

"HOW ARE WE TO LIVE?"

TERESIAN COMMUNITY FOR THE CHURCH AND WORLD OF TODAY

"Now, daughters, you have looked at the great enterprise which we are trying to carry out. How are we to live if we are not to be considered rash in the eyes of God and of the world? It is clear that we need to labour hard and it will be a great help to us if we have sublime thoughts so that we may strive to make our actions sublime also" (Way, 4:1).

Introduction

From the very time she gave expression to the enterprise she had initiated with the group of sisters who were her companions in the monastery of St. Joseph, Holy Mother Teresa endeavoured to make them understand the profound significance of their being gathered together in that place. Their simple life which seemed to have little relevance in the midst of the great historical events that were unfolding around them, far from being something private that only touched themselves, was destined to have, in the vision of Teresa and in the fire of love that burned in her heart for God and for the men and women of her day, an enormous relevance.

News of catastrophes, of Christian nations at war with each other, of so many people who lived and died without ever knowing the good news of the gospel, all these things weighed on Teresa's heart. It was in this context that she felt called, together with her sisters, to a mission: the Lord had gathered them together in St. Joseph's "that we live so as to please Him" (Way, 3:1).

At the root to this teresian impulse, there is more than a moral impulse. What Teresa wants is to offer her own life together with others, with love, detachment and humility, so as to contribute, by being united in this way to Christ, to spreading abroad his blessings upon the world and to heal its wounds, wounds that we recognize as our own when we love the men and women who live there as He loves them.

During the Extraordinary Definitory at Ariccia, which brought together the Major Superiors of the Discalced Carmelites and the Definitory, and which was presided over by the Superior General, Fr. Saverio Cannistrá, we sought to make this teresian intuition our own, to translate and actualize it for our time and in the places where we live.

It is for this reason that we have given first place to an examination of our actual situation, basing it on the information gleaned from the visits that the Definitors made in the course of the first part of the sexennium and on the meetings of the various geographical areas; Fr. General, the Definitor with responsibility for the zone and Major Superiors of the different areas all took part in the meetings. This analysis, together with a reflection on the state of the Order presented by Fr. General, and included in this document by a decision of the Ariccia Definitory, serves as a help for dialogue about the path we should follow during the coming years, up until the General Chapter of 2015.

In addition, we dialogued about the ongoing formation projects promoted by the Centre of the Order, about the missions, about the initiatives being taken for the celebration of the 5th Centenary of the birth of St. Teresa, about the situations of the Centres that are dependent on the General Government, and on our relations with the nuns, our sisters.

During the final days of our meeting, we were joined by a number of our Discalced Carmelite Bishops, whose help we asked in order to better understand the service that the teresian Cannel can carry out in the local churches. Besides, our brother bishops were able to share among themselves and with us their concerns and their hopes; together, we experienced fraternity and communion in the same charism that unites us.

In the pages that follow, we share in a more detailed manner the experience of these days. May God grant, through the intercession of St. Teresa, that, as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of the 5th Centenary of her birth, that we continue to deepen and ardently live the way that she indicated, a way of service of Christ, our guest, and, in Him, of the Church and of humanity.

"To go to the very things themselves"

The last General Chapter, as we know, did not produce any document with a programme for the sexennium, but preferred instead to focus on the proposal of re-reading St Teresa, as a preparation for the fifth centenary of her birth. We like to read this decision as a declaration of the need to place ourselves humbly in an attitude of listening to the one whom we recognize as our mother and teacher, so that from her experience and doctrine we can draw the criteria for the journey of our Order at this precise moment in its history.

