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Circular Letter of Father General

FRATERNAL INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITIES AT THE SERVICE OF THE MISSION



"that all may have life and may have it to the full" (Jn 10, 10)

Introduction

Our last General Chapter (2005) left us the following orientations for mission: “We find it important to organise missionary stages for young Montfortians (priests and brothers) in international communities.” (No 61); and “We have to continue and to develop experiences of international communities for the mission.” (No 62).

In response to these instructions, the General Administration has launched community experiences with a multicultural and multiethnic dimension. The steps which have been taken, even though small, have shown both the difficulties and the richness in living together as confreres from different cultures, the resources and the potential for fraternal life and mission. Some of these attempts have been interrupted after a relatively short time due to encountering some weaknesses; some others continue; still others we plan to put into effect progressively.

All of this has formed in me a desire to stop a moment and reflect deeply on these experiences in order to better look at the present situations, foundations, goals, and modes of organization and to offer some tools for discernment. The consecrated life is fundamentally a call to be a “prophet” of communion and fraternity in the Lord. It is he who has gathered us together, and who has prayed “that all may be one.” It is he who sends us “that the world may believe” that the Father has sent him (Jn 17, 21).

One of the supporting columns of intercultural communities must be the construction of a joyful fraternity, in which day after day the members acquire a deep maturity and interior freedom, in order to be open to others in transparency, to know how to give with passion and to receive with gratefulness. This is only possible if the fraternal project is founded on the unique Fatherhood of God, present in every brother in the particularity of his situation. When people distance themselves from this Fatherhood, they also end up far from fraternity, thereby compromising its success. In this case, we need a new Pentecost through which, even in the diversity of languages, people come to welcome, respect, and love each other, as they see themselves as brothers again, because they are the sons of the same Father.

The reality of intercultural communities is so widespread in consecrated life that the Union of Superiors General wanted to devote its last bi-annual assembly to this theme. This took place in Rome last May. Geographical and cultural changes in the life and mission of consecrated life; inter-culturality and changes in charism, in communion, and in community; inter-culturality and changes in the service of authority and in formation: these subjects were presented to the attention and reflection of the superiors general. The phenomenon of globalization, demographic changes on the continents, with their consequences for vocational growth in certain countries or the aging of personnel in others, push us to be aware of the transformation in process, to open ourselves to this new situation in searching for the will of God and in continuing with confidence the mission of evangelization which God has confided to us.

With this letter, I want to offer to all the confreres an occasion and a tool for deepening further our life in fraternity and, moreover, to know how to re-think the conditions which will promote a greater qualitative growth in intercultural communities for the benefit of the mission inherited from our Founder.

1. Fraternity finds its origins in Christ, sent by the one Father

1.1. A PROFOUND AND PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST, THE LORD

Daily Lectio Divina as one of the preferential places of this encounter.

In creating man and woman in his own image and likeness, God created them for communion. God the Creator, who revealed himself as Love, as Trinity, as communion, called them to enter into intimate relationship with himself and into interpersonal communion, in the universal fraternity of all men and women. (Fraternal Life in Community, 9)

The fundamental choice of consecrated life consists in an intimate relationship with the Lord and his Word which illumines and guides in order to become the “Word of God” in the community and in the world.

Each day, our priority is to nourish our life of faith by reading the Scriptures, allowing ourselves to be penetrated by the Word of God, which is “spirit and life.” It is indispensable to read these holy pages often, to pause over them for a long time and to pray them in the light of the Holy Spirit, so that they may conform us ever more to Christ. It is only in this way that we will have *a heart burning within us* just as the disciples of Emmaus experienced when the Lord explained the Scriptures to them.

It is good to admire some concrete figures like our Founder or the holy Curé of Ars, our guide in the year of the priesthood, and so many others around us. These persons have been contemplatives, real witnesses of their profound relationship with the Lord, nourished by their daily encounter with his Word.

We will also understand the insistence with which Saint Louis Marie invites us in his writings to reserve for ourselves some concrete and specific space for meditation, prayer, and silence. It is important not to feel that this is a duty or a weight, but to live it as a desire for an encounter with the Lord by means of the Word which introduces us to his life and mission. At the same time, it is important to remain vigilant so that the reading of the Word of God might be interiorly free and authentic, to avoid manipulating it, using it to affirm ourselves one more time, falling into a “smug sureness of ourselves,” into moralism, voluntarism, ideology or even something else.

