**Marists The Great Awakening - The role of the Laity**

We have to say, first of all that we are living in a very special time.

**it is very important to speak together today … it is very important that people who live the Church and who try to live their faith in the world of today take the time to reflect together on the world and on the role of the Church in the world**.

I am using these 2 terms on purpose WORLD AND CHURCH. The 2 cannot be separated and not only because we are lay people.

**The old traditional axiom that says the soul to the priests and clergy and the world to the lay people does not really work any more…**.it is a division long gone and buried and it only remains in the mind of some nostalgic….

**Together, we are at a crossroad of history, one of those moments that only happen once in a long time and that must be understood and lived with great care. It is true for the world and for the Church as well.**

**We need to make history not to allow history to dominate us.**

**It is one of those moments in which history is made and we need to decide if we want to make history or allow events, that are not history but daily chronicles, to dominate us.**

**We need to do it in a different way … we cannot remain anchored any more to the old and safe traditions of our organizations and not even of our theological security**

**We badly need new paradigms that may help us understand the present and look at the future with a vision.**

**Pope John Paul II used to say that the world suffers from the lack of vision. That vision that is clearly stated in the documents we have been asked to comment today.**

This require a surplus of effort on our part because t**he world is complex, more complex than it ever was. I am not going to repeat the already obsolete mantra on globalization but we need to understand that we have not yet been able to come to terms with the effects of globalization.**

**We need to look at this world of ours if we want to understand our role in it.**

It is necessary, then, to keep a watchful eye on this our world, with its problems and values, its unrest and hopes, its defeats and triumphs: a world whose economic, social, political and cultural affairs pose problems and grave difficulties in light of the description provided by the Council in the Pastoral Constitution, Gaudium et Spes *(CHR LAI 3)*

**Because our role is not only within our ecclesiastical structures but, first of all it is out there in the cold of the streets of the world. In our cities and in the situation of conflict and misery, Pope Francis would say it is there at the periphery of the world and of human existence.**

Pope Francis was asked what he thought about the issue of the laity and he answered in a way that may leave is a bit taken aback:

*“The body of Christ is the harmony of the different,” the Pope explained condemning the phenomenon of “clericalism” which afflicts many lay people, to the point that it can be defined as an “added evil”. “Some bishops and priests are drawn by the temptation to clericalism the laity, but there are also many lay people who get down on their knees and ask to be clericalised: it is a two-way sin.” But according to Francis, “a lay person has the strength that comes from baptism and his lay vocation is not negotiable.”*

A non negotiable vocation, not a charisma not a subsidiary but a vocation that has its full value.

**Papa Francesco si pone fortemente nella tradizone iniziata da JPII ma al tempo stesso la supera n quanto non parla alla chiesa come un corpo diviso ma come una realtà unica e unita che ha una unica vocazione.**

Of course the times have changed … I still remember when it would not be easy to speak about a role of the laity … we did walk a long way from the idea that the lay people were just “non – priests” but also from the way they had been defined in the Lumen Gentium … If you think that speaking about the role of laity not directly connected to the hierarchical structures of the church was not seen very well…

Only within the framework of the hierarchy .

Congar

But we are at a turning point in History I said….

**I am no theologian … I am not here to tell you what to do but my task, as I read it is not that of finding answers but generating questions that may become reflection and may lead us to a vision for ourselves as men and women committed in the Church and for the communities we have been entrusted with**

In a few days we will celebrate Pentecost. The moment of the greatest extroversion of he early church.

We need to ask ourselves where we stand!

**Are we still like those disciples locked into our rooms and fearfully waiting?**

Are we islands in the city, made of some people, who do some good work but island nevertheless. And we can be islands in many ways. It can be an attitude of self sufficiency, it can be pride, it can also be extreme humilism (in Italian it is the bad form of humility). **It can be a way of speaking a lingo that carries us away from the people and from their need.**

This is a personal question that we need to address to each one of us

The world awaits the revelation of the children of God … we are asked to change our habits, to abandon the ordinary was of doing things and walk on paths that are not yet well traced. It would be much easier to do all the way we know how to do it. Play it safe and sure.

I am saying this because it is a profound reflection we have started in our community from Easter. And it is beginning to touch all our services. I am not saying it to you as a professor who has a lesson to give (even if I have been doing this for so long) … but as a person who is trying to renew myself and the part of the Community of Sant’Egidio I live.

We need to examine our structures even those we think are working well in order to see if we are meeting the real need of the world and the expectation of the people. I AM SURE THAT EVEN OUR LANGUAGE NEEDS TO FIND NEW EXPRESSION …

Think of Jesus when he entered Jerusalem, he made so many people come out of their houses, acclaiming him, because they are expecting him. From where do these people come? What are they seeking? Who are they? They are our fellow citizens.

I feel the urgency of knowing them more, of speaking with them all. But we often are afraid of them least they may upset our habits and force is to change.