In fact, for over forty years we have been speaking about the renewal of the Order, of the need for taking up a way of life that would give full motivation to our lives and bring us to the evangelical and charismatic source of our vocation. Nevertheless, we must humbly admit that we haven't yet been truly renewed, although we are changed in so many ways: in the Northern hemisphere (Europe, North America) we have grown older and our presence is becoming less, while in the South we are increasing and the Order is widely diffused. The commitment to the post-conciliar renewal has, no doubt, produced certain fruits which we can in no way undervalue. Today, after a long period of work that lasted almost twenty years, we have a new text of our Constitutions; several serious and valid documents have been elaborated during these last decades; various attempts have been made to stimulate a resumption of the authentic and specific meaning of our teresian vocation.

All this doctrinal richness, however, places even more in the limelight the fundamental problem, namely, poverty of experience and of experiences, which would take seriously and try to put into practice what we have understood, approved, decided. The theoretical and programmatic statements have somehow been metabolized and assimilated without bringing too many changes to our actual lives. In other words, the changes that we have seen come more from outside than from within, more from the variations that are imposed by the historical and social context in which we live, rather than from an internal process, from a series of strategic choices meant to give a new quality and stability to our religious identity,

to our spiritual and community life. This justifies the last General Chapter's humble decision: to go back to the school of St Teresa and allow ourselves to be guided by her on the way that we feel we need to walk, and that after so many efforts, we once again go to the trouble to perceive or, while having glimpsed it, we did not have the courage to truly take it on.

Re-reading Teresa, we note immediately an enormous difference between our way of speaking and what we find in her writings, and as we do also in the writings of St Therese of Child Jesus and St John of the Cross, although in a different manner. From what they have written, their lived experience, the little and the great things that they have experienced on their human journey and in their spiritual and religious lives, are either explicitly or implicitly transparent; it is precisely because of this that what they say is at the same time both original and authoritative. We have often heard repeated in these past years that Carmel favours experience, the experience of God in prayer, the experience of the human person in fraternal life. But when we take decisions, how far have we made use of such experience? Do we put it at the centre? Do we study it? Do we ask ourselves if our experience is teaching us anything? When we refer to the concrete reality of our communities, we often do that only to express moral judgments about them or to propose projects for the future. To put it in more speculative terms, we tend to avoid the actual reality in favour of what we should be (the abstract ideal) or what we could be (what I could do in a future that is more or less remote). It costs us to accept the poverty of the present in order to read what is written in certain life experiences, over and above the fact that we like them or not, and to be able to judge whether they correspond or not to the life style of a teresian-carmelite community, and whether or not they have a future.

This grass-root hermeneutical work, of narrating our experience of sin and salvation, however, is the only possibility we have of understanding where in fact we are going, and where eventually we would like to go to, confronting the forces that cast us adrift. In making a plan for the future that sets out from experience, errors and failures are also, and perhaps, especially, to be valued; for it is from them that we can develop a wisdom of life that is not limited to speaking only of history and the world, but which has known and learnt how to face them. Where are we making mistakes? Why have we made them? These are some basic questions for every human group, which we cannot bypass, if we are not to lose sight of the truth, the truth of reality, and take refuge in a theoretical, ideal, platonic truth. Just as we cannot have peace by avoiding conflicts, but by confronting and overcoming them, so also the truth in history cannot be attained without a continuous process of verification, recognition of error and its correction. The paschal mystery is, in this sense, the revelation of how the good and the true are found in a history that is marred by suffering, sin and death.

We believe that it is possible to apply to our communitarian reality what St Teresa affirms of a single person, namely that we need to set out from "self-knowledge", without which it would be an illusion to hope to make any spiritual progress. In fact, without this humble and attentive consideration of what we really are, we risk making a mistaken evaluation. For example, in one particular area (circonscrizione) or community one could consider the situation to be already sufficiently strong and sound, not requiring, therefore, any help or structural change, because one limits oneself to thinking only of numbers and, by a certain effort of the will, consider the situation to be alright (but one could question: alright for what? to live or survive?) On the contrary, one could think that there is no further hope of change simply because one is not able to see the seeds of new life hidden beneath the type of unease, lack of peace, and sometimes even the depression that is suffered. In some other regions it could happen that one is proud of having big numbers of young friars, without thinking realistically that this could depend on external

changeable factors, and not give sufficient thought to the importance of a solid formation that would transmit to them our identity, if we want a strongly rooted Carmel to continue into the future. We continually experience these errors of perspective, often rationalized and canonized with sociological or theological arguments, and found equally among the friars and the nuns; this is one of the most important experiences that we should like to bring to your awareness and discussion, this difficulty of "going to the very things themselves" as Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein's teacher, used to say.

