted and rejected by the people, he intercedes in their favor: *Even though our crimes bear witness against us, take action, O LORD, for the honor of your name. Even though our rebellions are many, though we have sinned against you. O Hope of Israel, O LORD, our savior in time of need! Why should you be a stranger in this land, like a traveler who*

has stopped but for a night? Why are you like a man dumbfounded, a champion who cannot save? You are in our midst, O LORD, your name we bear: do not forsake us! (Jeremiah 14: 7-9). As we can see, the prophet identifies with the people, he feels that he has participated in their sin, he is not an observer who condemns from the outside, he is another petitioner, aware of his own weakness. The experience of Isaiah is very similar: *“Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”* (Isaiah 6: 5).

The Founder, in Mediations 201 and 202, in which he invites us to exercise our mission animated by a burning zeal, talks to us in the same tone. It is the zeal for the Lord and for children and young people that should inspire our educational service and help us to become intercessors before God for our students: *The zeal that ought to inspire you is meant to give you these dispositions, recognizing that it is God who has called you, who has destined you for this work, and who has sent you to work in his vineyard. Do this, then, with all the affection of your heart, working entirely for him* (Meditation 201.1).

7. Prophets of gratuity

The prophetic vocation always starts from a gratuitous call, sometimes unexpected and sometimes when the prophet is undergoing a series of crises as burdens. The vocation of Amos is expressed clearly: *I was no prophet, nor have I belonged to a company of prophets; I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. The LORD took me from following the flock,*

and said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel." (Amos 7: 14-15). Even more dramatic was the experience of Jeremiah who, in a moment of desperation, exclaimed: You duped me, O LORD, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed. All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message; The word of the LORD has brought me derision and reproach all the day. I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it (Jeremiah 20: 7-9).

At the beginning of our Institute, gratuity was part of our name: *Brothers of the Christian and Gratuitous Schools*. A gratuity that certainly had financial connotations, but which also contained a spiritual angle that we should not lose in our lives. We have strengthened this gratuity throughout the history of the Institute with our vow of stability, one of the first three vows pronounced by the first Brothers and which today continues to be our fifth vow. We commit ourselves to remain in the Institute not for financial advantage nor for intellectual opportunity or other opportunities, not even for the spiritual advantage the Institute may give us. We commit ourselves to remain in the Institute because, gratuitously called by God, we want to seek his glory in the educational and evangelizing service he has entrusted to us. Service that we must live with absolute gratuity as guarantors of a received gift. *Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give (Matthew 10: 8).*

This is also the invitation of our Founder, in one of the Meditations he proposes to us, with regard to the zeal that should animate our mission for the souls of the children and young people we teach: *What must you not do for them if in your ministry if you have a zeal for their salvation! How much you must be disposed toward them as Saint Paul was toward those to whom he preached the Gospel, to whom he wrote that he was not seeking anything they had, but that he was seeking only their souls. The zeal you are obliged to have in your work must be so active and so alive that you are able to tell the parents of the children entrusted to your care what is said in Scripture: Give us their souls, keep everything else for yourselves, that is, what we have undertaken is to work for the salvation of their souls. It is also the only reason you have committed yourselves to take responsibility to guide and instruct them* (Meditation 201.3).

This is about a gratuity that expresses itself in closeness, interest and affection and that puts us on our guard so that the criteria of our mission are not dominated by the commercial or business order. As Pope Benedict XVI tells us: *We need to return to give splendor to the logic of gratuity and commitment, to rediscover the value of humble resources and small signs: The “earthly city” is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion* (Caritas in Veritatae, 6).

To live gratuity today is not to look at anyone from above, pretending that our vocation is superior to others. To live gratuity is not to imitate the sons of Zebedee in their search

of the first places in the Kingdom; to live gratuity today is to be aware that we are *unprofitable servants* (Luke 17: 10) as the Gospel says. To live gratuity today is to opt for “short distance” evangelization in which we can look in our own eyes. *Where there is a climate of lived gratuity* – José Cristo Rey Garía Paredes tells us – *it is there where a space and a climate of hospitality, trust, and liberty exist, in which even non-Christians can feel that they are not outsiders, but that they feel welcomed...Prophecy will have more possibility to be heard if you know how to be a splendid witness of gratuity, if you know how to teach the offered gift, without seeking recompense or profit.*

8. Prophets who experience weakness

Prophets were always aware of their own frailness – from the *I am too young* (Jeremiah 1: 6) of Jeremiah to the *I am a man of unclean lips* (Isaiah 6: 5) of Isaiah. But not only at the moment of the call at which time they sense the existent abyss between what they are and what they are being called to, but also throughout their existence marked not a few times by doubt, crisis and rejection. Thus we can understand that Elijah at a difficult moment says to the Lord: *This is enough!* (1 Kings 19: 4), or that Jeremiah proposes to *himself* not to speak any more in his name (Jeremiah 20: 9), or that Isaiah recognizes that he has uselessly spent his strength (Isaiah 49: 4). Like Abraham, they decided to journey in the darkness of faith, in the midst of the awareness of their limitations on the one hand, and in the thick of persecution on the other. As Rabbi and doctor Abraham J. Heschel, recognized as the first specialist in the philologi-

cal, historical and theological study of the Hebrew prophets, tells us: *No prophet seems satisfied in being one, nor proud of their ability... To be a prophet is as much a distinction rather as an affliction. The mission that they carry out is unpleasant for them and repugnant for others; no recompense is promised to them... The prophet endures disdain and reproach. He is stigmatized as a crazy person by his contemporaries, and by some modern researchers, as abnormal.*

