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"Don Calabria, prophet of communion"

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Il "Collegino" (the small boarding house), is a kind of port, a lifeline for many, on the outskirts of Rome. Primavalle and Torre Angela were the houses built directly by the masons, by the builders who built Rome, who during the weekend they went to build the house, thanks to the savings they raised the house little by little, in one or two years working now and then as it happened, making use of of the help of their relatives.

Primavalle was the working class suburb of Rome that began to arise in the late 1920s - early 1930s, and was supposed to house displaced people from the " Spina di Borgo", the current street, Via della Conciliazione. It was outside Rome, but is now almost in the center because in the meantime the city has expanded. There we do find the presence of Don Calabria, whose Institutions represent a port of humanity, of many human shipwrecks, especially of many drug victims, from all over the city outskirts. The drug was a terrible tyrant, a terrible drug "Herod" that killed so many kids. We must also think that today too little is being done against this "Herod", people thinks that we are used to it, because we no longer see the obvious fruits, the syringes, the deaths on the street, but it still reaps many victims. The drug has become trivialized today.

I really thank for the invitation and I believe that Don Calabria has given his Charisma to many people. Here is a first observation while I think of him as a prophet of communion. Don Calabria has encouraged many saints, let's say he was a saint who helped many saints. This struck me; many used to write to him, while some of them he used to write to, in a mutual help that is not at all obvious. Because sometimes even among us Christians, we help little each other.

Among the Veronese religious I dealt with in Rome, there are the Daughters of Jesus, who are in Torre Angela. In Bologna in this time, I have met the Sisters of the Holy Family: the



Veronese presences accompany me! There Was a woman at Caritas who always worked alone, and I asked her: "Sorry but why are you alone"? She answered: " because I do first and I do better", and she has been left alone. Feared, perhaps yes, she managed to do earlier, but it is not said that she did better this way.

Holiness is not an individual improvement

Don Calabria gave his holiness to many, encouraging, comforting, reassuring and also supporting each other, even in this he really gave a great example. Because what we are, that's to say our holiness, is not an individual improvement, which it would be like saying: I am sure, I become a saint, it is all an individual problem, then the others are the object of my individual improvement. Because in order to be a little perfect individually we must practice good works and therefore the others are an object. But this is not holiness! It is individual perfection.

I believe that here Augusto Barbi (and I say this with a lot of admiration for the biblicist he is) can explain to us what holiness means in Scripture, or what the invitation to holiness means, because God is holy. But it certainly is not an individual improvement! It is not an individual improvement! Don Calabria helped many people over and over again,, his correspondence shows it us. You don't know the long list of saints who had a point of reference in Don Calabria. When we make our holiness something individual, I believe that we take it away from others, and we are a little less holy.

I will shortly read a quote from a very important document of Pope Francis "Gaudete et Exultate", a document in which Pope Francis invites and indicates holiness. With this in mind, I anticipate that in my opinion it is the man and the woman, the common Christians, who must live the Evangelii Gaudium.

Evangelii Gaudium is the great prospect that Pope Francis offers us, pastoral and missionary conversion, in which communion is never turning back on ourselves.



Communion is not a condominium

Many times we risk, with the discourse of individualism, understanding the communion as a condominium (always using a vocabulary from Pope Francis). Communion is not a condominium, but a single heart and a single soul. In my house when I tried to make an condominium, I think that my mom like all moms, told us that phrase (which then annoyed me a lot, but it helped me a lot): "This house is not a hotel"! Communion is not a hotel with some spaces, nor a condominium, most of the time with some difficulty of regulation, but communion is one heart and one soul. When communion becomes a comdominium, the world moves away. On the contrary, if we live the communion and live it intensely, the world opens up. Because communion and mission are like the heart, of which they are respectively systole and diastole. Because I believe, even if I'm not a cardiologist, that if there were only systoles, we would hear an explosion. If the communion is only within ourselves, it becomes bulimic or gets sick, always to take up Pope Francis' vocabulary. We get sick. If we stay closed we get sick. If communion does not live it transforms itself, degenerates, becomes a role. Why are you so angry with careerism? If communion is reduced to the use and consumption of the idolatry of the self, that is, it must be good only for me, I must be well, it is deformed.

