



letting our faith conviction be transformed into real availability, allowing our hearts to be converted, to belong more and more to the Lord so that it becomes He who loves and acts through us. The work also involves humbly recognizing our limitations, those that have always shadowed us and those that appear over time; we think, too, of our failures, some of them involuntary and others much more tenacious, causing us to stumble again and again; and then there are our sins, personal and institutional. As regards institutional sins - I think of the clericalism that has kept us distant from the people and their struggles and dispensed us from observing the legitimate controls needed in the exercise of the ministry, giving rise to all kinds of abuse. I think, too, about the situation of some brothers who are in crisis or in conflict with their community or with their superiors. In many cases, these situations are the result of a 'laissez-faire', where members of the religious or pastoral community or his superiors did not accompany or even confront the brother in due time. In part, such situations can also be the result of brothers simply not accepting being challenged or corrected. How much of the harm caused between us and to the people we serve could have been avoided by a timely, fraternal and clear intervention by the local community or by a superior - an intervention to be offered and accepted with simplicity of heart! We should not be afraid to make such interventions or corrections. At stake is the good of the brother and the good of the people of God who have the right to expect a good service from us.

Basically, being available and open to God's work requires that we work with God. This is the fruit of the Covenant, the outcome of the friendship that Jesus entered into with us when he pitched his tent among us and made his Gospel shine in the midst of our limitations, despite our failures and taking into account our sin.

### **The gospel of weakness**

To engage in a process of personal, pastoral and ecclesial conversion, a starting point could be that of daring to recognize our weaknesses, our fragility. It is true that this may not be easy for many of us. So often we tend to focus more on our strengths and our achievements for our sense of self-worth and appreciation. Understandably this may result in our wanting to hide whatever it is that we consider weak, sinful or a failure.

In the Gospels, on the other hand, we see how Jesus appears with keen sensitivity to embrace and welcome the people he met or who passed his way in their fragility: the sick, the undefended - such as children, widows and foreigners -, the sinners who ask for forgiveness and even the arrogant who seek to hide behind their paper walls. The strength of the Gospel is not for the weak and the frail. If it were like that, Nietzsche would have been right. The strength of the Gospel is for those who have the courage to embrace their fragility, call it by its name and present it to Jesus so that he may transform it and heal it with his word, with his gestures, with his trust. How good it would be for us to present ourselves to the Lord with the words of those who dared to confess their weaknesses before Him: "Lord, depart from me, I am a sinner", "Lord increase my faith", "Lord, if you want to, you can cleanse me", "Lord, save us lest we perish", "Son of David, have pity on us!" Of course, we are not limited to words. We can approach Him with gestures that often speak more than words, on our knees, in tears, because He already knows what is in our hearts.

Those who have the courage to acknowledge their fragility before the Lord and present it to him, can then open themselves to his grace, to the strength that comes from Him, from his word, from his welcome, from his empathy. In this way, Jesus transforms weakness and even death into a place where the Wisdom of God can manifest itself in his works. Our fears become the place in which we can, without masks or pretensions, tell the truth of our lives. Our limitations, even our sins, become the place where the superabundant grace of God's love is manifested. Our weaknesses and failed plans

present us with the opportunity to open ourselves to the tireless action of God, at a time that God judges opportune.

Our founders were spiritually fruitful and apostolically creative because they knew how to embrace their weaknesses, their own as well as the institutional weaknesses of their religious family. By so doing, they allowed the good news of God's providential action to mature through them and the congregation. Confident in his providence they knew how to discern and respond to the pastoral and spiritual needs of their time. Moreover, they took risks on pastoral fronts, overcoming the precarious human, professional and institutional resources that existed at the time. In a letter full of sober affection and a sense of co-responsibility in the mission that belonged to both of them, the Good Father wrote to the Good Mother: "Try then to get better, so that you can continue to support the poor boat that God has built using two very poor mortals and with such sad and badly polished planks" (6<sup>th</sup> August, 1822, LEBP 770).

## **A vision**

As a General Government we present our reflections in poster form (and bookmarks) in a way that we hope highlights the emphases that we wish to place during our service of spiritual and missionary animation of the congregation for the next 6 years.

The poster portrays a single spiral movement of "conversion" that links the renewal of the inner life (La Motte d'Usseau and reparative Eucharistic adoration) to new ways of being and serving the Church in mission (e.g. Mentawai (Indonesia) and the Institute for the Visually Impaired in Beira (Mozambique)). Indeed, it was in the granary of the Motte d'Usseau, that the Good Father was able to consider the persecution that the Church was undergoing at that time in the light of the history of God's acting in his Church, especially through its saints and martyrs. It was in the granary that the Good Father understood with renewed ardour what he had himself already expressed on the day of his priestly ordination: his readiness to give himself totally - even unto death - to the service of Jesus.

Meeting with the real poor evangelizes us and leads us to appreciate the promise of the Gospel in a different way: "And behold, I am with you always, until then end of the age." (Mt 28:20). Meeting with the poor connects us to our inner life - who is Jesus, who, through the Spirit, acts, loves and risks through us.

We will discover renewed strength and the joy of the call to renew our inner life and new ways of being and serving in the Church if we do stay connected to Jesus "always until the end of the age." Hence, from birth to death we are called to renew our "Yes", our "Amen" to what the Lord asks of us **each time** he says: "I count on you, I want to be able to love through you". Drawing from our very lives, our achievements, our failures, our living together as brothers and sisters in Jesus, the small services we offer and even our death, the Lord can use us to manifest his love. He only asks that we allow ourselves to be molded by him, so that he may fully carry out the work that he has begun in each one of us.

The Lord's call to renew our "Yes" and our "Amen" is a call extended to sisters, brothers and laity, members of one body and a pilgrim people. It is thus a synodal call. This is what the Good Father sensed in his vision of La Motte, a vision that would accompany him throughout his life: a unique body of men and women who, through different ministries and a simple lifestyle, take the Gospel everywhere, as first-hand witnesses to the strength of the Gospel that they proclaim.

Our hope is that the poster and the bookmark will help us to remember the vision and the invitation to enter this conversion process. A first step in preparing ourselves for this

is to pray unceasingly to the Lord that each one of us, brothers, sisters and lay, might receive the grace of conversion of heart for the sake of new ways of being and serving in church. We can make our own the words uttered by Esteban Gumucio SSCC (1914-2001) when he asked Jesus for the grace of openness to his work: "Make of me a parable within the reach of simple people. May I live in such a way that they ask me for You, my friend Jesus. May I live in such a way that every night I can say to you: 'tomorrow I will try to be more attentive to my brothers and sisters'".

With my fraternal greetings in the SSCC,

**Alberto Toutin ssc**  
*Superior General*