But for all of them, one final experience is demanded. In spite of everything, they can always count on the strength and the closeness of God. Therefore, *Have no fear, because I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD* (Jeremiah 1: 8), is repeated in their lives as a kind of refrain.

We, too, are called to live the prophetic journey, starting from our own weakness, aware of our inconsistencies, sins and limitations, but confident because all is grace and mercy. Confident because the initiative is God's who makes use of fragile instruments to do his work and because he is always at our side, recognizing humbly with Saint Paul that *we hold this treasure in earthen vessels* (2 Corinthians 4: 7).

II. A prophetic community

In the Old Testament there were already signs of a more universal kind of prophecy that was not reserved for just a few. This was the case for the famous prophet Joel, whom we remember each year in the liturgy for Pentecost: *Then afterward I will pour out my spirit upon all humankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream*

dreams, your young men shall see visions (Joel 3: 1). And it was precisely starting from Pentecost that the prophetic character of the first Christian community began to appear clearly. As we know the principal character in the Acts of the Apostles is the Holy Spirit and it is the entire community that is guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul, for his part, invited communities evangelized by him to not extinguish the force of the Spirit nor to underestimate the prophetic gifts (1 Thessalonians 5: 19-20). But on the other hand, it continues to be very clear that in these first communities the point of reference is the person of Jesus.

Today, without a doubt, each community of Brothers is called to be a prophetic sign of the Kingdom and the primacy of God. It is an idea that the Founder repeats in several of his meditations. The first evangelization is that which we share mutually in community. *Because we ought not to be here except to bring one another to God, we must especially strive to be united in God, to have but one and the same heart, and to have one and the same mind. What ought to inspire us most to achieve this, as Saint John says, is that those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them* (Meditation 113.2).

We ought to live Gospel values communally before bringing them to others, because these values are born of lived experience that is shared existentially and they are not the result of intellectual and abstract learning. *It is mainly in communities that good example is most notable and has the most power and efficacy. All those who live there together en-*

courage one another to practice what is most holy and most perfect in the Gospel maxims (Meditation 180.1).

1. Prophecy in our community

The religious community is called to be, as Metz says, *an alternative model of society, a shock therapy of the Spirit for the Church which is always threatened by adaptation and an institutionalized form of dangerous memories for the world.*

One of the consequences of the crisis we are going through is the loss of models of reference. Today young people seek them, need them and rarely do they find them. The phenomenon of youth gangs or “crowds” that are so prevalent in certain countries is a negative manifestation of this need. Our community should be a model of reference for young people that will mobilize them in a different direction on the basis of love, respect and warmth.

Almost all of the idols of the present time have to do with the world of sport, fashion and show business/entertainment and we need to challenge these, whenever possible, with our witness and our word, the Lord Jesus, in order to follow him on the journey of gratuitous disinterested dedication in favor of the needy. In the case of teaching young people of other religions and creeds, to develop in them a deep recognition that I have seen being done almost everywhere, with the values of faith, fraternity-community and service that characterize our spirituality and teaching.

It is about a prophetic community that makes visible God's saving plan, such as our Founder sensed and which gave life to our congregation and the Lasallian mission. A humanizing plan that goes beyond the primacy of having, individualism, reductive rationalism, consumerism and the increased use of technology in intelligence.

Our communities should be an arsenal of dangerous memories that involve the Gospel. This was an invitation made to us by the Founder when he proposed that we let ourselves be led by the Spirit to be able to accept certain Gospel criteria that are *above the level of the human spirit*. *How, indeed, can we ever realize that blessed are the poor, that we must love those who hate us and rejoice when we are calumniated and when people say all sorts of evil against us, that we must return good for evil, and so many other truths entirely contrary to what nature suggests, unless the Spirit of God teaches them to us?* (Meditation 44.2)

It seems to me that today these dangerous memories, dangerous because they destabilize anti-values that we have managed to make our own, we ought to live them communally especially in four areas:

- **Gratuity:** lived out in community relationships of freedom, welcoming, pardon and celebration and in an attitude toward young people marked by generosity and the gift of our life, without giving any type of invoice.
- **Participation:** searching together for what God wants us to do, avoiding all despotic power and offering participation to partners and to all those who share our mission with us and to the young people we teach.

