

To the Council of European Episcopal Conferences

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE FAMILY:

A PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE STYLE OF FAMILY COMMUNION

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1. Thinking together about “post-pandemic”

I extend warm greetings to those present and express my special gratitude for this much-appreciated invitation goes to His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, to His Grace Msgr Leo Cushley, President of CCEE’s Family and Life Commission, and to Fr Martin Michalíček and to Don Nick Welsh for organising this meeting. To you all I also bear cordial greetings from Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life.

In this dramatic time of the pandemic, the whole of humanity has experienced *quarantine*: Jesus’ forty days in the desert have been a symbol of a human condition, have given meaning to the isolation into which we have all been forced.

The Lord has led us into the desert, as people, as society, as Church. He has led us to the *place* par excellence where the *human limits*, with their ambivalence, are tested: the place of death, but also of life¹. The place where at last we have begun to re-think our way of being in relation to reality, with others and with God.

The person is relationship and the desert, as absence and privation from the material world, is the place where one enters into relation with the essential, with the *invisible* and where the value of the relations which root our lives are measured. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote, alluding to Christ’s encounter with the Samaritan woman: “What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well ...”².

¹ G. Maspero, *Dal deserto della pandemia alla rigenerazione della società con la matrice trinitaria*, in P. Donati, G. Maspero, *Dopo la pandemia. Rigenerare la società con le relazioni*, Rome: 71-138.

² A. de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, Sellerio, Palermo, 2015, p.???

I am truly grateful to have been invited – and in some way obliged – to reflect with you on the “post” pandemic.³ It is in this sense, right from the outset, that I wanted to interpret the invitation given to me, because, as Pope Francis repeatedly tells us, «preparing for the aftermath is important»⁴. So, I have tried to listen and discover where might be hidden that little well full of gushing water, able to regenerate our social and ecclesial life, in this pastoral year devoted to the family.

This concrete moment of history – Pope Francis wrote during the pandemic – “is the Lord’s favourable time”, it can be “the favourable time to find the courage for a new imagination of the *possible*”; to reflect in a critical manner and with Christian realism on what has happened and to discern in order to promote the dynamics that can testify to and channel the new life that the Lord wants to generate; to enable the action of “the Spirit, who does not allow himself to be enclosed or instrumentalised with fixed or expired schemas, modalities or structures, who proposes us to join his movement capable of ‘making all things new’ (Rev 21:5)”⁵. “Even worse than this crisis, - Pope Francis warned us in his Pentecost homily last year – is the tragedy of squandering it”⁶.

As Giulio Maspero noted in an interesting work on the “post-pandemic”: *pandemic* means that what threatens the people (*demos*) has become a matter for everyone (*pan*), and so, as in the desert, we no longer have the possibility to avoid the question about what lies *between* us today, about the quality of human relations, about what must be the style of our relations to live in the Church and be Church along with families.

2. What happened to families and relationships in the pandemic

To reflect together on the family in the perspective of “post-pandemic” pastoral care, I want to focus briefly on an analysis of how the family has been perceived in these months of difficult hardship for everyone.

Covid-19 demonstrated to us that personal and social relations are decisive for our lives, for our destiny. Modernity had liberated people from natural relationships; post-modernity reduced them to playful and self-referential expressions of subjectivity. The pandemic, for the first time, imposed “social distancing” on us, deprived us of the majority of our

³ Francis, Letter to the popular movements, 12 April 2020.

⁴ Letter to Roberto Andrés Gallardo. “Prepararsi al dopo è importante”, 30 March 2020.

⁵ Cf. Francis, Article for the Spanish magazine Vida Nueva (in L’Osservatore Romano, 17 April 2020).

⁶ Francis, Homily of Pentecost, 31 May 2020.

relationships, protecting only those within the close family nucleus, closing us in our homes, breaking the bonds which united generations, relatives, friendships.

