

MIS PALABRAS HACEN BIEN AL QUE ANDA RECTAMENTE

(Miq. 2.7; Je 23; Ez. 34)

CONSAGRACIÓN Y PROFECÍA

Nota bene: this material we offer you reorganises some ideas proposed by Fr. Pedro Solis, Visitor of the Philippines. It is not intended to be prayed and finished in one day of retreat. It is a retreat that can be prayed and meditated on throughout the month. The way in which I present the theme is not exhaustive, nor does it pretend to be a lesson. They are points, if you like, a little loose, just to provoke some reflections. We hope you find them useful. Fr. Aarón Gutiérrez Nava, CM

1. Motivation

A few months ago I found a shack of street dwellers in the middle of the city. I was surprised to see a sign on it: *"Prophets are needed here"*. And underneath it was written: *"I don't say so. The Pope says so"*. I was left in doubt, but it was true. On April 12, 2024, His Holiness said when speaking about the virtue of fortitude: *"In our comfortable West... we sometimes feel a healthy nostalgia for prophets... uncomfortable and visionary people... who lift us up from the 'soft place' in which we have lain down" and make us "resolutely repeat our 'no' to evil and indifference"*. This statement can be true for the whole world, but it needs to be applied to each continent or each population and each person accordingly.

Fortitude is a gift that the Holy Spirit transmits to us in baptism and is given precisely as a reinforcement of the prophetic dimension of the baptised. God does not like the lukewarm¹, he cannot stand mediocrity, the lacklustre, the liquid, and there is enough of that now. The ancients could not conceive of a human being without passion. The men and women of their time had to excel in something, to show some resemblance to their gods. Also the consecrated person now has the mission to show his or her relationship to God well. The Pope says something of this: *"A Christian without courage, who does not bend his own strength to the good, who does not bother anyone, is a useless Christian. Let us think about this! Jesus is not a clear and aseptic God, who does not know human emotions. On the contrary. At the death of his friend Lazarus, he bursts into tears; and in some of his expressions his passionate spirit shines through, as when he says: "I have come to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already burning" (Lk 12:49); and he reacted strongly to the trade in the temple (cf. Mt 21:12-13). Jesus had passion.*

There is a lack of prophets! ... men and women who stand out for their prophetic passion: the "ardour" to evangelise, the "enthusiasm" to involve others, the "impetus" to fight against evil, the "fervour" to love without limits, the "fervour" to seek justice and peace so far away from the world of the poor. The prophet (man or woman) is a person passionate like God, like Jesus Christ, to change the history of the world and to save it.

2. Opening Prayer

✚ Pray the prayer for the 4th Centenary of the Foundation of the CM

¹ Rev. 3:15-16: "So, since you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth".

3. Points for prayer and meditation...

a. SEE

At the root of the prophetic life of the disciple-missionary is the "following" of Jesus Christ. The prophet follows Jesus Christ mainly in *"his preference for the poor"*, of whom he declares himself to be an "evangeliser". This is what the Father sent Jesus Christ to do; and this is what he was driven and accompanied by the Spirit² during his whole life. **The poor and evangelisation** together are the common thread of the prophet's vocation. Call, election and sending are realised through the practice of the *"evangelical counsels"*. A practice which **"obliges"** through the subsequent taking of vows.

Counsels and vows have always had a passionate character. They imply an intense passion for Christ and a passion for humanity³. Vows and virtues imply being in the world as *"witnesses"* that it is possible to *"give oneself to God and to the good of the brethren"* in a radical way. The radicality of the prophet consists in advancing the Kingdom of God, restoring *"its original meaning"* to goods (poverty), to their relations in society (obedience), and to man-woman relations (chastity). Love for God and love for one's brothers and sisters cannot be separated. This is what the life of Jesus Christ says, an excellent model of the radicality of prophecy and prophet in both the Old and the New Testament.

Well, this passionate consistency that accompanies the vows and the practice of virtues is slowly weakening and depreciating in the face of the idiosyncrasies of the human world. Take, for example, an increasingly evident reality. One of the themes most often brought to the present stage is ***"practical atheism": "living as if God does not exist"***. In practice it is to marginalise God in everyday life, it is to act as when I am in front of a person and pay no attention to him or her because I am too busy with my phone. Disconnecting from God has become habitual for a good number of people. People do not deny the existence of God. Indeed, one believes in Him, but one denies and offends His *"divine image which is imprinted on every human being"*. Pope Francis warns that when one does not recognise God in the suffering of others, one commits *"a sacrilege, an abomination, the worst offence that can be brought to the temple and to the altar"*.