- **Solidarity:** with all suffering humankind, with any type of poverty, making our own the compassion that Jesus always showed for the weakest and the smallest.
- **Hope:** as a way of living and acting in daily life, where enchantment and the reason for being are always found and as a way of facing the future and our place in it, opening ourselves to loving and fraternal relationships, convinced that the final future is that *God be all in all* (1 Corinthians 15: 28).

Our elderly Brothers can offer a great contribution to the prophetic dimension of our communities. Their witness today is more needed than ever, in a world that tends to relativize essential values, such as that of fidelity. They should feel that these beautiful words of the prophet Zephaniah are addressed to them: *Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; He will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love, He will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals.*

Carmelite Bruno Secondin invites the elderly to scatter *sweet and gentle sparks of wisdom, transparent faith that recognizes that only God is the value and the essence of life; humble witness of works and days that have only taken shape for God, and are deposited in God's lap. Thanksgiving for having been made worthy to love and serve him along with so many generous persons brimming over with charity.*

In a prophetic message it is important to transmit to others that life does have meaning, that in the end only God is enough, that the myth of eternal youth is fleeting, that the

most important thing when all is said and done is what has been planted. It is not only about the end of a period, but about the opportunity to be born again and thus to be witnesses of a kind of wearing down, which Saint Paul expresses with these words: *Although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day* (2 Corinthians 4: 16) and to thereby realize the dream of Tagore: May the little that remains in me, Lord, be able to call you my All.

2. Shared prophecy

When we speak of the prophetic dimension of our consecrated life, we should not forget that prophecy does not belong exclusively to us but that it is the patrimony of the entire People of God as clearly stated by the Second Vatican Council. Therefore we can talk here also about a shared prophecy with partners and other Lasallians in our association for the educational service of the poor. *Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the Kingdom of His Father both by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfills His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and to whom He gave understanding of the faith and an attractiveness in speech (cf. Acts 2: 17-18; Revelation 19: 10) so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life (Lumen Gentium, 35).*

There is a prophetic figure who can illustrate very well what we are going through today on the level of association in

sharing the mission. Moses had grown old, difficulties had multiplied, complaints were on the increase and Moses was not ashamed to tell this to the Lord. *I cannot carry all this (sic) people by myself, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you will deal with me, then please do me the favor of killing me at once, so that I need no longer face this distress.*

In this situation, the providential solution was to distribute the tasks to assure the future of the mission. So the collaborators of Moses, the elders, must help him to carry some of the burden that had been entrusted to him, and to be participants in the spirit that animated him in his responsibility. The narrative is marvelous due to the fact that it breaks down barriers and it invites us to be open to God's initiatives that will exceed our own thoughts and plans. Possibly the most surprising thing is that two of the elders who were summoned were still in the camp yet they also received the spirit: *the spirit came to rest on them also, and they prophesied in the camp* (Numbers 11: 26). Here there is an anticipation of what the Gospel will say to us about the Spirit: *The wind blows where it wills, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes* (John 3: 8). The Spirit is freedom and it goes beyond prescribed rules, we cannot imprison it... And the same goes for today, when many times it is hard for us to see the action of the Spirit outside of our small personal or congregational world. This is what happened when Joshua, filled with jealousy for the authority of Moses, asks him: *Moses, my lord, stop them.* (Numbers 11: 28). Nevertheless, Moses approves God's action: *Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets! Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!* (Numbers 11: 29).

Father Bruno Secondin tells us that this text teaches us that the authentic “center” is the one who recognizes God’s action in peripheral entities and persons and that, therefore, he accepts the originality and the freedom of the Spirit that can cause charisms to emerge in whatever place and situation in order to enrich and guide people. This beautiful and sometimes disconcerting reality is the one we are living today, as associate María Cruz Miquel says to us Brothers, in an interview that was published this year in the Spanish magazine *Vida Religiosa*: *This is the time to join forces and not to face the future alone. Let not fear paralyze you into disappearing because there may be few vocations; open yourselves in confidence to the vocations of lay people who are committed to God by your charism; do not drown yourselves in your individuality nor isolate yourselves when you see that the journey is difficult and will include changes; may your personal plans never be above community plans; trust that the Spirit will burst in and offer us a new journey on which to proclaim Jesus. We need to not let ourselves be led by spiritual routine that is always mediocre. It is time to distribute tasks. Religious life today, more than ever, has the role of being the soul of the charism in the mission. It is not so much about maintaining works.*

3. Prophets of nations

I was very impressed by one of the paragraphs from the Pope’s homily for the World Peace Day this year. He speaks to us, using the icon of children, concerning how to teach about respect for differences. I believe that this homily is of great richness and fine Gospel intuition. *It is important to*

be taught respect for others, even when they are different from us, from an early age. Increasingly today classes in schools consist of children of various nationalities but even when this is not the case their faces are a prophecy of the humanity we are called to form: a family of families and peoples. The smaller these children are, the more they awaken in us tenderness and joy at an innocence and brotherhood that seem obvious to us despite their differences, they cry and laugh in the same way, they have the same needs, they communicate spontaneously, they play together... Children's faces are like a reflection of God's gaze on the world (Benedict XVI, Homily for January 1, 2010).

