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## Towards the Prophecy of Communion

Reflection by Fr. Miguel

### **Introduction**

The next General Chapters of the Poor Servants Brothers and Sisters are asking our Calabrian Family to reflect, deepen and give concrete form to the theme *“The Prophecy of Communion”*.

I wish to share with you some reflections that may help us to tune in to the great call to live a true and prophetic fraternal communion. I do this with my heart because I am sure that communion is not built with theories but by letting us be taken into by the Spirit, which makes us one body and one spirit.

Fr. Calabria, in his First Rules written for his collaborators, has given them the key we need in order to fulfil any mission to announce the Charism: *“Above all regard each other as brothers, and as such love and help one another, especially in the spiritual life”*.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, in many of his writings, he always reminded us the themes of unity, communion and fraternity as concrete expressions of God’s Paternity.

I walk with enthusiasm along the path that the Delegations and the Missions are making in this period of preparation of the Chapter, trying to involve many people. I read the various reflections that the religious are sending and sharing on this theme.

With this letter, I feel I can also contribute to what the Holy Spirit is raising and to what since the beginning I tried to understand and to propose to the Opera in the historical moment in which we live.

In this reflection I will refer to the synodal method, to the foundation of every communion, and to the areas in which we have to live our communion concretely.

### **1- A synodal method**

The first thing that comes to mind when we speak of communion in the journey of the Church, of the Congregation, of the Calabrian Family and of every group, is that of *“walking together”*. To walk together is not so easy, and there are so many ways to do it. One of these ways that more expresses collegiality is the synodal method.<sup>2</sup>

The synodal method chosen for the preparation and the celebration of the XII General Chapter of the Congregation of the Poor Servants of Divine Providence has already placed us *“into*

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. John Calabria – *Holy Rules*, September 23, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> International Theological Commission: *La Sinodalità nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa*, no. 1. «The journey of synodality is the journey that God expects from the Church of the third millennium» [Pope Francis, October 17, 2015: AAS 107 (2015) 1139.] no. 7. “... the concept of synodality calls for the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church.”

In order to deepen the meaning, the biblical and theological foundation, and the pastoral dimension of “synodality” I indicate the Document of the International Theological Commission: LA SINODALITÀ NELLA VITA E NELLA MISSIONE DELLA CHIESA.

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_it.html)



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*the Chapter*” through the mutual listening, a listening of every single reality of the Calabrian Family.

From the moment when we, the General Councils of the PSDP Brothers and Sisters, the Delegates, and the Superior of Mission, got together to pray in the spiritual exercises last March, we have shared our reflections and have identified in the light of the Holy Spirit the theme and modality of the next Chapter and the future General Chapters. From that moment we were thrilled and amazed, aware that it was not us, but the Holy Spirit that showed us this direction. We have experienced the synodality in placing ourselves in the attitude of mutual listening and attention to our diversities, in the attitude of discernment of the signs and of the paths that the Spirit allowed us to do for some time as Calabrian Family. Hence, we recognize as a fruit of this experience the choice of the theme and the orientation that we decided to give to the preparation and the realization of the General Chapters of our Congregations.

After the letter of call for the Chapter, every Delegation and Mission started listening to the Calabrian Family in order to bring out the richness of the charism through the *narrative method* (for those who chose this way), and to make known how it is lived and handed on to different realities. This gave to all the opportunity to grasp how vivid and significant is the charism, and to recognize it as a gift of God, as a reality within us, so that we can feel it as “ours” and as a source of inspiration for our life and choices. It is also a charism which is communicated to and lived by many vocations (religious brothers, priests, sisters, and laity) and cultures. This mutual listening makes us closer in sharing what we hold most precious, namely, our Charism.

In a second moment, following the *analytic method* (applied by some from the beginning, while others are taking it in this second phase of preparation) we are called to make an analysis of strengths and critical points, without fear of bringing up problems and difficulties, because we are aware that we carry the richness of the Charism in the fragility of our people and structures. As St. Paul puts it, “*we carry this treasure in vessels of clay*” (2 Cor 4: 7). While, on one hand, all these problematic and negative aspects reveal some immaturity in our life and an opportunity of growth, on the other hand, they are transformed and reformulated into desires of change, hypothesis of solutions, and stimuli to find new directions with concrete proposals of choices and actions.

Every Delegation and Mission, by involving, listening, and sharing with the Calabrian Family, is already living “*its Chapter*”. This process is already an expression of communion, which later will be reported to the pre-Chapter assemblies. There, the inspirations of the Spirit will be gathered into a document that, first of all, will serve every Delegation and Mission. Then, all the documents will be sent to the central commission that will summarize them into a “*synthetic document*”; this is the document that the Chapter will hold as a fruit of all the contributions, and, at the light of the Holy Spirit, through discernment, will identify the operational indications for next sessennium. The synodal method is helping and will still help us listen, share and discover the gift we have received, the Charism that animates our life and our choices to be prophets of communion today.