But no-one explained to us how to re-work these relations. We had at our disposal, even if not always, digital resources to replace relations at least with connections. But we turned upside down the rhythms of life and habits. The most fragile felt it in a most dramatic fashion: grandparents isolated for months, people dying alone in hospital without the closeness of their own loved ones, children with impairments without educational support or access to distance-learning, and in general children without school, without those institutional educational relationships (school, parish, sport) which enable them to grow in an integral fashion. Distance-learning, however, revealed itself to be very stressful, imposing difficulties in homes due to the lack of appropriate technological instruments, the need for continual assistance on the part of parents for children of primary and middle schools and the absence of friendly interaction with classmates.

Many generous and extraordinary people, by virtue of their social and professional role, strove to readjust their contribution to the common good according to the ongoing emergency.

And within families, the reactions to *lockdown* were marked by a great heterogeneity. In general, there was great resilience in the majority of families.

In reality, the effects were different depending on the relations on which they were built. If one considers that in Italy, for example, in 2020, 61% of registered families comprised at most two elements and only part of the remaining 39% had children at home⁷, few among them demonstrated a strengthening of their internal relations. In fact, the pandemic inserted itself into a process of individualisation and fragmentation of families already underway and produced significant inequalities. The deprivation of the network of social protection, which assured relationships with relations, friends and neighbours, imposed on families major situations of stress, which had selective and destructive effects at the marital level. Families with an inner solid relational capital were able to avoid major distress and poverty, while others experienced social and relational deprivation, giving rise to psychological illnesses, violence and distress, as well as an increase in dependence borne by young people⁸. On the

⁷ Cisf (ed.), *La famiglia nella società post-familiare*, San Paolo, 2020, p. 34.

⁸ Cfr. P. Donati, *Pandemia: epifania delle relazioni e opportunità di trascendenza*, in P. Donati, G. Maspero, *Dopo la pandemia. Rigenerare la società con le relazioni*, Rome: 9-70.

work and professional front, *smart working* on the one hand and the loss of work for many, on the other, deprived us of work as social relationship and in many families working from home was translated into an increase in tension, due to the extra work, especially for women with children. So, every family remained alone with its own private identity, often fragmented and in difficulty.

In these months, the human sciences are seeking to understand the phenomena which have characterised family reactions within and outside the domestic walls. Within families, the watchword “Stay at home” was translated, for those living alone, into total isolation, with frequent episodes of anxiety and depression; for couples, in a pressurised situation in their relationship, deprived of the social relationships which nourished them; there was greater resistance among couples with small children, who huddled around the need to care for their children; while families with adolescents often found it difficult to manage self-isolation of their children within the domestic walls, constantly immersed in digital connections with the outside, which intensified inter-generational tension. In some cases, this withdrawal of families into themselves led to greater collaboration between families; in others, irreconcilable conflicts led to an increase in divorce (which in Italy increased 60%). Many families experienced a “bunker syndrome” due to fear of infection; current studies tells us that the birth rate is likely to decline significantly in the near future, in conditions of major personal and social uncertainty. Everywhere there was a lack of welfare systems based on social relational work.

At a closer look, then, the collapse of social relations manifested itself in two ways: first of all, *inter-personal relations* remained confined to homes; externally, *role relationships* survived, through digital means, the relationships people live by nature of the social tasks and roles they fulfil (doctors, teachers)⁹. Secondly, physical distance – which is objective and measurable – was often confused with social distance, which instead is a moral quality. For example, in many church contexts, at the celebration of Mass for a good while it was decided not to pronounce the words “Let us offer each other a sign of peace”, while it was then understood that physical distance did not necessarily include social distance, and that a sign could have been expressed even with just a bow of the head or a glance with the eyes. The

⁹ P. Donati, cit. 18.

rule of “being close” in daily life struggled to find expression, before we realised that other ways were needed to learn to feel close in difficulties.

Of course, many families started internally to look for ways of *relational reflexivity*: in other words, to seek ways to talk about what is good about the relationships which bind them, the qualities of these relationships, which revolve around a common feeling. For it is by starting out from this common feeling that families generate good relations, trust, solidarity, gift. It is in this way that the family demonstrated its resilience as a moral quality of a system of relationships; its being the incarnation of *communion*.