In today's world we allow ourselves," says the current Vicar of the Lord, *"to believe in God" and "to hate others"*. If the baptised person feels within himself *"resentment towards others"* his prayer becomes *"pure artifice"* because he sinks into the sentence of St. John: *"Whoever does not love his brother whom he sees, cannot love God whom he does not see"*. It is not possible to believe in God and *"forget the tears of the poor"*. **Practical atheism** directly affects the poor: it entertains people's ears and eyes with other inducements; it makes them insensitive to the cry and suffering of the poor; in other words, it prevents them from being an authentic prophet because the prophet does not describe the essence of God directly, but translates his will in relation to his creatures, and preferably to the poor.

In this reality, prophets are urgently needed. Those of us who are called to be prophets need to review our lifestyle, our ministries, values, attitudes, etc., everything that we are living right now in society: *How is my prophetic passion at the moment? What is prophetic about it? What message, for example, does the living out of my vows convey? What prophetic message does my concrete life convey?*

b. JUDGE

All of us who have studied the biblical prophets have been moved by their vocation and at one time or another wished to be like them. I invite you to recall some notes that can guide our prayer and meditation in this intense search that occupies us: to return to the roots, to Jesus Christ, to the Gospel, to the way in which St. Vincent, led by the Spirit, lived his faith, his hope and his love.

The Church has long encouraged consecrated persons to care for and promote the prophetic dimension of their lives⁴, especially with regard to the meaning and scope of the evangelical counsels and the vows, based on their option for the poor. In this society which multiplies, relegates, marginalises and excludes the poor;

² Lk. 4,16ff.

³ See the conclusions of the first "CONGRESS OF CONSECRATED LIFE": "Passion for Christ, passion for humanity". Held from 23 to 26 November 2004. A document that seeks to keep alive the prophetic sense of a life marked by the Vows of poverty, obedience and chastity, in a world that has no alternative horizons.

⁴ VC 84-85

In a world that generates new forms of poverty and discards people, we consecrated persons feel called to live the evangelical counsels more radically, and thus revitalise our prophetic consecration here and now.

The evangelical counsels and vows refer to money, power and sex, valuable and necessary realities⁵, but in which - even without demonising them - we have to admit that they have always had an idolatrous character, and today is no different. Idols are human creations that alienate the heart and distance it from God: - *"by exaggeration"*, idols are given exaggerated power because they are not even true gods⁶. Or, - *"by omission"*, because we let them be, but do not work hard enough to eliminate them⁷. Today's world is full of idols before which the disciple of Christ, endowed with the gift of prophecy, cannot be insensitive or silent.

The disciple is a prophet, because of his covenant with Jesus Christ, he speaks of what he learned from Jesus and goes against the idols that Jesus overcame: *"In the face of the idols of the contemporary world: domination, accumulation and sex, the consecration made through the vows denounces the false lordship of those idols, rescues the true dimension of their values and, by his renunciation, does not deny them, but transcends them by not allowing himself to be imprisoned by them"*⁸. The disciple strengthens his prophecy in the victory of Jesus over his temptations in the desert.

Our faith confirms that we are not alone in living the counsels and vows. As promises made to **the Father**, they are entrusted to **Jesus Christ**, "the external Teacher" who "counsels us" by his own example how we are to live them. And finally, they are submitted to the gifts of the **Holy Spirit**, "the interior Teacher⁹" who accompanies us with his permanent Counsels and urges us to reorientate our following of Jesus Christ. Our life thus becomes a *"covenant of discipleship"*¹⁰ which is ratified in a concrete charism practised every day in our common life. Today we speak of prophecy in many ways and those who exercise it must know well what they want to say and do with it. The gift of prophecy is not exclusive to anyone: *"if only all could prophesy"*¹¹ is God's wish. If we want to be prophets today, it is indispensable to discern together and rediscover what *"the Spirit"* is asking of us in these moments of Grace.

Some proposals to review at this retreat:

1° To revive the intimate relationship between "consecration and prophecy" is something we are asked to do today. One of the current tendencies in religious life is to generalise everything: everything is mission, everything is prophecy, everything is service, etc. Much has been made of the phrase: *"if everything is prophecy (mission)..., nothing is prophecy (mission)"*. It is not possible to live so liquidly the great gifts that the Spirit has given us. Hence the need to rediscover and strengthen at least some of the prophetic aspects proper to our charism. It is not necessary to argue much: **"the prophet is a consecrated person"**; a man reserved by God Himself for Himself. To strengthen this conviction it is useful to pray the text of Jer 1:5: *"Before I formed you in your mother's womb I knew you; before you were born I consecrated you and appointed you to be a prophet to the nations"*. This is the declaration that God makes to Jeremiah while he is still a young man. However, being young did not prevent him from being aware of the commitment, and the difficulties involved in being a prophet; and he expresses his fears and apprehensions to the Lord. God replied, *"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you"*. Jeremiah knew how to *"be for God"* and to communicate his will with great fidelity in spite of the terrible human situations he went through. God, as he had promised, *"gave him everything to accomplish his mission"*¹².