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### **Foundation of communion**

Communion is a prophecy for the present times since it has the *roots up*, in the bosom of the Trinity which is by nature a “communion in Love”. The Easter Gospel and the Charism that flows from it are the foundations of our communion. To this source, we shall now turn our eyes. The prophetic strength of communion lies in the Easter of Jesus that began a new experience of fraternity. Detached from this source, our efforts of communion and our reflections become sterile and have no foundation.

Let us allow ourselves to be enlightened by the Word of God to deepen the true meaning of communion and let us understand how it can become prophecy today within the Church, the Calabrian Family and in our relationship.

In the New Testament, the term most used to speak of communion is “*Koinonia*”. In the Gospels, and particularly in the Pauline Letters, we find several references and nuances about what communion is. The very clear aspect in various texts is that in many occasions communion has been put in danger (Mt 18: 1-14; Rom 12: 4-21).

In the early Christian communities, from the “ideal” community of the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 2: 42-47) to the daily life in communities, we find the labor, the challenges, and the complexity of relationships (cf. Mt 18: 15-21; Rom 16: 17-18; Gal 2: 11-14).

The New Testament offers us many elements that enlighten our call to live communion in the Church and in the reality of the Calabrian Family today, and help us not to fall into temptation of idealization or rationalization of fraternal life, thinking of communion as something that can be theoretically programmed and implemented with our simple human effort.

Jesus has prayed for the unity of his own. The prayer of Jesus “*may they all be one*” (Jn 17: 21) reminds us that communion is a central theme for the life of the disciples. Not (to be one) because we are all similar and must think the same way. Communion becomes essential when diversity is there. To speak of communion, therefore, means to speak of diversity. We must seek communion that enriches and not the unique thought that impoverishes us.

I wonder: why is the theme of communion so present in the New Testament and among the early Christian communities? The experience of nascent Christianity was plural. This plurality required dialogue, meeting, and critical approach of different positions so as to prevent the legacy of Jesus being witnessed in a fragmented and contradictory way. But the fundamental reason why the community born of Easter has communion as its characteristic, is because it is called to be an incarnation of the communion that is in God. By welcoming this communion as paschal gift, we receive the ability to compose and harmonize the differences that characterize us (as also the Trinity is plurality). Sharing the same Charism of communion, we realize that our differences are harmonized in the one communion. The experience of communion that reaches us first, highlights our differences not so much as separation, division or split... but as an opportunity to build and to manifest communion.

I take some verses from the heart of Jesus’ prayer (Jn 17: 11b-21) that give us some important element to consider:

**“*May they be one as we are one...*”**. The source of communion is the Trinity. Jesus proposes the highest model of communion: the Trinitarian Love that exists among the Divine Persons.



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**“May they have my joy ...”.** Communion is not an end in itself, rather it leads us to God. In unity and communion, God communicates to us a joy that nobody can take away from us. The Apostle John reminds it to us, *“that you may have perfect joy”* (1 Jn: 1). The fruit of communion is joy, a joy that makes us live as sons and daughters loved by God.

**“The world and the forces contrary to the life of communion”.** The unity makes us strong against the division that comes from the world. The world, in an evangelical sense, cannot hand on unity and communion, because (in the world) there are opposing forces that destroy unity and communion. Jesus reminds us in his prayer that his own are not of the world, but they live in the world, that is, even though we are in the world we cannot let us be overwhelmed by the spirit and the strength of the world that divides because of individualism. We cannot operate in unity and communion with the mentality of this world.

**“Holiness is the expression of unity”.** Jesus in his prayer speaks of holiness, *“consecrate them in unity”*. In sanctification, there is a cohesion of the community. The spiritual director often repeated to Fr. Calabria: *“Sanctify yourself, and the whole Opera will be assured”*. The path towards holiness that we are invited to take in our life, keeps us in unity and communion with the Father and among us. A holy life creates unity in the diversity of the persons and of different vocations.

**“May they be one, and live in unity, and the world shall believe”.** The prophecy of communion has as its goal the testimony to the world, so that the world may believe. By offering the prophecy of communion, we propose a way of being and living that gives testimony to the world of the Father’s love.

This legacy that Jesus left to his disciples is alive and present, particularly for us, the members of the Calabrian Family, called to witness to the world the Paternity of God.

Therefore, it seems to me that we can seize in this passage of the priestly prayer of Jesus and in the New Testament in general, some fundamental characteristics of communion and unity that I will express through the following ten points:

- 1- Communion is not a doctrine to learn by studying; it is rather a life experience. We must live it.
- 2- Communion presupposes diversity. It is impossible to dream and plan a journey of communion, being inspired by the idea of uniformity.
- 3- Communion permeated the life of Christian communities. It was the great challenge of then and of today.
- 4- Communion does not have only a horizontal dimension (relationships among us). On the contrary, it has originally a vertical dimension (the relationship with the Father) which constitutes its true foundation and its vital source.
- 5- Love (*agape*) is the key of communion. Without a kind of love that gives life, there is no communion.
- 6- Communion is never ended. It is always a call waiting for an answer, a mission. It is a gift that never runs out... because the gifts of the Lord never expire. That’s why we are called to be *builders* of community and not only *consumers*.