Don Calabria "Curate of the world"

For Don Calabria, communion and the world, communion and the poor, his friends and hospitality, attention to others, were the same thing. It was the two movements of the heart, systole and diastole, in order that the heart could function well. And he called and sent, like Jesus. He built communion and in this communion involved everyone. I was struck by one of the definitions of Don Calabria, I think that since the beginning of the Opera, they used to say he was: "The Curate of the world". The idea struck me and I believe that all of us priests, just all of us, we must consider ourselves like Curate of the world. Communion extends borders, goes beyond them, because we must be brothers and sisters, we must have one heart and one soul, we must love each other.

If it's okay, we can do some solidarity, and sometimes we are happy that someone remembered us, came to visit us, when we were sick. But many times we are not accustomed to communion, which does not shock us if some of our brothers do not come



to visit us, but we do not give up on this either. I remember that, while making a pastoral visit, talking about communion in a parish, at one point one person stood up and told me: "Listen, I agree with everything, it is a shame, that when my son was sick, nobody came to help me! ": he was right. Communion is not a declaration of principle in our life.

Don Calabria was a curate of the world, a man with a great ability to build, very attentive, he remembered everyone's name, one who has woven relationships, who remembered everyone, even in correspondence. In the names we say he built communities, as if to say: putting name on name. He did not set up a great institution, or rather in some ways it has become it, but name by name, as communion should be.

The sacrament of the service

For this reason, I think that we live far too little what is the greatest gift, and it is one of the greatest concerns of Our Lord. He spent a lot of time trying to teach us to love one another. He recommended: "love one another!", And he showed us how to do it! The testament is, so to speak, the Eucharist, but there is another sacrament, Augusto Barbi explains it well, which is the sacrament of service, the sacrament of the brother. Remember: in the Gospel of John there is no remembrance of the Last Supper, because there is the "Washing of the feet", to say how important it is! To say that it is the love of the Lord that is broken among the brothers who love one another, who bend over each other, who make each other's servants. This is the communion! Let's do it! Despite we make a great effort. Our communities are likely to be a large religious wellness supermarket.

True religious wellbeing is not to feed God, but to open God to us, to let him enter us. True wellbeing is learning to love, starting with the brothers, starting with the brothers whom the Lord gives us as such. In this sense, Giovanni Calabria was a true prophet of communion. We see today the religious who seem to make a different life from the ordinary, the religious are men and women who try to live together.

One of the great insights in my opinion of Don Calabria is that it involved many people, in some ways practically all those he met in this tie of communion. Losi also reads in the Sisters of the Opera: you must pour yourselves all together, in a very large communion! If we remove the veil and the religious habit, all those of Don Calabria that I have known are not exactly distinguished one from another very well. They are men who try to love each



other, who love each other, who live a communion with each other, the more they live among them, the stronger they are also in living it with others. In my opinion Don Calabria was truly a prophet of communion!

Communion is not an optional

In our world where there is idolatry of the self, communion is the Lord's answer for all generations, even in ours. The first boys that Don Calabria loved, through his love he made them people, tore them from anonymity, from being one... among many. Communion does just this, and also snatches people from individualism; this is the strength of communion, which inserts everyone into a circularity. Communion is not a totalitarianism, the totalitarianism in which you pool yourself with the others, in storage, for a greater good. As a matter of fact, communion has never gone much in fashion inside the Church, but the Gospel, always forcing us to love each other, makes love give value to the other. You don't love a person for ideology, you just love him and that's that! So this goes beyond ideology itself. Perhaps in the past there has been a very strong emphasis on self-sacrifice, sacrifice, self-loss, so basically you had to cancel yourself for communion. We think that we now suffer the opposite excess: nowadays we bend everything in favour of the self.

On the contrary, in Don Calabria there has been a very human communion, very attentive to one another, very full of respect, and at the same time justly full of self-denial. Because if I am at my house, if I feel at home, if I feel loved, I do everything to help others. If I practice self-sacrifice but not communion, it means that I lose myself, that I cancel myself. Communion does not cancel us, it makes us be ourselves, but not alone. If I bend the communion to feed my ego, the communion becomes only a condominium, and in the end it becomes completely annoying.

Is communion also reduced a little to democracy?

Sometimes we have the temptation to reduce communion, and a little also the structure of the Church, to a kind of democracy. The Church is much more than a democracy. In my house there was no democracy, there was communion, it is another thing, my mother commanded, as in most families. In the sense that communion, and the paternity from which it derives, is fundamental.



In this world torn by wars and violence, wounded by a widespread individualism that divides human beings and sets them against one other to pursue their own well-being, I believe that Christians of all communities can live the testimony of fraternal communion (this is *Evangelii Gaudium*) that becomes attractive and luminous. May everyone admire how you take care of one other, how you encourage one other, how you accompany one another: "From this, everybody will know that you are my disciples" (John 13:35), and "that you are all in one, so that the world could believe."