In fact we, as lay people, as Pope Francis rightly said are very good at installing ourselves as an island within the city, as a respected institution. Content on the island, we live among our commitments, without being wounded by the questions of the people who, however, would like to welcome Jesus.

We cannot resign ourselves to being a respected minority, but we must be a people in the midst of the crowd it encounters.

Pope Francis, beginning in December 2015, has launched a Jubilee of mercy, fifty years after the end of the Council: to celebrate mercy in a world of orphans needy of love. Fifty years after the end of the Council! In the letter to the theological faculty of Buenos Aires, the Pope wrote that the council "was an *aggiornamento* [updating], a re-reading of the Gospel in the perspective of contemporary culture. It produced an irreversible movement of renewal which comes from the Gospel. And now we must go forward." How?

We need to re-read the Gospel in the perspective of the culture, feelings, and life of the contemporary city, and of the whole twenty-first century. We need to communicate more mercy – it is the message of Jubilee – to the contemporary city.

Also because the crowds of the city are without a father and pastor/ shepherd. How can old people have a father? They are thrown into a condition of being orphaned: without love and family. Orphans are also the children, whose fathers and mothers do not know how to be so.

The homeless wander without a shepherd. Hearts are without a shepherd: and many young and adults are seeking.

Who will accompany them? Masses of immigrants walk the earth, like sheep without a shepherd. Many work and go about their own business, but very few in the city and in its peripheries care for man and woman gratuitously, for free.

There is great need of mercy. And it is the sign of the two years of Francis: many people – not just-Catholics – approach him, not because he is the pope, but because he speaks of the Gospel of mercy.

It is the hour to return to the city: not with our schemes, but with the liberty of those who walk with Jesus.

Our communities are precious as a talent, which is a hefty sum. What have you done of the talent that I gave you? – asks the master on his return. What have we done of the talent of love that our communities are in the cities where we live, in our countries,– it is asked to each one of us.

What have we done with the talent for the good of others? Have we made it a great tree in the city, refuge of the birds of the sky?

Is this speaking about the role of laity? No it is not but at the same time it is. Because if there is one thing that is clear in this time of the church is that when we walk or where we walk we do it together. As a PEOPLEWHO HAS ONE FATHER AND MANY BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

This is COMMUNION but we must also be aware that we are speaking about something that has been so often misused that lost most of its original meaning *(The concept of communion lies "at the heart of the Church's selfunderstanding"(4), insofar as it is the Mystery of the personal union of each human being with the divine Trinity and with the rest of mankind, initiated with the faith(5), and, having begun as a reality in the Church on earth, is directed towards its eschatological fulfilment in the heavenly Church(6).* **And it became almost a synonym of coordination between different agencies of the church**

Pastoral conversion

BUT WE COULD SAY THAT WE ARE ALREADY DOING SO MUCH AND THAT OUR DAYS ARE FULL OF COMMITMENTS AND EXTREMELY BUSY….

Pope Francis has spoken, in the *Evangelii gaudium,* of "pastoral conversion".

Conversion means to be another way among people who have no shepherd, and who seek him. The Pope speaks of "pastoral and missionary conversion that is not able to leave things as they are.”

**Our charism is not doing what we do, but to be men and women in history, reading it, meeting it in the light of the Word of God.**

The pope says "I dream of a missionary choice capable of transforming every thing, so that the habits, the styles, the schedules, the language and every ecclesial structure may become a channel adequate to the evangelization of the contemporary world, more than for self-preservation". The dream of the Pope: a radical missionary conversion of the Church, capable of putting to itself the question: how do I communicate the Gospel?

We need to be pastors…. And tis is a question for us who have so often tought that this task was reserved to others.

What does it mean for me to be a pastor todaya

What does it mean to read the Scripture in a new way ?

What does it mean for me to be a evangelizer and with this word I also mean literaly spread the Gospel?

And is it possible to get out? ... To break away from what we do and from how we do it, from our consolidated habits and models. Nicodemus says to Jesus: "How can anyone be born after having grown old?

Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?" (Jn 3:4). Old also means experienced: it goes and it works in this way.

Change seems a mistake or a risk. If we do not change, we do not walk. We have constructed it this way, is not a risk to call into question positive results? We are contented. Looking at our efforts, we are satisfied.

Ask the Lord: how I can change, knowing that you need to do it?

II Part

Too often we are people of little ambition.

Yes, of course we have been told that ambition is a grave sin but there are different forms of ambition

We should have boundless ambition, looking at the boundless needs of the world. To the crowds hungry for bread and true things. To the many poor not helped. This is the ambition of a Christian today BOUNDLESS AS BOUNDLESS IS THE SORROW OF THE WORLD.

I WILL NEVER STOP REPEATING IT THE CENTER OF OUR CONCERN MUST NEVER BE OUR OWN THIGS, EVEN IF THEY ARE GOOD. THE MEANING OF WHAT WE DO IS NOT INHERETN IN THE THINGS WE DO BUT COMES FORM THE WAY THEY IMPACT THE WORLD AROUNND, FROM THE WAY THEY COMMUNICATE THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE JOY OF THE GSOPEL.