It is up to the Spirit to teach, to explain the Word and to apply it to one’s personal history and to human history. We need to read and pray the Word of God while invoking the Spirit so that it might be the Spirit who unites us to Christ, who helps us to say



“Abba, Father,” and conforms our feelings, our thoughts, and our will to Christ, the first born. Our existence then will be a path of progressive adherence to Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life for us. This baptismal path is a process of vital growth which needs to be nourished each day by the Word in order to eliminate infected cells, poisonous toxins, and thus to draw continuously from the fullness of the Lord’s grace in order to live as true sons of the Father.

1.2. TO TRAVEL THE PASCHAL PATHWAY

The fraternal life passes by way of humiliation, service, and adherence to the will of the Father.

When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (1 Cor 2, 1-2)

How many times in his writings and by the example of his life, did Saint Paul invite us to travel the paschal pathway to find true life there! It is not the wisdom of this world which must guide us on the path of fraternity, but a real immersion in the paschal experience. It allows us to detach ourselves from our thoughts in order to have the “mind of Christ,” to no longer cling to our will so that we may search for the “will of the Father.” An experience of true fraternity will be humanly possible only if we enter in an ongoing way into the paschal mystery in order to shape our being and acting after the model of Christ who gave his life out of love.

The paschal way is a path of reconciliation between God and humanity through a love freely given: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not be lost, but may have eternal life.” (Jn 3, 16).

It is a path of faithful love: “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them till the end” (Jn 13, 1b).

It is a path of service: “If then I have washed your feet, I who am Lord and Master, you also must wash one another’s feet” (Jn 13, 14).

It is a path of betrayal and pardon: “I do not know the man.” And immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter ... went out and began to weep bitterly.

It is a path of humility: “Behold the man” (Jn 19, 5). The Lord did not refuse to be humiliated, despised, rejected, judged falsely ...; he did not seek to be applauded and acclaimed by songs of Hosanna, but rather he wanted to be coherent and faithful to the end of the end of the mission entrusted to him by the Father.

It is a path of self-emptying: “not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22, 42). We too must take up this prayer of Jesus to the Father each day, to empty ourselves radically of our will in order to be constantly open to discerning the plan of the Lord for each of us and for our community.

It is a path of failure and rebirth: Jesus approached the disciples of Emmaus, who were disappointed at heart, and he said to them: “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Lk 24:25-26). At that moment, life was reborn: “*Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?*” (Lk 24: 32)

1.3. LOVING AS CHRIST LOVED US

It is love which makes life grow in abundance.

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13, 34-35)

Created in the image and likeness of God, we are called to enter into relationship with the Creator, and in Him with every human being. Capacities for dialogue, for interpersonal relationships, and for profound communication, express within us the fact that we are made in the image of God. But, in all these dimensions, we experience each day our human fragility, our weaknesses, our sin.

In the concrete and complex situations of our daily life we are invited to follow Christ, and to encounter our brothers in Him in a new way. To follow the Master means to welcome and imitate his trust in everyone, without distinction of culture, language, or social origin. How hard it is to follow this path in a society which discriminates easily and in which there is a strong temptation to believe only those who share our own ideas or prejudices, who have the same personal inclinations and with whom we feel an affinity of character! We are called to examine ourselves deeply and to be converted continually in order to rebuild the community.

We must also stress that our commitment to love and serve mutually for all our life in a concrete religious community is part and parcel of our original decision to follow the Lord. It is only at this price that our community life avoids degenerating into simply living under the same roof or being an organizational chart for work, and instead becomes true and transparent in its internal dynamics. If *our hearts are truly burning within us*, we will spontaneously proclaim to one another the love with which the Lord has united us. His love is the love of the cross, on which he has given his life for all, on which he loves freely and without cost, without being conditioned by the response or the amiability of the other.

Seeds to cultivate

- ▶ Daily Lectio Divina: to create a space morning and evening for the Word of God of the day to be incarnated, becoming flesh in our life.
- ▶ The constant celebration of the sacrament of forgiveness: to enter into the paschal pathway and to live reconciliation with God and our brothers.
- ▶ Celebrate the Eucharist as the highest expression of love to the end: to be capable of giving life freely in imitation of the one whom we consider our Teacher.

2. Fraternal life in Intercultural Communities

I do not want to present here all aspects of fraternal and community life. For this topic it would be good to re-read documents like *Fraternal Life in Community* (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 1994). I want rather to call attention to several particulars which will help us to construct intercultural fraternities, a path already begun in our Congregation.