We are in a world wounded by a widespread individualism that divides human beings to pursue their own well-being. You are not comfortable alone, you are not comfortable alone, here it is! I have the impression that lay fraternity no longer exists. Our risk is that we reduce it to a symbol, an acronym, to a small common area of reassurance, and not 'one heart and one soul'. In the secular world there is very little fraternity left. Fraternity in the proper sense that make us thinking that he is my brother. For us, fraternity has a religious value, it is our neighbor, it is the greatest indication that unites the three great loves: for God, for our neighbor and for myself. Beautiful solution that resolves the opposition between the love for myself and that for others, but fraternity is required to everybody. But there is too little fraternity in the secular world.

It is impossible to believe if we stay alone. Faith is not just an individual option, it is not an exclusive relationship between our ego and his. Following its nature, it opens up to others, it always takes place inside the communion of the Church. When faith becomes an individual fact, we have to worry a lot. Because faith is not even internal, I think, I think we really become men with a true interiority (not with a faith from mere religious belonging or reduced to an external symbol) when we live in communion. Faith is much more personal if we live the communion, it is external when we live it in an individualistic way. What I read is contained in *Lumen Fidei* at n. 39, which is the only two-handed encyclical, written by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

The Man needs the love of a mother

The man, said Don Calabria, needs the love of a mother. For him, the house in which he welcomed the shipwrecked was not an aseptic emergency room, it was a real house: man needs the love of a mother.



Communion is actually thinking about the Church and our living the Church as a family. We have insisted very much, with such importance, on the family as a domestic Church. The results perhaps did not reward so much insistence, judging by some difficulty of the family. The world, individualism, fragility and many other reasons have not allowed it. We will have to insist, as it was for the years immediately after the Council, that the Church is domestic, that the Church is family. Man needs a mother, a family, a community. The Church is also a great institution of course, but if it loses its domestic dimension, we no longer like it. And I believe that Don Calabria left this great intuition that we need a mother, and gave us a home. Someone, in the years immediately following the Council, sometimes celebrated the Mass at home. Why? To understand how the Church was a domestic reality. And basically the houses of Don Calabria, are this, they wanted to be this basically, a family reality. A domestic church, a Church that lives in communion with family relationships. Yes, Don Calabria was right: man needs the love of a mother!

Providence

Providence is far from fatalism. Providence is knowing that just in not distressing the Lord is always among us. And that our communion always has Someone more, who is among us and who frees us from anxiety. When Pope Francis says: pay attention to Pelagianism! But what is this Pelagius story? Pelagian heresy basically means a community or a life of faith without God, inside which there's only me and as a consequence it's only me that must do. Where there is no Providence because the Providence are just my hands, Providence is represented by what I am able to do. Therefore everything becomes easily sad, because later, it either becomes merit, or becomes a failure, in which I also measure my fragility, or I think I demonstrate my omnipotence.

There is always the Lord, we are always useless servants, there is always Providence. And communion is also always the fruit of this. I believe that his trust [of Don Calabria] in Providence is what allows us to live a wider communion than the one we can do with the people around us, the one which always thinks also of all those who are not immediately among us, of those we cannot reach immediately.



In Gaudete Exultate Pope Francis insists: "Fraternal love multiplies our capacity for joy", but I would say changes all our capacities. Because there is the presence of the Lord in brotherly love.

Poors

For Don Calabria, the boys from the Oratory are the first people to be part of his communion.

The poor are not an object but they are fully subject of the communion that unites us to them. Our relationship with the poor is not an operational relationship, it is fraternal, it is the relationship with the little ones.

The poor are not the justification for Don Calabria's activity. They were part of the family inside the communion, they were within communion.

When the poor become an object, Christianity becomes a board of directors. When there are so many things at stake, there is also a little administration to do, but it is a family that we must take care of. They are not the users to whom we must provide services, it is another thing. Then we have to provide services, of course we have to do it, of course we will have to talk to the institutions, but it will come in a second moment.

But the poor is my brother and I think of myself with him, he is part of the communion that unites us.

Don Calabria spoke to everyone

This too struck me: Don Calabria spoke with everyone, he was truly the universal curate. The Communion, when we do not live it as a club, when we do not live it by isolating ourselves, allows us to talk to everyone.

The first communion, why does it cost? Because communion is talking to everyone.