The faces of the children we teach are *a prophecy of the humanity we are called to form: a family of families and peoples*. I believe that these words describe very well what we Brothers and the Lasallian Family are doing on the world stage. Our limited presence everywhere gives us the opportunity to address ourselves to children and young people of distinct cultures and religions and to work elbow to elbow with persons of different cultures and religions. I believe that this is one of the most beautiful experiences of universal prophecy that we are called to live today. It is not only about a mission *ad gentes*, but above all a mission *inter gentes*, in which the most important thing is open dialogue, full of trust and calm, mutual respect and the determination to work together for a more fraternal and just world. Accepting the plurality of religions and cultures and being tolerant is not enough. There is still something more important, as Cardinal Martini tells us in presenting the challenge that he considers to be most urgent for our civi-

lization: to learn to live together with our differences, sharing the same geographic and social territory, learning to live together without mutually destroying ourselves, without ghettoizing ourselves, without looking down upon each other or seeing ourselves as enemies, or not even tolerating one another. We have to do more: to revitalize and to shake ourselves up, so that each one may be aided in responding, before God, to one's own call, whether a Muslim, Hindu, Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. To respond before God to one's own call. This is very difficult, it is perhaps the principal problem of society today and tomorrow.

And how can we not live the above if we see that prophecy goes beyond the borders of the Church and that the Spirit was and is made present through persons of diverse cultures and religions! Prophets like Gandhi, Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Mandela, Brother Roger of Taizé who along with John XXIII, Archbishop Romero or Mother Teresa and so many others in our Church who inspire our lives and allow us, as Father Adolfo Nicolás, the Jesuit Superior General, **to see** the world with the eyes of God, filled with compassion and tenderness; **to listen** with the ears of God to the voices, cries, and distressed clamor of people; **to feel** with the heart and mercy of God; and only then, **to speak** the Word of God, words of conversion and solidarity capable of transforming society.

III. Lasallian prophetic icons:

We have all known, no doubt, Brothers who have been true prophets in our lives, by the importance of their words,

their witness, their Gospel radicalness, the authenticity of their lives, their dedication to the poor... Each one could draw up a list here of their own Lasallian prophetic icons. Allow me to name some of those Brothers who for me have been true prophetic icons, by presenting first the fundamental role of the Founder and the first Brothers, and then two Institute realities that have touched me very closely this year and which also have, it seems to me, a very special prophetic dimension.

1. The Founder and the first Brothers

As Carmelite Ciro García says: All of our founders and foundresses were mystics and prophets. We are called to recreate their mystical-prophetic charism in the Church. Without mystics and prophets consecrated life has no future. Mysticism and prophecy are two essential aspects of all religious identity, of Christian life and of consecrated life, and they are closely related. The first aspect is aimed more directly at union with God; the second is concerned with the fulfillment of his will here and now. Only a wise union between one and the other can forge an authentic religious identity of God and the human person. There is no authentic mysticism if it does not culminate in an ethical and prophetic commitment; nor should you think of prophecy that is not fueled by a deep connection with the divine.

Our Institute came into being because of a mystical intuition: *This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.* (1 Timothy 2: 3-4). This intuition gave rise to a Gospel re-

sponse within a historical situation in which the children of artisans and the poor were abandoned to chance and with no possibility of human and Christian education for their lives. We could say that we are the result of the working out of the divine plan of salvation for the reality of abandonment of poor children. The Word of God and historical reality are the two coordinates that brought our Religious Family into being. An intuition that was transformed into a passion for the glory of God and for the poor.

There is no doubt that this represents a prophetic response of our vocation and our mission. It seems to me that the Rule says it very well in the following text: *John Baptist de La Salle was led to found a community of men who were enlightened by God to have a share in his plan of salvation. They associated together to respond to the needs of young people who were poor and far from salvation. Even today, each of the Brothers' communities finds in this historical event a fundamental source of inspiration* (Rule, 47).

Therefore, we can talk of a mystical and prophetic realism that drove the Founder and the first Brothers to consider everything with a view of faith and with impassioned love for God and for the poor. De La Salle favored that mystical and prophetic stance, with a view to developing it in Novices and Brothers, as well as attention, recognition and celebration throughout life, of the presence of God, and to think of nothing except the Kingdom, and of what God wills; to think of the presence of God which opens them to the presence of his face reflected underneath the rags of the poor children they were teaching. In their lives there

was no contradiction between a mystical view and the prophetic action; rather, they felt called to live an active faith in the practice of impassioned love. For them the center was God the Trinity who was acting and who included them in his actions as collaborators and ministers, as disciples, ambassadors and angels; as apostles and messengers of the Kingdom in the Church and as prophets, managers and servants.