At the school of Teresa

We need therefore to go to our lived experience, to know it and to work on it. Besides, we are not alone in doing this. Together with our vocation we have also been gifted with an exceptional guide whom we are resolved to listen to systematically during this sexennium. In particular, we have dedicated this year to the re-reading of the Way of Perfection, and probably no other work of Teresa is more apt to reach the aim that we have proposed to this Extraordinary Definitory, namely to trace a route for the coming years that would lead us to a renewed experience of the teresian charism. We seek, therefore, in a simple way and without pretense of originality, to draw out from this fundamental text of Holy Mother criteria and guidelines to trace a realistic and possible route towards a living experience of the charism. We could also call it: a route towards an authentic happiness. The question: "Am I happy?" is decisive when we decide to verify our experience. Teresa, basically, proposes to us only this: a way towards happiness, as she herself says:

"This house is another Heaven, if it be possible to have Heaven upon earth. Anyone whose sole pleasure lies in pleasing God and who cares nothing for her own pleasure will find our life a very good one; if she wants anything more, she will lose everything, for there is nothing more that she can have. A discontented soul is like a person suffering from severe nausea, who rejects all food, however nice it may be; things which persons in good health delight in eating only cause her the greater loathing" (W 13:7).

If we were to express with one word alone the biggest problem of religious life, especially of our Order, today, we could say it is unhappiness or dissatisfaction. This widely diffused sadness and discontentment which often gives a tone to our life and our communities, not only makes us suffer, but takes away the hope and the will to do something to come out of this situation. We risk becoming slothful, of lacking, that is to say, in care of ourselves, of our being, abandoning the helm of our personal and communitarian life. What Teresa said in the text just quoted happens among us too, however much a province or a region might try to offer occasions of ongoing formation and spiritual renewal: it is useless to offer nice food to one who doesn't have an appetite. Hunger may be cured by food, but lack of appetite needs be cured by a change of life, which is certainly more difficult to realize.

We often propose prayer as a remedy to this situation. But even prayer runs the risk of being good food for a stomach that has no appetite, or better, for a psyche that has no appetite. The first extraordinary newness that we find in Teresa is that she does not set out from prayer, but she arrives at prayer. In our documents we usually put prayer first, on the basis of its excellence. Teresa doesn't do so; she follows a practical order: the first in intention is not the first in execution; we could even say that it is the last, especially if by prayer we mean contemplation. Teresa tells us that if we wish to learn to pray, if we really want to make our life a journey of prayer, and vice versa, we must first put down solid existential foundations, for without them prayer does not exist or at least not in the form and way as thought of by Teresa. We all know

from memory the three conditions for prayer according to Teresa:

"The first one is the love that we need to practice mutually; the second is detachment from creatures; the third is true humility which, although mentioned last, is the principal one and embraces the others" (W 4: 4).

One cannot stress sufficiently the centrality of this text to understand the teresian charism. It is a very efficient synthesis of what is really essential to our life, and not even one word can be removed from it or changed. The very order is significant, as Teresa herself notes. Mutual love cannot but be first, both because it corresponds to the fundamental gospel commandment and because the teresian reform is characterized by a particular insistence on the communitarian and familial dimension of religious life. Teresa seems to be telling us that mutual love cannot be founded on sentiments, human sympathies and affinities, and still less on alliances suggested by interests. Love presented by Teresa is a love that flourishes among humble persons, detached from the world: "I cannot understand", says Teresa (W 16,2), "that there can be humility without love and love without humility, just as it is not possible that these two virtues be present in a soul without a great detachment from everything". Humility, therefore, becomes the foundation of the whole edifice and the hinge on which the whole teresian pedagogy turns.