ANYTHING WE DO FINDS ITS MEANING IN THE CONTINOUS REFERENCE TO THE WORLD AND TO THE PEOLE.

WE MUST LEARN ONCE AGAIN THE PATH OF PENTECOST: A PATH THAT URGES THE DISCPILES TO GET OUT AND SPEAK NOT ABOUT OURSELVES BUT ABOUT THE GOSPEL.

**Five loaves and two fish**. (too little, or enough?) But it took so much effort to put them together! Yet the crowd in the city that needs to be fed is so large. The food collected is almost nothing. Jesus says: "You give them something to eat" (Mt 14:16). Where will we find the bread? And then is it not pessimistic to say that five loaves and two fish are a modest result? To say that that small group of people with us is not enough to serve so many people?

***Communities of the people Una comunità-popolo***

Each community must be of the people, says Martin Buber: animated by the enthusiasm of being a people. A chapter of the *Evangelii gaudium*, the manifesto of Francis, says, "Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people." (270). And, he uses a beautiful expression: it is the pleasure of being a people;

The **community-people** is not a question of structures: but of human and missionary openness. It must involve everyone. None of us can say: I have already my commitments! I do this and therefore the mission is not concern me!

The pope continues: "Jesus himself is the model of this method of evangelization which brings us to the very heart of his people" (269).

**The Christian is this: "I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing"** (273).

I am mission when I live on the road, where I work, when I meet people, even those who have nothing to do with me and with my work, when I stop there where nobody stops, when I read the news and I try to explain the world to others, when I see people suffering …

Everything depends on the concrete care and concern I am able to live.

How many people wasted, chased away, lost, not invited into dialogue ... There is a distance, inattention, distraction, which chases away from the lives of our communnities.

There is a shyness that becomes self-centeredness.

**In me there does not prevail the disciple-missionary; but one that has a role or a function.**

**We must affirm the primacy of the communicator of the Gospel: with a concern merciful and passionate. This concern is the link with the other. I should ask myself: how do people see me?**

We do not ask it often because we are what we are and this is enough for us.

We have to share the concern of Jesus who had compassion on the sheep tired and sick, without a shepherd. We have to remember them, to pay attention and look for them.

Every Christian holds the post of the shepherd. Every Christian is vicar of the shepherd of all the sheep. One may feel humble and unable – perhaps one has reason – but at that moment one is the shepherd.

Not someone else. It is this one whom the other meets. Each is – as John XXIII said – "*pastor amabilis*" [lovable shepherd]. Too much ambition?

*Meeting and mission*

In order not to lose people we need to meet them, to become their friends, to listen to them, not to forget them, to build a network of relationships faithful and free. Often the mission seems difficult, how to communicate something that is not required.

We need to encounter each other in friendship. Meeting: as between **Mary and Elizabeth. Mary is young and inexperienced, perhaps she does not speak well, but she carries Jesus in her womb**, because she is with by the grace of the Spirit. Elizabeth is old, the wife of a priest, an experienced woman. Mary runs in haste toward the house of Elizabeth, highlighting the link between her and Elizabeth. **When Mary meets Elizabeth, the life that is in Elizabeth leaps** and she says: "‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.’" (Lk 1:42-45).

There is already something living in Elizabeth and the presence of Mary, indeed her greeting, enlivens the life that is in Elizabeth.

This life is made of questions, dreams, hopes, prayers, secret invocations, waitings.

The meeting brings out the question and the presence of God in the heart of the other.

Francis says: God lives in the city. Even if the city does not recognize it: God lives in the city! We must awaken this awareness.

Elizabeth recognizes in this woman, younger and inexperienced, a mother. It seems strange.

What is it that rejoices in the elderly Elizabeth? The child: the desire for life and future, the best part, the ingenuity and the hope.

The mission is a visit, multiple visits, which revive questions that are dormant and a seed of a good and evangelical life, already present in her. The visit reconstructs or builds a family relationship that, without arrogance, gives to Mary a responsibility towards Elizabeth, as a mother.

Francis writes: "There is a Marian style in the activity of evangelization of the Church. Because every time we look back to Mary we begin once again to believe in the revolutionary force of tenderness and affection. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak, but of the strong, who do not need to abuse others to feel important. "

With tenderness, dialogue, and friendship, we revive the questions at the bottom of the hearts of those whom we meet, ones buried under disappointments or loneliness. It takes the patience of a friendship that lasts, in the memory of the name and of the personal history. We must get out from those circuits we rarely leave. From the closed-ness of our homes. Our Centers, our schools, our movements are doors and not fences.

*We have a vocation ?*

*Champagnat EDUCATION EVANGELISATION .. BE BRAVE BE PROPHETS.*

*PPROèèHECY OF A CORAGUEOUS EVANGLISING ACTION THAT THINS FIRST OT THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEED.*