This marvelous icon ought to inspire each of the Brothers today and each one of our communities. Like the Founder and the first Brothers we feel deeply associated with the God of Life, the God of the Kingdom, the God of History, the God of the poor. In this way the Founder becomes for us, as he was for the Brothers of our origin, in the words of Brother Michel Sauvage, *a witness who calls, the prophet who challenges and inspires, the Brother who invites us to walk and to accompany, in the measure in which his work is dealt with – written work, but also community or school structures established by him – not as something that is completely finished but like milestones on a journey.* A journey that today is up to us to continue.

2. PARC

I am convinced that each one of the Regions of the Institute has a particular gift to offer to the other Regions. In my pastoral letters beginning in 2007 I have listed as one of our icons, each one of the Regions I visited. This year I visited PARC, a Region that covers the immense Asian continent and the countries of the Pacific Ocean. It seems

to me that this Region also has a prophetic voice that the entire Institute and the Lasallian Family ought to listen to with attention. And it seems to me that the Synod on the Church in Asia highlights for us very clearly the three gifts that this Region can give us. *The search for God, a life of fraternal communion, and service to others are the three chief characteristics of the consecrated life which can offer an appealing Christian testimony to the peoples of Asia today* (Ecclesia in Asia 44).

And the Synod goes on to say: *The Special Assembly for Asia urged those in the consecrated life to be witnesses to the universal call to holiness and inspiring examples to Christians and non-Christians alike of self-giving love for everyone, especially the least of their brothers and sisters. In a world in which the sense of God's presence is often diminished, consecrated persons need to bear convincing prophetic witness to the primacy of God and to eternal life. Living in community, they attest to the values of Christian fraternity and to the transforming power of the Good News* (Ecclesia in Asia 44). In Lasallian vocabulary we could say that this Region ought to make to us a strong call for spirituality, interreligious dialogue and service of the poor. During my pastoral visit I found marvelous examples of these values.

As I reminded the Brothers during the visit, when Westerners think about Asia, oftentimes they think of spirituality. Asia has been the cradle of great religions. In general I found everywhere concern for living spiritual values on a community level and passing on those values to young people, with a profound respect for their own religion. In few

Regions of the Institute have I felt such appreciation for the Brothers and I am very hopeful about the efforts being made in the area of pastoral ministry of vocations. For example, in the Philippines this year we had the good fortune of receiving 12 postulants and the Brothers have decided that as one of their commitments for the District's centennial celebration, each Brother will feel himself responsible for this vocational dimension. Practically everywhere the events involving students began with a prayer, many times led by some of the students. I was impressed that one of our first activities in India was a consecration to Our Lady on the part of the Delegation.

Service of the poor has also taken some important steps in the Region. In Vietnam, Cambodia, India and Thailand there are new initiatives for their service, such as the Bamboo School for children, on the border between Thailand and Myanmar where there are many refugees from both sides of the border. There are "Boys Town" schools in various Districts, among them Colombo, and they are also a very wonderful response for needy young people. In other Districts, like Australia-New Zealand-Papua New Guinea or the Philippines, volunteer programs are being encouraged, with service projects in the poor areas of this immense continent; in many other sectors, the Lasallian Youth Movement in the area of service has experiences that allow young people to feel close to and to be sensitive to the poor. I also had the good fortune to meet some groups of volunteers who came from Ireland and Spain to collaborate in new projects with an admirable generosity and spirit of sacrifice. While in India I learned of a recently-

published statistic that stated that this country had numbers of poor people similar to the 11 poorest countries in Africa. Therefore the challenge we have in front of us is immense. I would not want to miss pointing out the missionary spirit of this Region. Today we have two Australian Brothers and one from India who are involved in the South Sudan project.

Possibly the most significant prophetic contribution from this Region is that of interreligious dialogue. It is always impressive to find in Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Myanmar....young people of diverse religions who are united in Lasallian values of faith, community and service. Once again, especially in some meetings with youth groups, I had the opportunity to listen to Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist young people express what it meant for them to be Lasallians. I think that there is no better place than the school for this dialogue since it is there where they have relationships of respect, acceptance and conviviality in a very normal framework of life. It is a wonderful thing to see how this spirit continues beyond the school with our former students who maintain very close ties with the Brothers and they are extremely generous in helping the different works. The China project continues to be a great challenge for the Region and for the Institute.

3. Utopia

One of the greatest experiences I had this year was my participation, on June 25, in the inauguration of a project of La Salle University in Bogota called Utopia. It is located in

El Yopal, Casanare, on the eastern plains of Colombia and this project has three principal purposes: To be an agricultural and ranching research center, to promote the training of farming leaders and to offer a program in Agronomic Engineering. It seems to me that this is a very appropriate model for responding to the needs of young agricultural workers and I have no doubt in considering it a prophetic icon, especially for our Universities and Centers of Higher Education.

The name Utopia is very symbolic and it indicates a never-ending process but one that is always being revitalized and is open to new horizons. As Brother Rector said: *Our Utopia is also a way of showing that to resolve problems it is possible to try another type of response. Many people in Colombia believe that the only path for overcoming violence, poverty and exclusion is that of war. We believe that it is possible to try another approach which is, precisely, to give opportunities to young people to help them find different paths in order to grow and to develop themselves* (Brother Carlos Gómez Restrepo).