Because he is consecrated, the prophet is called **"a man of God"**¹³ and he must be so. This conviction fills the prophet's life with hope and enables him to stand against the current of the world, to have the courage to confront the tendencies which threaten the consecration of his heart to God and to the good of his brothers. In this sense, Vincent de Paul was very conscious. He transmits to us the urgency of

⁵ Nota bene: "The realities of power, money or sex are valuable and necessary because "through them we grow as persons, as society, as humanity. Without the instinct of possession, we could starve to death; without the instinct of power we would be unable to develop and transcend ourselves; without the sexual instinct we would be unable to complete ourselves, to enjoy our otherness as men or women, to prolong life, to love. If we were not inhabited by these fundamental drives we would be heading for catastrophe".

⁶ "You shall have no other gods besides me. You shall not make for yourself any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God" (Ex 20:3-5).

⁷ "You wicked and slothful servant... let your talent be taken from you... even what you have will be taken away from the unprofitable servant. Cast that unprofitable servant into the outer darkness" (Mt 25:26-30).

⁸ CLAR, Life according to the Spirit (Bogotá 1973) p.41.

⁹ José Cristo García Paredes in Ecología del Espíritu: mi casa es toda viento" (Ecology of the Spirit: my house is all wind). Claretian Publications. April 1998.

¹⁰ Hebrews 9:11-15-17 Let us remember that Jesus Christ "sealed with his blood" the "New Covenant". And the disciple of Jesus Christ lives out of that union.

¹¹ 1Cor. 14,5. Note: The very word "prophecy" is becoming secularised and is a symbol of alternative, innovative, transcendent proposals. No one has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit fills the earth. We are in the time of the mission of the Spirit. The collective prophetic movements are a call for us, for our discernment. Also at the end of history

the Lord will say: "Come, you blessed of my Father, because you prophesied". They will then ask in amazement: "When did we prophesy, Lord?"

¹² Jer. 1,17-18

¹³ 1 Kgs. 13,1ff; 17,24; 2 Kgs. 1,9-13

to decide to renounce living the maxims of the world¹⁴ in order to commit one's life to practising the maxims of the Gospel. If this watershed is not clear, my witness becomes grey, it has no definition.

2° Something about the figure of the prophet in the Bible is that he seems to be not only different, but superior to that of the priests, the Levites¹⁵, and to that of the judges of Israel¹⁶. His main task is to see to it that God's presence is established and respected everywhere¹⁷, that God is truly worshipped (priestly function). He strives to ensure that the socio-legal system is just and that justice is done to the poor and needy¹⁸; that the dignity of work is respected and its original meaning is restored¹⁹ (Regal function). Everything and everyone passes through the critical gaze of the prophet, who sees everything with the eyes of God, and analyses everything from God's will.

The prophet is very sensitive to good and evil because he is a "symbol" of God's passion for his people. Unlike false prophets, the one chosen by God needs to discern continually between what is God's and what is his. Little by little, and sometimes against his will, he becomes "sympathetic", he becomes passionate for God's cause, he feels the pathos of his Lord as his own. He is in favour of the Covenant and against all that hinders and impedes it. He admires God's plan and openly proposes it to the people. Because he is called, chosen and sent, the prophet owes obedience to God and continually seeks his will. He cannot and must not keep silent about what God commands him to say; he is sincere and clear, he does not allow himself to be intimidated or bribed, which often makes him annoying and even unbearable. When society goes against God's plan, he goes "against the tide" and presents the newness of the Kingdom, motivating people to form a community or society that is an alternative to their reality.

3° The vows and virtues, signs of prophecy: "To consecrate" is synonymous with "to sacrifice". In ancient times, the prophet expressed his dedication to the world with various signs. Some of them seem contradictory to us, but they had their own logic. Today we express what is different about our consecration in the profound living of the vows and the missionary virtues.