2.1. FORMATION IN FRATERNITY

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but (also) everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus. (Phil 2, 2-5)



As I think of my weakness and my limits, and having had contact with our concrete realities during these years of animating the Congregation, I cannot but notice the fragility of our integral formation of the person, in his human dimension. Such a deficiency often leads to the cultivation of jealousies, envy, resentment, a desire for glory, pride – resulting in wearing down individual persons and community life. We must take stock of the human dynamics which constitute the foundations of the person, for it is from here that springs either the positive energy which builds up our life together or the negative energy which instead weakens it to the point of destroying it.

I invite both those responsible for the Entities and formators to take to heart this aspect in the formation of all the confreres, with a particular attention to our young people. Each person must acquire a solid human foundation, which is now more than ever an indispensable requirement for developing the life of a consecrated person called to fraternal life for mission. Each one must be aware that he is a unique creation, personally loved by God as he is, with his gifts and shadows, always striving to be better. To accept oneself does not mean to neglect oneself or let oneself go ...

We must grow in interior freedom. This will help us to construct our personal history without comparing ourselves with others, without wanting to be stronger than the others, without being preoccupied by their judgment, but happy with what the Lord wants to achieve with each one of us. Interior freedom is the necessary basis for establishing rapport and positive relationships. Each person needs to make a long journey of interior healing, taking advantage of all the means necessary, in order to grow in that human maturity which makes us free and open to the truth.

The truth of who we are – because it is only in this that the person finds peace and calm and feels at ease with God and with himself. True in the knowledge of ourselves, of our dynamism, but true also in the recognition of the diversity of others, respecting and willingly accepting it. We will attain the ability to encounter the other only to the

extent that we are capable of true interiority. The more we enter into our own depths, the more we will encounter the interiority of the other.

It is necessary and never too late to realize that the path of human maturity is essential to construct true fraternities in the consecrated life. This is absolutely indispensable so that intercultural communities might be “an evangelical prophecy” in a word which tends to become more and more a “common house” and a “family of peoples.” The building of intercultural communities is not an easy undertaking; neither is it something that can be improvised. It requires a solid formation from the beginning. It is utopian to try to form intercultural fraternities with individuals who do not have the sensitivity and the basic elements of a “culture of communion.” Inter-culturality requires a change in mentality and a task of education which must begin from the beginning and be carried out throughout all the phases of formation.

2.2. "THE SERVICE OF AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE" IN THE REALIZATION OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES

“the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk 10, 45)

The recent 2008 Instruction from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life took the service of authority into consideration in an enlightening way. During recent decades we have passed from a rather functional service of authority to a certain underestimation of this service even to the point of almost ignoring it.

Following the example of the Master who washed the feet of the disciples, the one who is invested with authority is invited to take up his responsibility and to undertake the function which he has in service of his brothers. He cannot neglect, or let things be, or flee; his mission is to accompany, to animate, to walk together. It is up to him to help each confrere to discover his potential and the talents he has received from the Lord for the good of all. It is also his responsibility to detect and to know how to deal with all the traps which appear in the confrere and which slow down or often block the path of growth for the community.

In the process which leads to international communities, we see clearly how each level of authority is involved in the search for what the Lord wants. The general administration is requested to respond concretely to important challenges for the future of the Congregation, in light of the charism which Father de Montfort left us as a heritage and which constitutes a gift to transmit with creative fidelity. In constant dialogue with the general level, the administrations of the entities must know how to make wise choices that are thought out and that allow for opening new paths with serenity, enthusiasm and fruitfulness. This often requires some sacrifices of human resources on the part of the entities. They will be made as a gift and a joyful sharing of the riches received from the Lord of the harvest.

Within intercultural communities, the service of the local authority is important. The first duty of someone in authority is to listen, to observe, to guide, and above all to bring to light the presence of the Lord, the Good Shepherd, who knows each of his sheep. In cultivating a personal relationship with each confrere, built on esteem and trust, and in communal sharing and discernment, he will infuse in the community the spirit of obedience to a common plan for mission in which all are called to collaborate because it manifests the will of God and his apostolic mandate.