I had the good fortune to spend three days with the 64 young people who have begun the program. I was impressed by the human quality of these young people. Many of them had been scarred either personally or their families had been, by problems occasioned by war, drug trafficking, paramilitary groups... The statements that three of them gave during the ceremony were very moving and raised many questions. For example, Octavio A. Vargas said: *I have lived in the country my whole life. My dad left us when I was 5 years old; ever since I was little I knew about country*

chores and I liked doing them. I grew up in fear because at any time the paramilitaries could take me away. Fortunately that did not happen but I have seen many people die...When I learned that I had been accepted into this project I could not believe it. Utopia is a unique opportunity that was presented to me to become a better person and to work in repairing the country. I know that this is my opportunity to learn, to receive knowledge so that when I graduate, I can return to my own area to offer jobs, to plant and to do important things.

4. Brother Michel Sauvage

Brother Michel Sauvage is without a doubt one of the most known Brothers in the Institute and his influence has strongly marked the Brothers and all Lasallians, beginning especially with the renewal Chapter of 1966 - 1967. As I said in my first words after having been elected Superior General in 2000, recalling the things that for me have had special significance in my life, I first of all highlighted Brother Michel Sauvage who introduced me to the Founder's fascinating life journey. I am sure that not only for me but for many Brothers in the Institute, Brother Michel is a prophetic icon.

A prophet is always incarnated in a social and political concrete reality. The prophet's sensitivity means that he feels with passion what he is suffering, what he is experiencing. Michel was born and grew up in a world and a Church impassioned by social issues, but which was showing signs of fatigue. His journey as a Brother, starting from the Novitiate, opened these perspectives onto a more conflicted

world and a more complex history, a world at war. In military service, he met other young men from a world he barely knew himself. His years of initiation and his early professional life brought those young people closer to him.

His initiation into the study of theology gave him the tools he needed to dialogue with that world that was dying but trying to survive. Vatican II was for him a grace-filled event that opened new horizons for him and allowed him to make a fundamental contribution to the reflection of the Institute through Lasallian studies and a rediscovering of the Founder that he gave expression to, with the active intervention of other Brothers, in the document on the Declaration of the Brother in the World Today. This was a prophetic document that allowed us, in those uncertain times, to develop the ability to see, listen, defend and proclaim the new world that was developing in the Church and in society.

As in any time of transition, we know that there were difficult years. Brother Michel knew the solitude and anguish of the prophet in his dark night, without knowing which way to turn. A long journey of successes and failures, of acceptance and rejection. A prophet who was progressively led by the God of the poor, with the fire of divine passion, as he put himself at the side of the vulnerable, the forgotten, those without hope. The great current of energy that De La Salle had for the poor is the same current that sprang forth from this source of renovation. Brother Michel was the connecting thread.

A deep and critical study of his entire professional life journey and his writings would lead us more systematically to the central node of Brother Michel's prophetic experience. But I will limit myself to one precise event in his history in which I myself participated as Vicar General and in which Brother Michel appeared as a prophet, giving us indications regarding how to approach better the mystery of a special vocation in the Institute and in the Church.

That event was the RELAL Assembly that was held in Araruama, Brazil, in March 1997 and served as a preparation for the 43rd General Chapter which would take place three years later. Brother Michel was invited to speak about the perspectives of the Institute in Latin America, a continent he loved deeply and with which he identified. However, he opted to speak about the perspectives of re-foundation.

In an original way he brought us to the center of the *dangerous memory* of our community: starting from De La Salle's life journey, he discovered that at the heart of the foundation was an experience of being Church, but in another way. John Baptist de La Salle, *renouncing his privileges, embraced a community of laymen, he made himself a layman with laymen, he left the clerical Church which was closed in on itself*, and he went towards a Church for the world, especially the world of the poor. He left behind a powerful Church in order to draw nearer to a servant Church.

This act of the past ought to illuminate and inspire our present. It is a new Exodus to respond to new calls; it is an

invitation to live an Incarnation in new scenarios that young people live today; animated by that double passion that constitutes the life of the Brother: passion for God, passion for the poor, starting from a Gospel fraternity consecrated by God the Trinity.