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- 7- Communion is a mystery. It takes great patience and perseverance to find it without getting discouraged.
- 8- Communion has its origin in God, in the Trinity. Only from him we can obtain true unity and communion.
- 9- Communion is built day by day, through concrete initiatives, and with reciprocal exchange of values. *Today I start again.*
- 10- Communion is celebrated and expressed in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is at the center of communion as its primordial source. A community that does not live the Eucharist does not live communion. In the Eucharist, fraternal communion is born and develops; it becomes prophecy so that the world may believe.

It is fundamental for us, members of the Calabrian Family, to follow these key points to learn our communion, and then to start our journey listening to one another and go on with the process that the Chapter invites us to take on. This is the “new breath” that the wind and the fire of the Holy Spirit are bringing to our Family, our communities and our structures... The call to “prophecy of communion” is addressed to the whole Calabrian reality, since it is a reality born of a Charism, which is expressed in our relationships, our choices, and also in our structures and activities. If the latter does not express our Charism, if they do not let themselves be renewed by the new wind of Communion, they lose the reason of their existence. Then, the activities, too, must draw from the source and become “prophecy of communion”.

In the knowledge, deepening, experience and communication of the charism we find strength for unity among us. This is the sap that circulates within us, like in the tree which grows and bears fruit. If we focus on the charism, first of all, unity and communion come as a consequence. We are different, but united by the same charism and the same gift that God has given us by calling us to take part in this Opera. To be a member of the Calabrian Family is a gift, as Fr. Calabria reminded us, *“you who have the grace to belong to this Opera”*. But God uses intermediaries to make the Opera known and loved. Today we realize more than ever that all of us, religious brothers and sisters, and laity are entrusted with the responsibility to be intermediaries so that the charism may be lived, known and handed on. It is a great responsibility!

The intuitions of Fr. Calabria are gifts of God. They are like a spring that never runs out and from which we can always draw water. They will remain always open, as he said: *“The Opera is for the present time”*.

We are challenged by the historical context in which we live. The last General Chapters made a strong effort to discover ourselves as Calabrian Family. Besides, we are touched by the various provocations of the Church through the figure and magisterium of Pope Francis. All these stimuli push us to take resolutely those new roads that open us up to communion of all the Calabrian Family, as one body called to realize the same charism and mission.

### **3- Three areas where we are called to grow in communion**

From the Trinitarian and Charismatic source of communion, some concrete aspects come to make communion visible, so that it may become a credible prophecy for the present time. I





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would like to point swiftly three areas where communion can be realized, to which we should pay particular attention in this process of conversion:

**The first area** to take care of, with love and truth, is the ***communion inside our communities*** and our fraternal relationships. The journey we have started certainly pushes us towards new relationships with our brothers and sisters, placing our relationships at the center as indispensable path of communion. At the same time new relationships become a testimony like that of the early Church that made the pagan say: *“See how they love one another!”*

**A second area** is about ***communion of the Calabrian Family***; it means to feel and recognize ourselves as a family born of a charism; all belonging to the same spirit that circulates within us as a gift which we have received. This is the journey we have begun. It now binds all of us and helps us to recognize ourselves as one family in diversity, in the different ways of belonging, and in the variety of cultures, in order to hand on the one charism that generates communion among us, as a sap circulating within each one of us. This is our richness and the strength of our unity.

**A third area**, not less important, is ***communion in the mission of the Opera***. It means to live and spread the Charism through the activities, expression of our spirituality and evangelizing mission. All our activities have the goal to announce the charism, and this is a mission for all, religious brothers and sisters, and laity. Communion helps us rediscover collegiality. It is not only a strategy for a better organization of our activities, as to give them cohesion and continuity. It is, above all, a kind of collegiality to communicate the spirit of the Opera, in such a way as to realize our mission in the world.

All this includes a long journey of formation, of mutual listening, of sharing and of transformation, and of placing at the center the source of every communion and unity for the life of all.

## **Conclusion**

It would have been an illusion to think that the renewal of our experience of communion about the spirit of the Opera can be a work planned in the office, according to the criteria of any human organization. The same words of Fr. Calabria remind us very clearly that: *“The Opera is God’s”*. The Holy Spirit involves us in this journey of mutual listening, and pushes us to seek new ways to express with current language the beauty of the charism which we have received. It is a Charism that does not need to be “updated” because it is always present. It consists only of the Gospel. It never expires... However it needs to find always new forms and places to be expressed, in life, language and structures...

We felt challenged and urged to take this path that I consider inspired by the Holy Spirit, in order to share and to seek together this realization (the preparation of our Chapter) in a synodal and collegial way.

We do not know where this journey will lead us; and this is a very good thing. As it happens with the works of God, we need to be very open to his inspirations, to grasp the fascination of what we have in our hands. We are invited to look at this in amazement.



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In my opinion, to undertake a journey of synodality, collegiality, and communion, we need to pray a lot to the Holy Spirit, and to try to avoid every individualistic tendencies and selfishness, to walk together in diversity with one goal and horizon, that of the Opera.

It is a great grace and a great responsibility. I wish all of you a good journey in communion towards the Chapter.

United in prayer

Fr. Miguel Tofful

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