2.3. CULTURE AND OPENNESS TO OTHERS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all. (Col 3, 9-11)

After a prolonged time of some cultures dominating others, in recent decades we have entered upon an evangelical season of intercultural dialogue which we must accompany and help to grow. But experience also warns us about a temptation that is present a little bit everywhere. Some people rely on traditions, rules and habits, but more out of laziness or a difficulty in being open to new things and out of a lack of readiness to welcome what is different. Other people refer to culture in an inappropriate way, only to defend and justify what really is simply their own will or their inability to be open to the richness of other traditions.

In light of an encounter with the Lord and his Word, we must obtain the inner freedom which allows us to distinguish what is authentic in a culture from what is rather simply an exterior expression. If the presence of God the Creator is hidden in each culture, then He who is a relationship of love will orient each culture to a reciprocal openness and to a sharing of specific riches. So, the encounter of persons from different cultures must put in play a dynamism of life, of communication and of communion, under the sign of giving and receiving, which enriches and causes growth. To remain attached to one's own cultural expression in a rigid way, in an attitude of competition with the other, leads to a cultural ossification which prevents growth and causes fraternity to die.

The path of intercultural communion requires a process of ongoing formation which helps us to go beyond conflicts and which values differences. It is a matter of arriving at a progressive and fruitful openness to diversity, which will then find convergence and unity in a sense of belonging to the same religious family and in the call to the same charismatic mission.

It is good to emphasize what the document "Fraternal Life in Community" says in n° 42: "The presence of religious communities -- which, through a process of conversion, enter into a fraternal life where individuals make themselves available to their brothers or sisters, and where the "group" enhances the individual -- is a sign of the transforming power of the Gospel and of the coming of the Kingdom of God. International institutes in which members from different cultures live together can contribute to an exchange of gifts through which the members mutually enrich and correct one other in the common desire to live more and more intensely the Gospel of personal freedom and fraternal communion".

Seeds to cultivate

- ▶ To live and value the process of establishing international communities in the novitiate and scholasticate as a fulcrum by which to construct the itinerary of the congregation for the coming years, in view of international fraternities for the service of the mission.
- ▶ To go beyond excessive decentralization which has weakened a sense of belonging to the Congregation, in order to see ourselves as a committed part of this great international and intercultural family.
- ▶ To form ourselves in the “culture of communion” which makes us capable of relationships and collaboration with all, in the diversity of cultures and generations.
- ▶ To begin right away the study of languages, with a clear and effective program, in order to value this means of building intercultural fraternities.

3. Intercultural Communities in Fraternity for the Mission

On the theme of fraternity for the mission, as with the other points, I come back to other texts. I would suggest, for example, re-reading the Letter to the Congregation of my predecessor, Father Bill Considine, “Montfortian Apostolic Community” (1996). I want to recall certain fundamental aspects for discernment in the construction of intercultural fraternities in service to the mission.

3.1. CHARISM: A PERSONAL GIFT AND A HERITAGE WHICH UNITES FOR THE MISSION

“Reference to the institute's founder and to the charism lived by him or her and then communicated, kept and developed throughout the life of the institute, thus appears as an essential element for the unity of the community.” (Fraternal Life in Community, 45)

What we are in the Congregation is the result of an encounter between the personal charism of each one and the charism which Father de Montfort left us as a heritage. Out of their harmonious composition flows the apostolic life which characterizes our identity, qualifies our life together in fraternity and guides the elaboration of the common plan for mission.

“Missionary apostolic”: that is the title which Pope Clement XI conferred on Saint Louis Maire during his visit to Rome. Before that, the Saint had undergone a laborious process of searching, made up of doubts and lights, by which the charism matured in him as a gift from the Lord. Strengthened by this apostolic mandate received from the Pastor of the Universal Church, his missionary action became even surer and more coherent, despite difficulties: “to preach missions after the example of the poor apostles.”

The path of intercultural communities, on which we are insisting deliberately, will be possible and fruitful on the condition that it casts light on the charism which unites us. We must not yield to the temptation to save works or structures. On the contrary, it is our duty to open ourselves to the Spirit who urges us on paths which can revivify our specific presence in local churches. The fact that international communities may be the sign of the presence of this gift of the Spirit to his Church makes possible a creative fidelity which opens new perspectives useful to the entire Congregation.