In fact, numerous families have been able to benefit from forced time together in order to rediscover their own internal relations: rediscovery of what it means to be husband and wife, to live in a calmer manner the educational relationship with children, being able to think of them together, as spouses, sharing daily moments (breakfast, lunch and dinner) as life before never allowed. To celebrate and party, to organise free time and play with children have doubtless regenerated and strengthened some family contexts. And many have rediscovered the essential value of faith and the spiritual and ecclesial life.

3. Learning to be amazed by the Christian family

The experience of the pandemic is stretching out into the pastoral Year which the Holy Father has wished to dedicate to the Family, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. A text I would describe as a *programme of ecclesial commitment* for the family, to be realised with families. This is something new compared to how family pastoral care has been set out in the past, something which now calls on us to put into practice a relational reflexivity within the Church, too. What sort of pastoral perspective do we want to realise with families? What type of ecclesial relations can we plan to accompany them, making them protagonists and subjects of family pastoral care (AL 200)? Certainly, we will not return to the paradigms and systems of before. “Our life after the pandemic must not be a replica of what went before”¹⁰. The difficulties in which the family finds itself are in part also the result of a pastoral perspective which for a long time dragged on in ways inappropriate to family reality and it is extraordinary to observe

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Life after the Pandemic*, Preface by Cardinal Michael Czerny, LEV, Vatican City, 2020, p. 13.

how the Spirit is bringing many church realities to an effective discernment, capable of generating a new creativity.

Amoris Laetitia calls us to a “missionary conversion” (AL 201), which helps us not to stop at “proclaim[ing] a merely theoretical message without connection to people’s real problems”, especially now. In the midst of the difficulties accentuated by the pandemic, which “break[s] up families and their communion of life and love” (AL 19), the family today shows itself to be more than ever a “sign of the times” and the Church, called to look out for these signs¹¹, is invited to introduce families into the ecclesial space so as to be able to draw close to them and support them in their vocation, starting from that “principle of reality” which must dissolve every fear of drawing close to the difficulties in which families today often find themselves isolated.

The family, “way of the Church” (cf. AL 69), demands of us a gaze capable of being amazed by what it is in itself: its being a “community of life and love” (GS 48) can, in fact, represent a style of ecclesial relationship which can help us to reset family pastoral care.

During the pandemic Christian families demonstrated the strength of the stability of the bonds founded on matrimony, the power of the relationships of trust, the resilience generated in faith, even in the most difficult situations. Christian spouses breathed the profound filial relationship towards a Mother Church, which more than ever made itself present in homes during the daily Mass celebrated by the Holy Father, who with sensitivity entered into the family intimacy at the dawn of each day, marking time with his affectionate and concrete words, helping us to understand how to set the day in our hearts and in the relations with those close to us. He was for all of us a Pastor, a father, a brother, a teacher, in every case a “way” to centre our life in Christ. Families felt accompanied, felt part of the Church, “branches of the one vine” (cf. John 15:5), a body together with the Pope, but also with the bishops, with their priests, who strived to make themselves present in our homes by new ways and means.

In this slow, but in many contexts, effective dynamism, which gradually took shape within the Church, what revealed itself to be vital were those traces of authentic *communio*. That marvellous characteristic which stems from the Holy Spirit, the oxygen which has enabled us to continue to “breathe” the Church, our belonging to the Body of Christ, which has allowed

¹¹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 11.

us to nourish our faith and the need for hope. Today, families need to feel part of the Church, because the sense of belonging saves people from self-interest and loneliness, which are the greatest threats perceived by families and whose antidote lies precisely in the experience of *communion*¹². Pastoral care is not born out of a mechanical planning of activities, but out of an effective communion of life, of listening to families and of solidarity in difficulties.

For this we need to live communion and to see it in action. As Pope Francis explains in AL 325,

“no family is perfectly formed [...]” But there is “a never-ending vocation born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and his Church”, to which we must respond.

