

4. Vincentian spirituality, a prophetic spirituality

1. SEE – A contemplative look



Synodality raises the theme of the relationship between *memory*, *witness*, and *prophecy* as keys to the Church's self-understanding. In fact, as a living memory of the Gospel, the Church is a witness to the love of the Father who reveals himself in Jesus Christ and acts through the dynamism of the Spirit. Her prophecy is born precisely of what she is in her mystery: icon of the Trinity, sacrament of the Kingdom, sign and instrument of salvation for all humanity. This prophecy is reflected in her identity as a pilgrim people of God, in which all the baptized have the same dignity and are called equally to holiness in the diversity of vocations, charisms, and ministries. Such prophecy is verified in its mission to evangelize, proclaiming the unfathomable riches of Christ in order to promote and defend the life of all, with particular attention to the poorest. Exercising this multiform prophecy, in the most diverse contexts where the mission of the Church is carried out, many have handed over their lives with Christ and, like Christ, giving the greatest proof of love for their brothers and sisters, moved by the faith they professed. The martyrs are the most

convincing expression of the Synodal Church's prophecy. The Church's prophecy still is manifested in her ongoing effort of conversion, as Vatican II recalled when it spoke of the "*ecclesia semper reformanda*" which "*always follows the way of penance and renewal*" (LG 8). This in view of the growing communion among its members and its mission in the service of humanity.

As a living cell of the Church, the Congregation of the Mission also understands itself as memory, witness, and prophecy. It does so from the specificity of the grace bestowed on it by the Spirit: the Vincentian charism. Thus, the Congregation is called to be, in the heart of the Church, a living memory of God's predilection for the poor, extending the saving mission of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. As witnesses to the missionary charity of the Son of God and clothed in his spirit, the Priests and Brothers of the Mission are committed in a decisive way to the evangelization and service of the poor and the formation of the clergy and laity, through an enormous multiplicity of initiatives, ministries, and

works. The identity of the Congregation is radically *kerygmatic* and *diaconal*, precisely because it is rooted in the Gospel and oriented towards charity. This is witnessed by those who have left indelible traces on the path of holiness that we are called to follow, especially our martyred confreres. The more the Congregation understands its missionary identity and assumes synodality as the inspiration for its lifestyle and actions, the more the Congregation becomes a prophecy for the Church and the world. Hence, prophecy is not confused with a strategy, a discourse, or an ideology, but is the overflow of a charismatic identity historically incarnated, under the impulse of a vocation welcomed in faith.

To become prophecy, both the Church and the Congregation need to allow themselves to be led by the Spirit of the Lord and to be ready for conversion and reform, without which every effort of revision and revitalization will lack depth and consistency. The last General Assembly wanted to move us in this perspective, inviting us to *“place our fragile clay at the hands of the potter (Is. 64: 8), to welcome creative ways of living our charism, and to live a ‘new Pentecost’ so that the palpable signs of God’s Kingdom might shine among us. In the midst of the uncertainties of the times, we are challenged to undertake ‘a journey of conversion and purification... to rediscover the foundation and identity of our call without giving way to pessimism or to the tiring frustration of those who feel powerless and prepare for the worst.’”* So, all the members and structures of the Congregation truly are summoned to welcome the grace and to take up the challenge of Synodality as a path of revision and renewal in order to become a promising prophecy of the Kingdom for the Church and the world.

2. JUDGE – A lucid discernment

a) In the light of the Word (read: Luke 7:11-17)

The prophecy of Jesus of Nazareth radiates through the quality of his presence, his generous dedication to others, his merciful closeness, and his gestures and words capable of communicating life, hope, and salvation to those in distress.

b) In the light of the Vincentian charism

Saint Vincent was convinced that the first form of prophecy is fidelity to the vocation we have received. He said this expressly on many occasions, with encouraging and stimulating words, as in the conclusion of the famous conference on the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission on 6 December 1658:

“Let’s give ourselves to God, Messieurs, so that He’ll grant us the grace to stand fast. Let’s stand fast, Brothers, let’s stand fast, for the love of God; He’ll be faithful to His promises and will never abandon us as long as we’re truly submissive to Him in carrying out His plans. Let’s stay within the bounds of our vocation and strive to become interior men, forming a strong, holy attachment to the service of God; let’s do the good that presents itself, and do it in the ways we’ve mentioned. I’m not saying that we have to go to extremes and undertake everything indiscriminately, but to do the things God shows us that He wants us to do. We belong to Him and not to ourselves; if He increases our work, He’ll also increase our strength. O Savior! What a happiness! O Savior! If there were several paradises, to whom would You give them if not to a Missioner who will

persevere respectfully in all the ministries You've marked out for him, and who has never failed to carry out any of the duties of his state! That's what we're hoping for, brothers, and what we ask of His Divine Majesty. At this time, let's all thank Him for the infinite grace of having called and chosen us for such holy ministries, sanctified by Our Lord himself who practiced them first. Oh, what graces do we not have reason to hope for if we do them in His Spirit, for the glory of His Father and the salvation of souls!" (CCD XII, 82).

Let us dwell on three of the articles of the Constitutions that deal with the apostolic activity of the Congregation and try to draw inspirations to revitalize the prophetic dimension of our spirituality.

10.— The Congregation of the Mission from the time of its Founder, and under his inspiration, sees itself called by God to carry out the work of evangelizing the poor. In its own way, it can, with the whole Church, state of itself that evangelizing is to be considered its own grace and vocation, and expresses its deepest identity (cf. EN, 14). Furthermore, the members, individually and collectively, can rightly make use of the words of Jesus: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God for which I have been sent" (Lk 4:43).

11.— The love of Christ, who had pity on the crowd (Mk 8:2), is the source of all our apostolic activity, and urges us, in the words of St. Vincent, "to make the Gospel really effective" (SV, XII, 84). According to the varying circumstances of time and place, our work of evangelization in word and action should strive for this, that all, through a process of conversion and celebration of the sacraments, should be faithful to "the kingdom that is to say, the new world, the new order, the new manner of being, of living, of living in community, which the gospel inaugurates" (EN, 23).

12.— These are the characteristics to be kept in mind in this work of evangelization which the Congregation proposes to carry out: 1° clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor, since their evangelization is the sign that the kingdom of God is present on earth (cf. Mt 11:5); 2° attention to the realities of present-day society, especially to the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world's goods, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization; 3° some sharing in the condition of the poor, so that not only will we attend to their evangelization, but that we ourselves may be evangelized by them; 4° genuine community spirit in all our apostolic works, so that we may be supported by one another in our common vocation; 5° readiness to go to any part of the world, according to the example of the first missionaries of the Congregation; 6° striving to live in a state of continuous conversion both on the part of each individual member and on the part of the whole Congregation, according to the mind of St. Paul, who counsels us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rm 12:2).

3. ACT – A renewed commitment

Enlightened by the Gospel and the Vincentian tradition...

- How can we incarnate the prophecy of our missionary spirituality?
- Do we exercise prophecy in its double aspect: *ad intra* (revision of life, spiritual revitalization, personal and community conversion, change of emphasis, correction of institutional plans, etc.) and *ad extra* (revision of works, missionary revitalization, pastoral conversion, ministerial creativity, new apostolic frontiers, etc.)?

- From the social and ecclesial realities in which we find ourselves, how is the kerygmatic and diaconal prophecy of our missionary presence manifested?

Let us pray with Pope Francis...

*Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life
in the depths of your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own "yes"
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.*

*Filled with Christ's presence,
you brought joy to John the Baptist,
making him exult in the womb of his mother.
Brimming over with joy,
you sang of the great things done by God.
Standing at the foot of the cross
with unyielding faith,
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.*

*Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection,
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life
which triumphs over death.
Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,
that the gift of unfading beauty
may reach every man and woman.*

*Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself
or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.*

*Star of the new evangelization,
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith,
justice and love of the poor,
that the joy of the Gospel
may reach to the ends of the earth,
illuminating even the fringes of our world.*

*Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,
pray for us.*

Amen. Alleluia!

[*Evangelii Gaudium*, 288]