Allow me to underline two dangers, among others, into which we have risked falling and which can easily destroy our ability to live and work together: a generic tendency and individualism. “Genericism” – maintaining a vaguely generic presence, extinguishes enthusiasm and masks the beauty of the specific call of the charism. The duty to keep Montfortian identity alive and up to date is for each one of us a question of loyalty to the Congregation and the Church, and even more towards God himself who wanted us and called us to follow Louis Marie de Montfort. The vocation to religious life is never generic, but always specific. Individualism is a radical temptation which each one of us carries within us and which we often know well how to justify. The risk is to cancel out the orientations connected to the charism for the sake of personal demands, even to the point of completely leaving them aside in life and in apostolic choices. The result is that, instead of serving the charism of the institute, we serve ourselves as well as our tastes and our aspirations. By forgetting our original identity, the force of internal cohesion which unites us and justifies our specific position in the Church of God also begins to disappear.

The current situation places us before a challenge to confront, and, if God wills it, to overcome: the experience lived by the Founder and continued by many brothers in the past must be transmitted, whole and alive, to new generations. International communities are a providential vehicle to realize this passing on of the heritage. They can become the contexts which open new pathways, laboratories for experiments, thanks to the serene integration of diverse mentalities, cultures, social and religious origins.

Today, taking account of concrete human resources, means and structures, of needs and challenges which come to us from our religious family, from the Church and from humanity, it is necessary to define anew our charismatic inspiration. This is the path we have undertaken to follow in preparation for the next General Chapter.



3.2. THE PRESENCE OF MARY ON THE PATH OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Now of all God's creatures Mary is the most conformed to Jesus. It therefore follows that, of all devotions, devotion to her makes for the most effective consecration and conformity to him. The more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus. (TD 120)

The presence of Mary is another reference which gives strength to the process of integrating cultural diversity. In her we are all reborn in Christ her Son. Placed within her maternity it is possible to realize what to human eyes of our time is not easy to imagine or even less easy to believe.

Father de Montfort himself, welcoming Mary as the light and the sure path in the mission of evangelization, confides us to her care: “Liberos: true children of Mary whom she has conceived and begotten by her love, nurtured and reared, upheld by her and enriched with her graces. Liberos: true servants of the Blessed Virgin who, like Dominic of old, will range far and wide, with the holy Gospel issuing from their mouths like a bright and burning flame, and the Rosary in their hands ...” (PM 11-12)

Living the mystery of the Incarnation, which Saint Louis Marie posed as the foundation of our spirituality, will lead us personally and in community to reaffirm each day our availability to God, like Mary: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Lk 1, 38)

In the same way, we are called to discover the salvific action of God in us, despite our weaknesses and limits, in order to build his Kingdom, which is a kingdom of peace and love, factors which are required in every fraternity. Then we too with Mary can sing each day: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (Lk 1, 46).

Rediscovering the presence of Mary in our communities will allow us to have the experience of the disciple whom Jesus loved and who received this heritage at the foot of the cross, just when everything seemed to be lost: “ ‘Behold your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.” (Jn 19, 27). Precisely at the moment of complete self-emptying Jesus became the Lord of Life, “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1, 14), a fullness from which all disciples can draw.

“All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” (Acts 1, 14). The presence of Mary, silent but fruitful, in the upper room at Pentecost, no doubt gave strength, light and courage to the apostles on the point of “going into the whole world [to] proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16, 15). The same presence of Mary in our community, if we are attentive to it with veneration, accompanies us and strengthens us, inviting us to listen to her words addressed in Cana of Galilee: “Do whatever he tells you.” (Jn 2, 5) and to live then the same journey: “After this, he and his mother, (his) brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum...” (Jn 2, 12).

The attitudes of contemplation, listening, prayer, and silent but fruitful presence, which guided Mary, can be the bases on which to construct and inspire our style of community life, especially if these communities are intercultural.

3.3. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES WHICH MAKE THEMSELVES CLOSE TO OTHERS

They will strive to implement faithfully the words which express so well the charity of the great Apostle: I have become all things for everyone. (MR 49)

“*Open to Jesus Christ*”: this exclamation of our Saint, cried out while knocking at the door of a religious community in Dinan, with the weight of a homeless man on his shoulders, is the synthesis of his entire life and mission. Father de Montfort had a heart so radically converted and united to Christ that he followed his footsteps in his love for a humanity that was suffering, sick, sinful but desirous of life.