Humility is for Teresa something more than just one among other virtues. She speaks of "true humility", because the humility that she is thinking of is a result of cognitive experience; it is a characteristic condition of one who has encountered the Truth in its twofold dimension: the Truth of God's love and the truth of one's own humanity, poor and wounded, but loved radically, because there is no other reason for such love than the goodness of God. In this sense, humility does not mean lack of esteem towards human beings, but rather is the highway to realize that very lofty vocation to which one is called. Humility is therefore the very condition of Jesus Christ; it expresses his fundamental attitude towards existence. Following Jesus means, therefore, first of all making this attitude one's own: "Have in you the same sentiments which were in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5), that is to say, his self-abasement and obedience in order to share his exaltation. We are dealing then with the "very highest humility", which, while it brings down, it raises up and restores dignity to the person. That is why Teresa, while thinking of "true humility", thinks of it as a sovereign virtue, compares it to the "queen" in the game of chess (W 16:2) and, together with "desasimiento" (detachment), exalts it in triumphant tones:

"Oh, how sovereign are these virtues, mistresses of all created things, empresses of the world, our deliverers from all the snares and entanglements laid by the devil, so dearly loved by our Teacher, Christ, Who was never for a moment without them!" (W 10:3).

One cannot leave out, a little further on in her text, a reference to Mary as the model of this royal humility:

"Let us, my daughters, in some small degree, imitate the great humility of the most sacred Virgin, whose habit we wear and whose nuns we are not ashamed to call ourselves. Let us at least imitate this humility of hers in some degree—I say "in some degree" because, however much we may seem to humble ourselves, we fall far short of being the daughters of such a Mother, and the brides of such a Spouse" (W 13:3).

If we wish to learn from Teresa how to live our carmelite religious vocation we certainly cannot take lightly this point which is so crucial to her. Here we come upon one of the great obstacles that block, or at least render quite difficult, a different experience of life. As one can read in the

Definitory letter of December 2010:

"Today's men and women seek to be controllers of their life, however in Religious Life it is not like that. In responding affirmatively to God's call, we made him our Lord and master, the One to whom we hand over what we are and what we have, so that he can make of us what he seeks".

Humility and obedience are the requirements for great works of God to be realized through us. If we lack this spirit of faith, it is inevitable that we limit ourselves to accomplishing only our own little works. Moreover, while God's work always brings communion and peace, concentration only on our own works leads us to keep ourselves closed in our individual horizon, with the community left marginalized. We think that in this way we are freer and masters of ourselves, but in reality this is only an illusion, proved by the fact that normally we are not at all happy with the choices we make in an individualistic way. We defend these choices as our refuge, as though they were the anchor of salvation, but we obscurely sense that we would lead a far better life if we were to abandon all this and humbly entrust ourselves to the will of God as it is manifested to us through mediations that are proper to religious life: community, superiors, rule and constitutions.

For Teresa, on the other hand, humility is the most solid basis of community life. More than once she repeats that the most profound reason of living in community is the awareness of one's inability to tread alone the way of conformation to Christ, of authentic conversion and renewal of life. "I should like the five of us who at present love one another in Christ to make a kind of pact that [...] we might seek to gather together some time to free each other from illusion and to speak about how we might mend our ways and please God more since no one knows us like others who observe us if they do so with love and concern for our progress." Thus Teresa, in her *Life* (16:7) expresses her need to meet with others, not to walk alone because the risk is greater when we lack the gaze of a friend who is capable of correcting us on our way. In another passage she writes even more explicitly:

"There is so much sluggishness in matters having to do with the service of God that it is necessary for those who serve Him to become shields for one another that they might advance. [...] They need to seek companionship to defend themselves until they are so strong that it is no longer a burden for them to suffer this criticism. And if they don't seek this companionship, they will find themselves in much difficulty. It seems to me this must be why some saints used to go to the deserts. And it is a kind of humility not to trust in oneself but to believe that through those with whom one converses God will help and increase charity while it is being shared" (L 7:22).