Brother Michel said to us in this presentation: *I am aware that the utopia I dream about, if it happens, it will be very fragile.* But, certainly, it is about a Gospel frailty, that of the poor people of Yaweh, that of the small mustard seed, that of the yeast. A fragility that in reality involves enormous potential and which is an invitation to a life that is religious, enculturated, creative, on the border, freer. A fragility that has its support in hope:

- *the magnificent fragility of the hope of the poor,*
- *the guaranteed fragility of the hope of the Christian,*
- *the wounded fragility of the hope of a committed man,*
- *the prayerful fragility of the hope of the believer,*
- *the responsible fragility of the hope of the one who is sent,*
- *the available fragility of the hope of the servant,*
- *the faithful fragility of the hope of the pilgrim.*

5. Brother Noé Zevallos

All of us in Latin American undoubtedly knew of Brother Noé Zevallos, a Peruvian by birth and a Latin-American in heart, who touched our Region with the witness of his life and with his ardent words. I believe that for many Brothers he also is an important Lasallian icon. Brother Noé deeply

influenced my own personal life as a Brother, friend and spiritual master. It was he who spurred me on to involve myself in a charism that was more incarnated in the Latin-American continent and in the world of the poor... An incarnated charism is for me one of the secrets to understanding our life as Brothers. As we well know our Founder always started from a reality in which he discovered God. The Rule tells us that *he was attentive to it and let himself be moved by it*. This is about a compassionate look that ended up being an active commitment in favor of the poor, the least loved and little considered.

Brother Noé had a very clear sense of our origins and he lived it personally his whole life. It was an incarnated charism because the God we encounter each day in personal face-to-face meetings is also present in events, persons, life and especially in the world of the poor. Brother Noé approached me in this world with his word and example. The world of the poor in Peru and in Latin America was one of his great concerns. Not only did he fight so that the poor could have their say, but for him they were the privileged means through which he encountered God.

Therefore, at the end of June 2006, at the International Symposium of Young Lasallians held in Rome, where young people from more than thirty countries gathered to reflect on the *Mission Possible and a Dream Shared*, I began my message to them by recalling that poem that had always enchanted me, in which Brother Noé invited us to ask the Lord for the ability to give our life, *like the morning does to the sun which awakens it, like the beach does to the sea, when*

it caresses it, like th cloud does to the wind that carries it. And to ask the Lord to not relieve our thirst nor satisfy our hunger but that he spur us on towards life.

His life certainly was not exempt from pain and contradictions. To open new paths to the poor that come our way always has its price, as it did for the prophets. But he lived these trials with profound faith and with an unquestioning love for the Institute and fidelity to the Church. He made this sentence famous: *Life also has its Sundays*, and another, *All is grace, even evil, even sin.*

Brother John Johnston, on the occasion of Brother Noé's death, wrote: *Noé was a philosopher, theologian, writer and a very competent teacher...Noé's thirst for genuine liberation of the poor and the oppressed was not the result of a mission statement. The origin was his mission with Christ and his dedication to Christ's message. He loved the Church even when he lamented about what he considered to be her inadequate responses...*

Possibly the most beautiful witness was one that Brother Noé himself left us in a letter addressed to the Brothers of his District: *I tell you with absolute sincerity that I have submitted myself in everything to God's will in my regard. If he wants to keep me in his service for a few more years: here I am. If he wants to receive me into his Kingdom: may his will be done. I have made many mistakes and I have been and am a sinner, but I can assure you that the Word of God as nourishment and as the guide of my life has helped me to overcome all difficulties...*

6. Brother Sebastián Farró Soler

Brother Sebastián was a Catalonian Brother who worked all his life in the District of Central America-Panama and he had a great impact on me, as did all the Brothers of that District. I do not hesitate in considering him to be a prophetic icon for the Brothers. To speak about Brother Sebastián, for those of us who have had the good fortune to know and to live with him, is to speak about an uncommon Brother, an extraordinary Brother. I lived with him in my first community at Colegio La Salle in Antigua and what struck me the most at that time was the authenticity and radicalness of his religious life and his enormous capacity for knowledge in various fields. It was there where he prepared himself to assume the leadership of the Instituto Indígena Santiago, a normal school for the training of indigenous teachers for the country area, which possibly marked the most important stage of his life and which definitely influenced the direction that our Institute took in Guatemala, giving priority to the service of the indigenous world he loved so much.

We learned from Brother Sebastián that you have to be attentive to and let yourself be moved by – as the Founder did – the situation of the impoverished and the excluded; that you must know how to respond to their urgent and dramatic needs; and that for these responses to be effective, you have to read much, prepare yourself, study and above all be sensitive.

In time, we understood that Brother Sebastián's credibility

lay in his consistency and authenticity. He was consistent with that same consistency of De La Salle, who had the courage to launch himself in seeking solutions or needs that were strongly felt. He was also credible because he was a visionary who was not afraid to “go for it” – with Gospel creativity – in terms of new projects in favor of the poor, the indigenous Mayans of Guatemala.