We need “Christian communities which live communion and express it in gestures of co-responsibility and participation and in a style of service. A more profound understanding of the gift of communion will increase, without doubt, throughout the whole of our Church thanks to the unity lived in charity and will make credible the proclamation of the gospel”¹³. “Only a Church which lives and celebrates in itself the mystery of communion [...] can be subject of an effective evangelisation”¹⁴.

4. The Christian family, model and style of ecclesial communion

What is the model of communion proposed to us by the Christian family? Starting out from the definition of marriage in *Gaudium et Spes* 48, as “intimate partnership of married life and love”, we follow *Amoris Laetitia*. In n. 11 one reads:

“The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection.”

And in *Amoris Laetitia* 71 one reads:

“The family is the image of God, who is a communion of persons.”

More precisely,

“the Trinity is present in the temple of marital communion.” (AL 314) “Through his Church, Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace necessary to bear witness to the love

¹² “Pastoral care for families “needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one’s dignity and fulfilment in reciprocity, [in] communion [...]” (AL 201).

¹³ Italian Bishops’ Conference, *Comunione e comunità*, I. Introduzione al piano pastorale, in *Notiziario della CEI*, 1 October 1981, n. 6, p. 126.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 128.

of God and to live the life of communion”. “Christian marriage [...] makes that love present in the communion of the spouses”. (AL 63; cf. also 73)

“A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God” (AL 316).

And in relation to the expansive strength of family communion, in n.196 one reads:

“«the love between husband and wife and, in a derivative and broader way, the love between members of the same family ... is given life and sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism leading the family to ever deeper and more intense communion [...]». Friends and other families are part of this larger family, as well as communities of families who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith.”

Here is introduced the Church’s look of amazement at the family to understand the riches which the Church’s pastoral style can represent.

“so the Church, in order fully to understand her mystery, looks to the Christian family, which manifests her in a real way” (AL 67).

“The experience of love in families – one reads in n. 88 – is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church”¹⁵. Therefore, «[...] the Church looks to the families who remain faithful to the teachings of the Gospel, encouraging them and thanking them for the testimony they offer. [...]. Within the family ‘which could be called a domestic church’” (LG, 11), individuals enter upon an ecclesial experience of communion among persons, which reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Trinity. “Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous – even repeated – forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s own life”. (AL 86)

The style of family love, founded on communion and the complementarity of the spouses, can thus become a church style, since

“The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches. “In virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, every family becomes, in effect, a good for the Church. From this standpoint, reflecting on the interplay between the family and the Church will prove a precious gift for the Church in our time. The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord’s gift in the

¹⁵ “«[...] In this love [...] they celebrate their happy moments and support each other in the difficult passages of their life together [...] The beauty of this mutual, gratuitous gift, the joy which comes from a life that is born and the loving care of all family members – from toddlers to seniors – are just a few of the fruits which make the response to the vocation of the family unique and irreplaceable”, both for the Church and for society as a whole”. (AL 88)

sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community».” (AL 87).

Everyone, in fact, laity and priests, are called together to guard the precious treasure of the family.

5. The communion of vocations: ordained ministry and marriage

Faced with the possibility of discovering in the family a style of ecclesial communion, in which the Church can also express itself as “family of families”, it is important to pause and reflect again on the need to promote a concrete communion of vocations in family pastoral care. I am referring, in particular, to the ordained ministry and to marriage. The ecclesiological perspective of the Second Vatican Council, which valued the Church as *journeying People of God*, brought into focus the participation of every baptised person in the common and royal priesthood of Christ (LG 10), establishing a direct relation between the faithful and the priests:

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.

In particular, marriage and priesthood both have “a direct purpose in the building up and expansion of the People of God”¹⁶ and as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1534) states they confer a *particular mission* in the Church.

The common vocation to holiness of all the faithful, *each in their own way*, designs within the Church a *structure of communion* between the various states of life, *complementary* between them, since God does not want to “make people holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another” (LG 9), but together, as

“a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. (LG 4).

The *communio sanctorum* is what binds one to another in a *common vocation* aimed at *mutual edification, each according to their own grace* (Eph 4:7-16)¹⁷. So, the holiness of the priest

¹⁶ CEI, *Evangelizzazione e sacramento del matrimonio*, 32; CIC 226.