The fidelity and authenticity of our international communities must be reflected also in another supporting column of the spiritual and missionary commitment of the Montfortian. In a society like ours, dominated by the means of communication which each day defend theses and theories, justify ideological positions or behaviour; we are called instead by free encounters with all human persons, in their suffering and joy, in their spiritual poverty and sin, in their search for meaning in life and in their discouragement, to show them that they are loved, that there is hope, and that the Lord is the one who gives life. The real missionary challenge consists in refusing to exercise the role of a functionary which does not put us in communion with others, and to choose rather to be close to all people, showing them that we have confidence in them, that we have hope and believe in their potential.

Let us look once again at the Lord: his approach to people is the proof of gentleness and not aggression. He does not impose himself, but always seeks to attract, to call and above all to love. He does not judge, does not condemn, but rather he opens, he frees, he saves. It is only with the Pharisees and the Scribes that he speaks in a peremptory and authoritarian tone, because they persist in their arguments, in their own ideas and they easily tend toward exclusion, judgment, and condemnation. It is difficult to enter into relationship with such persons. With this kind of behaviour it would be impossible to travel the path of interculturality.

Once more, it is necessary to stress that concrete love for Christ, hidden in each person, can only grow within a community where the brothers truly love one another and seek to live the beatitudes day after day in a spirit of forgiveness, listening, sharing and profound relationship. The people we encounter want to see that we really believe in the Gospel and that we live it, to the extent that we build evangelical communities where one breathes an air of pluralism and universality.

Otherwise, it will be easy for them to perceive the inconsistencies and contradiction between what we say and who we are and what we really live.

The great challenge then consists in uniting the vocation which comes to us from the Father of all with the witness of life and of fraternity in intercultural living together.

Seeds to cultivate

- ▶ To grow in openness to welcome eventually some proposals to be a part of intercultural communities, by giving them a heartfelt support.
- ▶ To be close to groups of lay associates who live our Marian spirituality, by accompanying them on their journey.
- ▶ To strengthen experiences of life and mission with the entire Montfortian family, on the basis of a common spirituality and through a fruitful exchange of resources, gifts and witness.

Conclusion

Reactions to the perspective of fraternal international communities can be varied. Perhaps because of wounds from the past we feel that it all is rather difficult. Perhaps due to the failure of similar experiences before we consider that it would be utopian to try again and to insist on it further. Or maybe we feel tired or passed over by history and we prefer to remain tranquil, to be left in peace. Or we may even admit that all this is beautiful, but that it is not something easy to achieve.

As far as I am concerned, I want to extend to myself and to you all an invitation: let us look around us and discover confreres and persons whose faces reflect the goodness of a life lived in love. They have followed the Master with such a love that it appears easy for them, if not spontaneous, to open themselves to others and to believe in them. The concrete examples tell us that the path is always possible. Certainly, it passes by way of the cross and of reconciliation. It destroys the walls that we have built: between generations, between young and old, between cultures, between Westerners, Asians, Africans, Latin-Americans; walls between conservatives and progressives, and walls made of so much prejudice. We are called each day to take up the Gospel path of the disciples of Emmaus who, while listening to the Lord had *their hearts burning within them*, and who, after their encounter with him, ran to meet the brothers, filled with happiness.

It is the encounter with the Other and with others, this profound and fraternal relationship which gives true happiness and strength to be united to Him in order to have “life and life in abundance.”

To the extent that our pathways of community and of intercultural communities will become day after day a witness of fraternity, despite their limits, only to that extent will we be able to become once again a significant presence today.

I like to recall what Saint Francis used to say: “Preach the Gospel throughout the world, and, if necessary, use words.” It is by the witness of life that we proclaim the Gospel! Today the path of intercultural fraternities is a sign of the times. We speak of crises on the political, social and economic levels, and we analyze their causes. I believe that the deepest crisis is found in the non-culture of secularism: at all costs it places humanity at the centre and makes it an absolute, completely losing the way of real humanization by refusing to recognize that the image of God is imprinted in us and in

others. In a globalized world which forgets that, our communities are called today to bear this missionary message after the example of the first Christian community which came to live “with one heart and one soul” because they gathered to listen to the teaching of the apostles and to pray (cf. Acts 2, 42-ff). Our communities are called even more to rediscover in the charism of Saint Louis Marie de Montfort the heritage which gathers us around a common plan in service of the Gospel.

Santino Brembilla

S. M. M.

Rome, October 7, 2009
Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary

Fr. Santino Brembilla, S.M.M.
Superior General



Terracotta tiles by Lia Antonucci Capobianco
inspired by the *Prayer for Missionaries*
Ginosa (Taranto – Italy)

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