In such texts Teresa speaks with extraordinary authenticity and freshness. One can now understand better why she wanted to found praying communities, where people are not strangers, but mutually knowing one another, they would take care of each other's progress. It is a way of being humble when we ask help from others, knowing that they wish our good and that they will do all that is possible to help us. Without this fraternity, where "charity grows by being diffused", it is impossible to make a serious and trustworthy discernment about our future.

Without a community it is inevitable that the spirit of the world and the flesh would prevail. The more we behave in an individual manner, the more our choices, in a more or less explicit way, are conditioned by the needs of the flesh and by the influence of the world. If we remove from our lives the responsibility of building community (whether in a material, or, even more, in a

spiritual sense), all aspects of our religious vocation begin to lose meaning and value. Why do we want to be poor? Why not give ourselves all that we think might turn out to be useful, without judging if it would be a real need or only induced by the consumer society? Why should we limit our freedom of choice and action on the basis of what would benefit the community or be decided by superiors? And above all, why carry the cross of affective solitude, if out of it a deepening of relationships does not result, but on the contrary it seems to be only compatible with a superficiality that suffocates relationships?

The fact of living in community does not automatically mean that we live with the community and for the community. If the community is only a neutral space where one lives and works without characterizing, orientating and profoundly modeling it, it is inevitable that sooner or later we will experience in ourselves feelings of unhappiness and unease. It is something like being a soul without a corresponding body, having an interior identity without the exterior one, words without things. The suffering caused by a tension like this is such that, instead of persevering in the initial commitment, one could decide on renouncing the soul, substituting it with the body that is being presented. Life, then, is no more the one that was freely chosen at the time of our profession, when we had declared that we wanted "to offer ourselves wholeheartedly to this family begun by Saint Teresa". Instead of continuing to try to form a family, we accept, more or less with sadness, that the community is not a family, and consequently, we cannot give ourselves to it with our whole heart. We can certainly live in it, carry out particular task and service, receive benefits, maintain relations; but all that is no longer a family, nor can it become so without an explicitly shared will and desire.

In the measure in which one dedicates oneself to build a community as a family gathered around Jesus Christ, one realizes both detachment from the world and service to the world. Teresa wanted the community to be capable of living not according to a worldly logic, but by one inspired by the Gospel and friendship with Christ, and this precisely for love of the world, because "the world in flames" needed it. Love and service to the world is not possible by prostrating in surrender before the world. A strengthening of our identity is necessary in order to have a relationship of love with the world that is healthy. We need to be ourselves in such a profound and convinced way that we can lose ourselves for the sake of the other. Openness towards the other should go hand in hand with a more profound and convinced rooting of our Christian, Religious and Carmelite vocation. As in the life of the Holy Trinity, our mission is only an expansion, and in a certain sense a deepening of the original relationship of belonging, to which one should constantly return so as not to lose its dynamism.

Tasks for the sexennium

The first chapters of the Way of Perfection are the most original and important pages from the viewpoint of the renewal of religious life, pages where the fundamental intuitions of the teresian reform are concentrated. Behind her words there is a new way of thinking about religious life and Carmel, which constitutes the natural complement of the new vision of prayer and spiritual growth of a person in relation with the humanity of Jesus Christ. The more we fathom them, the more we become aware that the goals which Teresa proposes contain the solutions for the serious internal problems of our life, as well as the possibility of expressing something that has concrete meaning for the modern world.