¹⁷ Cf. LG 39-41.

and that of the spouses are not just for themselves, but “for the other”, ordered to the building up of the People of God¹⁸.

“Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an “organic” communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a *diversity* and a *complementarity* of vocations and states in life Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen *in relation to the whole body* and offers a *totally unique contribution* on behalf of the whole body”. (ChL 20).

Collaboration between ministers and spouses stems, therefore, from the essence of the Church: the holiness to which all are called (LG 40). They have the same root in Christ and are destined to make present his love in the community. That is, they are called to *make Church together*.

This mutual edification of the states of life is translated with a circular synergy: each state is generated by the Church and, in turn, generates the Church. In this way *mutual co-responsibility* with a view to mission calls spouses and ordained ministers – and bishops in a special way – to cooperate in a fruitful manner in the building up of the ecclesial fabric, as sign and participation of the love with which Christ loved his Bride and gave himself for her¹⁹. Hence, therefore, the importance of the nuptial mystery of the Church, which is incarnated in families and which is realised in the complementarity of vocations. For this the Church needs to observe and listen to families to understand itself and to understand how to plan Church-family interaction for an effective new evangelisation.

The relation of complementarity between family and Church helps us to understand that even at this historic juncture dominated by the difficulties caused by the pandemic, the family reality does not constitute a “problem” for pastoral care, since it remains a “sign” for

¹⁸ See also *Christifideles Laici* 55 and *Familiaris Consortio* 66.

¹⁹ Thus Pope Francis in the address to the Officials of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota for the inauguration of the judicial year, 29 January 2019: “In order to understand this pastoral need, it will be good for us to consider the experience of the holy spouses Aquila and Priscilla [narrated] in the Scriptures. They were among the most faithful companions in the mission of Saint Paul who called them gratefully and affectionately his *sinergoi*, that is, assistants who wholeheartedly shared in the Apostle’s concerns and work. One is impressed and moved by Paul’s acknowledgement of the missionary work of these spouses. And at the same time, one can recognize how this synergy was a precious gift of the Spirit to the first Christian communities. Let us ask the Holy Spirit therefore, to give to the Church today too, priests who are able to appreciate and value the charisms of spouses with a robust faith and apostolic spirit, like Aquila and Priscilla.” Even stronger, in this sense, is the speech of Francis on the occasion of the Inauguration of the Judicial Year of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota on 25 January 2020: “Therefore, may pastors allow themselves to be illuminated by the Spirit today too, so that this salvific news may be fulfilled by couples who are often already prepared, but not called. They exist.”

understanding the style of pastoral relationship to be built in the Church. Spouses, in fact, do not contribute to building up the Church in spite of their mutual love and difficulties. On the contrary, by means of the family – small domestic Church, privileged place of ecclesial relations and communion – they *build the Church*. This is an aspect which must be taken seriously to change the planning of family pastoral care in some parishes and to involve the family as family and not as fragmented reality of individuals, as if they did not belong to a reality of communion. One reads in *Familiaris Consortio* 50:

«Since the Christian family is a community ... the family's sharing in the Church's mission should follow a community pattern: the spouses together as a couple, the parents and children as a family, must live their service to the Church and to the world.».

So, spouses and priests collaborate “*in aedificationem Ecclesiae*” generating an *ecclesial communion (koinonia)*, a co-participation which can only imply a sharing of goals, of styles and a pastoral co-responsibility in the common mission.

6. *The family not just recipient, but protagonist of pastoral action*

If the spouses' vocation is to contribute to the building up of the ecclesial fabric, it is essential to enable families to grasp the meaning of their missionary vocation to take care of each other with the help of pastors.

Our families are “domestic Church”, place where the grace of the Spirit is moving and at work among spouses, between parents and children and between families. So, they can no longer be considered passive recipients and users of parochial and pastoral services. *They are and must be able to be the dynamic and sacramental presence of Christ in situ*. Alongside and together with the sacrament of Orders, they are *sacrament for mission* (CCC 1534). Their apostolic impulse comes from Baptism and the grace of matrimony and by virtue of this identity they can bear testimony, evangelise and give spirit to ecclesial communion.