Do you remember the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 2? It begins on Pentecost and ends with "they had one heart and one soul". Communion is talking to everyone.



If the closure would lead us to isolating, true communion leads us to open up and leads us to speak with everyone, just as Don Calabria did.

Forming one heart and one soul

All what Don Calabria said and planned for the Poor Brothers and Priests Servants of Divine Providence, also applies to the Sisters.

“Priests, brothers and sisters must constitute one body, one soul, one spirit, they will go on the same and unique train. They will embark on the same ship and we will all find ourselves one day in paradise together. Look, I am talking about an Opera and not Operas, just to mean that the Sisters are not separate from us. This absolutely never of course! Never forget the mysterious and delicate ways through which Divine Providence raised our Religious Family. It was the Lord, without my thinking about it, that by means of circumstances pushed me, I will say almost forced me, quickly to collect pious women who felt they could assist the Brothers in the poorest tasks not properly suitable to males, for the benefit of the poorest and abandoned, collected in the various pavilions by Divine Providence ”.

Providence is also the open door of our home. Because Providence is also for us. But Providence is keeping the door open. Providence is the open door to communion.

The whole world is God

A true communion makes us feel good everywhere, the whole world belongs to God. This does not take anything away from a precise communion. If we are brothers and sisters for real, we are also universal. When we are not really brothers and sisters, we become wary and parochialist people, and we lose universal strength. In reality, parochialism does not make us feel good, does not make us live in communion and becomes a condominium. On the contrary, the whole world belongs to God if we live with three characteristics, I remember them because they are beautiful: generosity, availability and gratuity.



Communion creates communion

I read this little piece of Don Calabria about a boy who, after having got up to any kinds of tricks, Don Calabria's insistence changed him: "The young man was far from being a saint, but changed greatly his behavior. When he became an adult, in an annual meeting of ex-alumni, he made known that gesture of exchange to Don Calabria: 'an act of love and trust that changed me'."

Don Calabria used to say: "However bad one may appear, he always has a good side". So we have to make a leverage of that. We have to give credit. " I find this phrase intelligent, humanly beautiful: giving communion on credit: I treat you as a brother even if you are far from being a saint, and I don't know if you will become one. But I already treat you as a brother. Giving communion, which means giving our friendship, giving our attention, our interest. Look always for the good side of people. Honestly we all do generally quite the opposite, because the first thing we see is the little straw (In people's eyes), the first thing we see is the risk. But who knows what people will do?

On the contrary, the prophet of communion is also in this contingency that let find always the good side in people's heart, which many times, the same person does not know he has. But if I give him credit, he will find it.

There was another saint of charity, a certain Don Lori, who said: "Treat everyone well! Treat it well. Even a very bad guy, treat him well. Oh, in the end he'll really think he's good." That means the 'giving credit' of Don Calabria, it is giving credit to communion, leveraging on the good side there is always in people.

Conclusion

Don Calabria is still a prophet of communion, because he helps us to think we are not alone, but we all are a whole. And because it helps us to see others, especially those who are most suffering, not as an object of our activities, but as part of our communion. And this is an extraordinary intuition, very important, a lesson that we still have to understand a lot.

I end with these words of Saint Augustine: we need everyone for communion, distrust all those who do not need communion, be wary of yourself when you think you do not need communion. Because we all need it, because being alone, you cannot become saint!!!



I read and finish: "During this life, while we are on the way, we must share our burdens on one another's shoulders if we want to get to the" life without any weight" (Saint Augustine). I believe that life without any weight is not only the life we see before us and that comes toward us, because the Lord comes toward us, to meet us, He is not only near to us, but He also comes to meet us. With regard to the weightless life, I remember a quotation from Saint Augustine, 'when you love', I am quoting it by heart "when you love, or you do not feel the weight or you carry it with pleasure, just because you love'. On the contrary, when you don't love, anything becomes heavy.

Some ethology scholars have written about deer that, when these animals wade a stream of water towards an island in search of pastures, they line up so they can load the weights of their heads, weighed down by their horns, upon one another's back. As a consequence, everyone, stretching its neck, puts the head upon the deer's back before it. Now, since there must be one that precede all the others, without having anyone before it to put his head on, they are said to take turns. Those who precede, fatigued by the weight of the head, go back to the last place and are followed by the one whose head they supported when they led the flock. So by carrying one another's weights, they pass the ford until they reach the mainland. Nothing shows true friendship, as much as carrying the weight of a friend. Here it is the prophecy of communion!