What are, in fact, our most serious problems? It is not lack of vocations, nor the fact that we are ageing and the shortage of personnel, which for the most part does not depend immediately on

us. Without any doubt, it is the poverty of the formation — both initial as well as on-going — that is offered. Even this deficiency is an effect rather than a cause. Likewise the lack of missionary and pastoral creativity and enterprise (not to mention laziness), which in turn provokes impoverishment of animation and transmission of our charism, is a consequence of a weariness in living our life as religious. The most serious problem, as I was saying, is unhappiness, living our vocation in the teresian Carmel without joy and conviction, not resonating to values and experiences which have inflamed the hearts of Teresa and John and all our saints, as well as the hearts of all our carmelite brothers and sisters who have witnessed to the beauty of living in Carmel. How many people have we known who could express the same sentiment of Thérèse of Child Jesus: "I don't say: if it is hard to live in Carmel, it is sweet to die there; but if it is sweet to live there, it is sweeter to die there" (Derniers Entretiens 12:7.5)?

Thinking of the life of Thérèse of Child Jesus we can rule out the interpretation that the sweetness she speaks about is to be understood in an idyllic sense. It is a profound happiness that coincides with the growth of a person who day by day discovers ever more what it is to be loved by God and to actively enter into this love — and that is sufficient. It is a form of abandonment that pacifies, consolidates and renders a person free to love: "Quien a Dios tiene, nada le falta. Solo Dios basta". But how can we appropriate this growth in our family? How can we propose it once again as the unique goal to attain, which gives meaning again today to becoming a Carmelite? We indicate in what follows some of fundamental guidelines, that emerged during the Extraordinary Definitory, and which can serve as practical orientations that can help restore a sense of motivation to our religious vocation, that can help revive our communities and enable us to find again the courage to go on mission.

1. Acknowledge the truth

We believe that the first irreplaceable step towards a real renewal of our life is to acknowledge the truth, without fear and without being moralistic. We need to learn to look reality in the face, what we actually are, not what we have been or what we say or have the desire to be. How are we constituted both humanly and spiritually, as persons and as communities? What direction are we moving in, and what future awaits us by continuing in this direction? What corrections do we wish and are realistically able to bring to our journey? In this truth, humbly recognized and honestly accepted, the love of God and his grace can work to heal and to liberate us from the obstacles of presumption and superficiality, of laziness and of discouragement.

Let us not delude ourselves into thinking that mature "self-knowledge" can be attained without an assiduous "taking care of ourselves", to which we need to dedicate both time and energy. That which apparently produces no fruit, like the exercise of prayer or the daily commitment to the life of the community, is the privileged ambience in which our being is opened up and revealed, is brought to our awareness, and we are permitted to gradually penetrate its reality. It is precisely in this context that the re-reading of St. Teresa acquires its meaning and its efficacy. Teresa is our teacher in this art, because she has preceded us on this path of exploration of the "interior castle" and she has left us an account of her journey, which is extremely useful for anyone who wishes to undertake the same venture in her wake. The fact that we are re-committed as a family to the re-reading of the writings of Teresa makes these years a *kairós*, a time of opportunity, providential for going to the heart of our vocation and finding again the meaning of this activity focused on what is more internal and profound, and without which our lives would lack foundation.

2. Embrace poverty

We can have this idea of a strong and efficient religious life. The times in which we live help us to purify this image and open us to a vision of our vocation that is more evangelical. In the eyes of today's world, we count for much less; we are marginal, but in this state of marginality an alternative is offered to us: do we think of ourselves as people of the world who are marginalized or are we followers of Jesus, of "a marginal Jew", as he has been called? What is the deeper and more profound meaning of Carmelite life? It is not about carrying out great works and it is not about taking leading roles either on the church or world stage. We need to look to other images, other icons. Teresa gazed on Nazareth, on the Holy Family, or on Bethany, on the house of the friends of Jesus, the places where Jesus did not feel alone and could rest, knowing that he was loved. These are poor places, hidden and unknown to many, but luminous and warm because of the quality of the welcome and relationship. This is generally the way it is in the homes of the poor: simple and without a lot of material goods, but open to the other, to the guest, ready to share with him/her all that they are able to. Can we succeed in grasping the meaning of Nazareth and Bethany for our brothers and sisters today? Will they find among us poor surroundings and rich hearts? Simplicity in what we do, and amiable faces? Or will they find us too occupied with our work, or, too stressed out on account of our ministry?