That means that the two dimensions of marriage – unitive and generative – must be read as a gift for the community, as *unitive and generative capacity of faith and love in a missionary perspective*. That is how we must explain marriage to young people who are preparing for the nuptial sacrament. And this is the missionary impulse we must reawaken in them with the gift of the sacrament of marriage.

To that end, it is more essential than ever to break down the barriers between states of life in the Church, while respecting and valuing the charisms proper to each. We need families who are alongside other families, sharing their challenges, problems and opportunities.

But we also need bishops and priests who have the courage and desire to “be nourished” by families. Those who really know how to listen, to question with humility and self-denial, to spend themselves in human relations and friendships, as Jesus did.

This is the concrete missionary conversion to which we are called by *Amoris Laetitia* (201).

7. Overcoming distance to build an ecclesial “we”

In the methodology of the work of communion it will therefore be important to develop consultation and collaboration with the lay faithful, men and women, at all levels of pastoral reflection: in this way can common problems be pondered on and ecclesial communion be better manifested²⁰.

Certainly, in many ecclesial contexts one encounters great difficulties in involving the laity in family pastoral work, especially due to the complexity of families’ daily lives, exacerbated today by a self-withdrawal caused by the pandemic. To that end, the first step to take is to devote oneself to formation of the laity, and in particular spouses and young people, so that they understand the importance of their own ecclesial mission. Groups and all those entities, including parochial ones, which contribute to forming families with continuity in the importance of devoting their own time to the mission and life of the Church can be of great help.

“The more that Christian spouses and parents grow in the awareness that their “domestic church” participates in the life and mission of the universal Church, so much the more will their sons and daughters be able to be formed in a “sense of the Church” and will perceive all the beauty of dedicating their energies to the service of the Kingdom of God.”. (ChL 62)

In that sense one can also think of ways of participation for families in all those areas of pastoral work in which marital communion can be an effective witness to proclaim the Gospel of the Family. Even before, the involvement of married couples in the formation of seminary

²⁰ Cf. ChL 25.

students should be encouraged, as well as the possibility of providing young people studying in the seminary with the experience of the apostolate with families, in order to bring them in the future to share their mission with the sacrament of marriage. The complementarity of the vocations, from which is generated an authentic ecclesial communion in the concreteness of pastoral care, needs to be understood and heard by pastors right from formation.

Awareness of the gift of communion between the vocations must be accompanied by a great sense of responsibility. That means, above all, being committed to overcoming every temptation of division. Just as family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice (cf. AL 106), so the Church must act in the same way, making holy every effort, every endeavour, because the *sacrum-facere* is precisely making holy the meaning of our action when it is more difficult and demands conversion.

That means including spouses, when possible, even where decisions are made about family pastoral care, so that their experience and their style of marital communion can permeate *per se* the pastoral work itself.

“At this point *communion begets communion*: essentially it is likened to a *mission on behalf of communion*.” (ChL 32)

Perhaps in this way we can imagine a Church-Communion in action: pastoral care with families which, starting from marital communion, can be translated into a shared and unitive pastoral style, in the complementarity and communion between vocations²¹. And the Church on its journey can find a new pastoral vitality. The Pope has reminded us that especially “at this time no one is saved alone”. Not even the Church: it needs its People, families, their model of life and love, which knows how to be close to those in difficulty.

“Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God’s love present in society”. (AL 184)

²¹ After all, this too could be “the breath of the Spirit that opens new horizons, awakens creativity and renews us in fraternity to say ‘present’ (or ‘here I am’) before the enormous and urgent task that awaits us”. Cf. Francis, Article for the Spanish magazine *Vida Nueva* (in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 17 April 2020. In this regard the Pope’s words in the *Urbi et Orbi* message at Easter 2021 are also very beautiful: “In this desolate land, the Lord insists on regenerating beauty and bringing hope to life: “Look, I am doing something new, it is already springing up, don’t you see?” (Is 43:18b).