

# The paths that change us

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Dear Brothers, Sisters and Lay members,

During the month of October we have closely followed the synodal process. Timothy Radcliffe's meditations have helped us to tune in to the action of the Spirit. We have also been helped by the talks that guided the themes of each week. Moreover, we have been honoured by the visit of some of the Synod participants who have come to our house. Fernando Cordero, for his part, has kept us informed of the progress of the synodal journey. In this context, the urgent call for peace and for the care of our common home resounds with particular force. We are not content with being informed. It is time to do something so that the changes we long for in our Church become possible and the so elusive and fragile peace may prevail over hatred, prevail over the trading in people and in arms, and that our way of consuming is not at the expense of the dignity of people or of the earth that shelters us. Faced with such challenges, we can be overwhelmed, we can feel powerless. We may even grow aware of a certain indignant urgency: "This cannot go on like this", "Something has to change". However, this does not mobilise us. To face these challenges together and to offer some contribution, I invite each of us to ask ourselves: How do these challenges affect me? What can I do? And in the faith community, what can we do together? With whom can we join to make possible the changes that our church, peace and care for our common home need?

## The hope that has its beginning in a journey

Abraham, in his old age, leaves his homeland behind and sets out for the land that God will show him. In this journey God will make him a blessing to all nations. Moses also leaves behind his securities, making himself available to participate in the long road that results in Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt as well as deliverance from his own bonds and the burdens that weigh on his heart. In leading the people to the land that God will show them, Moses himself becomes the friend of God and the intercessor of the people. Mary, for her part, moved by God's request that she be the mother of his Son, sets out for the house of her relative Elizabeth. In the encounter between the two women, both joyfully discover that nothing is impossible for the God in whom they believe. In short, God meets men and women and sets them on the way, asking them to trust in his unceasing companionship. Thus we travel along roads that are full of ups and downs, full of progressive moments and setbacks, as are all the human roads that God loves to travel along in order to carry out his work. His work would not have been possible without these men and women starting out, seeking God's footsteps and listening for his voice in the vicissitudes of a people, in the barren womb of an old woman, in a distant land, in an empty tomb. They set out in the certainty that in every step - however small - God is fulfilling his promises. These promises are always partial. But the God of the impossible loves to give himself entirely to the partial realisations of the great promises of peace and justice. God is there, both in the small steps that head in the direction of causes that surpass all we can possibly imagine, and in the breaths of a groaning earth.

## New beginnings, new resources

This month we remember the Good Mother. Once again, I am struck by the way she, together with the Good Father, was attentive and available to God's action. New missionary adventures did not frighten her. The precariousness of means or the fragility of people did not limit her in her response to the needs and urgencies of the Church of her time. And I believe that the secret lay in an unconditional trust in the Good God whose power is paradoxically manifested in weakness and generosity. What is fragile becomes strong in God's hands and the few possessions become wealth when they are shared and placed at the service of others. With this hope, the Good Mother, the Founder and a group of Brothers set out for Troyes at the end of 1820 and the beginning of 1821 to carry out parish missions. Without previous experience and without much preparation, they shared what they were, what they had and what they received from the people in order to revive the rural communities of this diocese. Catechesis and the sacrament of reconciliation are an important part of missionary animation, and these activities also bring the missionaries into contact with the reality of what the people live and suffer. In this context, Hilarion Lucas asked the Good Mother for advice on how to welcome people in confession, many of them returning to this sacrament after many years.

“Do not worry too much, my good Brother: I am confident that you and yours will do a lot of good especially if you show gentle kindness and amenity in your approach to things, even facing difficulties in such a way as to avoid bitterness. Avoid as much as possible any formalities difficult to accept. The feeling that God is at work will obtain more than you could ever ask for at the moment. In all things, my good Brother, as long as you can see the straightforwardness of an act, the sincerity of an accusation, fear not. Especially never show your apprehension.”

(H. Aymer de la Chevalerie, Lettre au Père Hilarion Lucas, 23 March 1821, LEBM 798 in *Correspondance*, vol. 4, 283.)

It was precisely the encounter with this new pastoral reality that awakened the capacities and resources of the brothers and sisters and put them at the service of the new mission. The encounter with these communities enriched and transformed them.

### So that the paths may change us

As a Congregation, we want to continue to walk together with the laity to make possible a Church that is always more welcoming, hopeful and collaborative with the men and women who struggle for justice and peace and endeavour to take care of our home. Let us allow God and his Spirit to make of us his generous and dedicated collaborators. Let us do so as the participants of the Synod convey in their *Letter to the People of God*: "Using the method of conversation in the Spirit, we have humbly shared the riches and poverties of our communities in all continents, trying to discern what the Holy Spirit wants to say to the Church today".

May mutual listening and the intercession of the Good Mother help us listen to the calls of the Spirit, awaken the gifts and charisms that slumber in us and set us on the way with men and women, where the Spirit precedes us and brings us together.

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