3. Risk going on mission

One of the most beautiful and visible signs of the radicality of the choice of religious life has always been the readiness to depart, to leave what is known and secure to go to what is unknown, forgetting one's own needs and preoccupations to concern one's self with the needs of the other. Without this missionary tension, we can no longer speak of religious life, and much less of contemplative life. Today there is a general tendency to withdraw ourselves: those who are older, because their age does not allow them to confront what is toilsome and unknown, and, those who are young, because of the fragility and insecurity that is often a characteristic which leads them to seek refuge and protection. In this situation, however, we risk death by suffocation. Certainly to risk going on mission today signifies, even more than in the past, making a choice in faith, but it is precisely this that we are in need of: to learn how to live by faith, not human security. We know that the only evangelical way of finding life is to lose it, but at the very time we are asked to make courageous decisions, we allow ourselves to be influenced by considerations of another kind.

At the Definitory Meeting, many made the point that to remain enclosed within the boundaries of one's own Province or area would compromise the development of the Order; the effort to save one's existence runs the risk of depriving ourselves of a future. The need was felt for a new mentality that would take to heart Teresian Carmel as a whole by overcoming attachment to the particular, to the egotistical focus on the interests of one's own monastery or area to the detriment of the common good. Therefore, new forms of collaboration and restructuring of our presences are to be encouraged, the implementation of which could restore meaning and missionary dynamism. Beginning with initial formation, we ought to educate our young "to go beyond frontiers", opening themselves to communion with the Order as a whole and to the courage needed for mission, with its challenges and its riches.

4. Take on the responsibilities of government

Among the tasks for the sexennium, the responsibility of those who are called to the service of authority and government comes into play in a decisive manner. What is the meaning and what are the implications of governing an area, or, the entire Order today? What is it that we can justly expect of a local superior, provincial or general? There are two basic dimensions in governing a religious community, which should integrate and complement each other. The first dimension could be defined as "juridical and administrative", that is to say, the management of realities entrusted to us according to universal and particular laws. The Major Superior is, in this sense, the one who fulfills a variety of institutional requirements ranging from provision of offices and the constitution of communities, to the execution of chapter decisions and of pastoral visits, to economic management and disciplinary provisions. All this is no small thing and a good management of all these areas is essential to the welfare of an area. It is necessary to honestly observe that quite often our superiors do not have a profound knowledge and experience of law, neither of Canon Law nor of our Constitutions and Norms. In a certain sense, it is normal that until one is called to exercise the responsibility of government, one remains with a superficial knowledge of the law. But, from the moment a person assumes office, one must put more commitment into studying and consulting the Code of Canon Law and our Constitutions; otherwise one runs the risk of often sinning "in deed and omission".

Then there is what can be called the pastoral and formative dimension. Here the question of applying norms or putting them into practice does not come up: we need to listen to the Word of God and allow ourselves be moved by the Spirit. To govern becomes a theological exercise of faith in God who is present and living with us, of love and searching for the true good of the brethren, of hope in a history of salvation that continues, touching our lives now. Only this attitude of faith, hope and charity can give us the courage to face difficult choices, and the strength to resist the temptation to prudently withdraw to positions that maintain the status quo; the same attitude is necessary to cope with criticism, as well as the failures and inevitable errors that occur in any process of change. Fulfilling one's obligations as Major Superior is really a serious task; it is for this reason that our law foresees that it not be compatible with any other office. One needs to dedicate time, energy and commitment to it. The role of the local superior, too, cannot be reduced to a job without responsibility, to be put towards the end of a more or less long list of commitments, or, to tell the truth — fortunately, in a limited number of cases — to be exercised on certain occasions for one's personal benefit.