Brother Sebastián was declared “Friend of the Mayans” by UNESCO. He, in a report that included part of his life story, said: *Meanwhile, as the head of the Instituto Indígena Santiago since 1966 as its first Director named by the Congregation of the De La Salle Brothers, and later as its Secretary and first Councillor, I tried to study university majors that were of interest to the people, to students who were more well-off, providing scholarships and other aid for many of them. And now we have 8 practicing doctors, several agricultural engineers, lawyers, graduates in philosophy, pedagogy, etc. I managed to send to Spain 2 technicians in vegetable canning (over the course of 3 years) to Alfaro (La Rioja region) to a school of the Ministry of Agriculture of Spain. I am convinced that it is absolutely necessary that agricultural cooperation must come soon to processing and to the market... I also initiated testing procedures for large farms, in favor of many indigenous families in the area of the municipality of El Estor. I made financial arrangements, using our juridical authority, so that a farm of 1,080 hectares with 100 families could not be transferred to another landowner. I also initiated procedures for the acquisition of another farm of 1,035 hectares for another 100 families.*

What Brother Sebastián did not say was that he followed a degree course in advanced Economics at the age of 70, because he saw a concrete way of serving indigenous people better, and he sacrificed his trips to Spain in order to use the money for university scholarships for those he mentioned above, and for the farming projects in El Estor for indigenous families – this he did after he was 80 years old.

Like all prophets, Brother Sebastián was also a man of God. At the end of his life and when I was already in Rome, on the occasions when I was able to meet him, what impacted me the most were the hours he used to spend in the chapel in prayer that was so essential in his life...

On the occasion of his 80th birthday, two Brothers from the District had this to say about him: *In the daily, common fabric of life, we see a man who responded as a Brother: at seven or eight o'clock in the evening we find him reading. He is a Brother who stays up-to-date, he finds out what is new...At nine or ten o'clock we see him praying...He is a Brother who has placed God in the center of his life. At 11 or 12 o'clock at night we see him working, making calculations, planning for the future...He is a working Brother with no fixed schedule...Sebastián still thinks about the future 24 hours per day as he works with the creativity of God because he is not unproductive. At his age, many of us would blow out the candle and cease to transmit light...*

I believe that Brother Sebastián was a gift from God for the District of Central America and Panama. A man who knew how to make that vital synthesis that we all desire, between

love for God and love for one's neighbor, especially the young who are poor and who need us the most.

CONCLUSION: Mysticism and prophecy

As I conclude these reflections, the words of one of our modern prophets come to mind, shortly before he was assassinated: *We have to see with eyes that are open wide and our feet need to be firmly planted on the ground, but our heart must be well filled with the Gospel and with God* (Archbishop Oscar Romero, August 27, 1978).

To have eyes that are open wide and a burning heart was also what our last General Chapter asked of us. To have eyes that are open wide makes us aware that we are living at a difficult time in human history and at a delicate time in the life of the Church. Surely we have all had such experiences, particularly this year that is ending. Personally I do not think that this is necessarily a negative time, but one of grace. The prophets lived in similar situations and during times of crisis. This could be for us a new opportunity. As Einstein said: *Let us not claim that things will change if we always do the same thing. Crisis is the best blessing that can happen to persons and countries, because crisis brings progress. Creativity is born of anguish, like the day of the dark night. It is in crisis that resourcefulness, discovery, great strategies are born... Without crisis there are no challenges, without challenges life is routine, a slow agony. Without crisis there is no merit. It is in crisis where the best in each person surfaces, because without crisis the wind has no bite.*

With Isaiah we can ask the Lord: *Watchman, how much longer the night?* With the Italian bishop Tonino Bello, whose cause for beatification has already been submitted, we can ask other questions: *How much time will we have to continue fighting? In this fight against evil forces that oppress humankind, is there a goal close at hand or are we destined to play never-ending overtimes that have no end in sight? Will there be a final whistle that will end the game? Will there still be long delays in outlining the horizons of the promised land? We will ourselves enter this land? Or will it be up to us just to point it out like Moses did?*

Possibly the best response may be that of a young Jewish mystic, Etty Hillesum, a victim of the Shoah: *My God, these are such distressing times! Tonight for the first time I awakened in darkness, my eyes were stinging, before me passed images and images of human suffering. But there is one thing that is more and more obvious to me, that you cannot help us, but that we ourselves must help you, and in that way we help ourselves.* Yes, the Lord wants us to be prophets and he counts on us, we must help him.

Aware that the charism of the beginnings necessarily was made into an institution, it is important to return periodically to the sources to discover better the original intuitions and to incarnate them in our today, integrating mysticism and prophecy, because mysticism as an experience of God in the human person is essentially prophetic. Like the prophets, it is in God and his close and unconditional presence where we must finally place our trust, as our Founder did in the *calamitous times* in which he lived, according to

his testament, and with him I invite you, Brothers, to make our own his deep conviction: *If this is God's work, who can destroy it? If God is not in its origin, I consent to its ruin. I myself would work with my enemies for its destruction, if I thought that God was not the author or that He did not will its progress. If He is declared its defender, we have nothing to fear. He is all-powerful. No hand can uproot what He has planted; no one can snatch away what He has in his hands...* (Blain, The Life of Father John Baptist de La Salle, Book III, RELAL, page 62).

May Mary, Queen of Prophets, who in the Magnificat sings to God that he has done marvelous things for his servant, extolled the humble and filled the hungry with good things, accompany us on this marvelous adventure and revive the flame of our passion for God and for the poor.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bro. Álvaro Rodríguez E.". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría
Superior General