5. Restore research in the area of spiritual theology

For the teresian Carmel, reflection on the spiritual life is not a secondary or purely academic fact. It is the cognitive and cultural dimension that accompanies a life of prayer, as evidenced in the writings of our Saints. They continually reflected on their lived experiences, asked questions and found answers, and in that way developed their understanding of the faith. We have a particular need today of that kind of research, "to translate the hope of the Gospel in a way that it can be put into practise".¹ At a time when the whole church is facing the task of a "new evangelization", we have a responsibility of making our own specific contribution which flows from our charism and is an integral part of our mission, as our legislation also underlines in a number of places (cf.

¹ Synod of Bishops, *New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith. Outlines*, Vatican City 2011, 37.

C 100-101, N 53-55, 111, 120).

We need to update our centres of study, and in a particular the Teresianum, actualizing the necessary generational renewal and encouraging our students to take up the study of spiritual theology. New methods, a new language, new forms of communication with contemporary culture need to be found, and this cannot come about without activating a deeper debate within the Order about these themes.

6. Share the charism with our sisters and with the laity

A deepening of our relationship with the nuns, our sisters, and with associated laity, in particular the Secular Order, is to be part of the overall renewal. The weakening of these relationships, or, reducing them simply to pastoral services, effectively impoverishes our identity by losing sight of the fact that we are united by sharing the same charism. In fact, to live an authentic brotherly relationship with the nuns and with the laity means drawing strength and stimuli for growth in the aspects of the teresian carmelite vocation that are closest to us, friendship with the Lord Jesus and loving care of the community, whose centre He is. It is in this climate of sharing and of deep unity, in the complementarity of the gifts received and of the different ways of building up the church, that Teresa wanted her Carmel to increase and develop as a joyful community in which the relationship with Christ did not take from, but rather strengthened the humanity of each one and molded it as a member of that same body.

A teresian community for today's world

In conclusion, all the tasks listed above aim at but one thing, to **form communities that can be places of authentic human and spiritual growth and that are radiant with the truth and beauty that are experienced within them.** If this does not take place and the communities are mere "transit places" where everyone goes their own way, where the centre of gravity is elsewhere, then we cannot possibly consider this an unavoidable evil, nor is it possible to accept it as a lack which is compensated for by other riches at the pastoral, social or intellectual level. This is the articulus stantis vel cadentis Carmeli, that is to say, if Carmel is to remain what Teresa had in mind and brought about, it depends on this; otherwise, it becomes something else.

Naturally, "community" in the teresian sense means something very specific. It is a way of being which requires a profound re-orientation of the person in the threefold sense indicated by Teresa, namely of fraternal love, of detachment from the world and of humility. Without these there is no community in the teresian sense. There may be a community where people work together, live amiably, commit to a monastic life style, but not a community of people united in the friendship of Jesus Christ as conceived by Teresa. It is something very simple and poor, but at the same time something very profound and engaging. We know that in the history of Carmel, especially in the male branch, this model has been easily lost sight of and replaced by something that was apparently more "useful" and "characteristic".

We cannot avoid this challenge: to realize Carmel as Teresa wished it to be, translating into practice her fundamental intuitions. This means in the concrete, to opt for community, a community life which can be a synthesis and visible sign of a new way of being: that of persons centered on a relationship with Jesus Christ. Let us first of all look for a teresian community and all the other things shall be given over and above (cf Mt 6:33). In particular, we shall be given a future which the Lord has promised us and for which, with the help of God and the intercession of Mary, our Mother and Sister, we will not grow weary in our hope.