The exercise of the vows and virtues presupposes "renunciations" which are a good sacrifice in themselves. Renunciation is a form of "holocaust", of "martyrdom", of "total surrender" which has nothing to do with "flight from the world". The prophet "sacrifices" (sacrum-facere) to God. And his sacrifice consists in "renouncing himself" for the sake of his brothers and sisters, preferably the poorest. I have sometimes heard it said that "renouncing oneself" is unacceptable. However, God "appropriates the person" who renounces himself. The prophet no longer belongs to himself, he has "given himself to God" and now "belongs to God" with all that he has; his whole identity is built in God and from God.

That is why his only and great treasure is God; his genuine and total love is God; God is the only and supreme authority for the prophet. The truth is that the prophet has belonged to God from his mother's womb and had not realised, was not aware of what he is called to be. The prophet then has to go through the history of his life and discover his identity in God and continue to live it from God. He has to unveil the form that God has given him from the womb and make evident the moment of his birth, that incomparable moment when he saw the external reality from God for the first time; and to start "his life" of service rather difficult than happy, in the world.

4.- The prophet is chosen to "do good"²⁰ and that does not please those who do evil. Hence the logic of the prophet: "My words do good to him who walks uprightly". The prophet finds himself navigating between God and men, he can be faithful to God or sell out to men; in other words, prophets can also be false and evil, but their aim is to be against falsehood and evil. Prophetic ministry is not to be compared or confused with the cultic, the social and the political,

¹⁴ XII, 300 "Holiness being a detachment from the things of earth and at the same time an affection for God and a union with the divine will, there is nothing that distances us more from earth and brings us closer to heaven than the evangelical maxims, for their object is to detach us from goods, pleasures and honours, from sensuality and our own satisfactions. That is their aim, that is their end. To say that a person walks in the observance of the evangelical maxims is to say that he walks in the ways of holiness, and to say that he possesses holiness is to say that he has renounced all the affections of the earth and has united himself to God.

¹⁵ Jer. 23, 16. Num. 18,20. Hos. 4,7-10 ff. Is. 1,2-3; 44,9-120;

¹⁶ Deuteronomy chapters 17-18

¹⁷ Jer. 29

¹⁸ Lev 19:15; Prov 31:9; Is 1:17;

¹⁹ Jer2, 5-8, 17, 30-33, 38... chapters that would do well to review and understand in the present situation.

²⁰ Note by Luis Alonso Shockel these verses from the prophet Micah. "The key to untangle the tangle is the polysemy of the verb ntp = to drip, gush, chatter, pour out, and its phonetic similarity with nb' = to prophesy and htyb = to do good".

but he proposes radical changes to them. The fears he experiences are not irrational, they make sense, since the changes proposed by the prophet are generally not well regarded and are rather persecuted.

The prophet needs to be constantly purified. This is the meaning of the singular gesture that God makes with the prophet: *"touch his mouth"* or *"burn his lips"* ²¹. Only the fire of the Spirit purifies his principal instrument which is "his voice", his word, his proclamation, his denunciation; for this reason, we constantly ask for *"a pure heart"*, and a profound *"interior renewal"* ²². We also need to be purified of our fears: the fear of obeying God, of putting yourself in his hands so that he can do with you what he wills. Many of these fears, insecurities and failures that we have are related to the matter of the vows, hence the need to continue the task of purification²³ that we have begun. At the end of his account, Jeremiah (1:9-19) admits that God takes time to encourage and urge the prophet to carry out his mission, which will be far from easy as it will put the prophet's life in constant danger. This support fills him with hope and strength to obey God.

c. ACT

In today's environment, the theological concern *"how to speak about God today"* is greatly transformed. From the prophet's awareness, the questions go much further: *who cares today what God wants or does not want, how to make the world listen and obey God's will, how to motivate people today to commit themselves to do God's will, to work out his plan of salvation?*

It is obvious that the first thing is to be faithful witnesses of what we proclaim and to be openly against idolatries, but convincing others is another matter. The prophet is always in serious trouble to do his job, and today is no different. Neither today nor ever before has it been easy to make people listen carefully and obey God's will. To *"speak for God"*, to declare oneself *"for"* his *"mystery"*²⁴ of salvation and deliverance in order to lead his creatures away from sin; to be *"resolutely committed"* to bringing believers closer to the Kingdom of God means overcoming many fears and difficulties today. Yet this is the mission of the prophet: *"yesterday as today, authentic prophecy is called to pay"*, says Pope Francis.

In this sense, it is undeniable and permanent that the prophet works in his own life the radical nature of the evangelical counsels. The prophet's life is called to propose today, *"an alternative way of life"*, capable of arousing attraction, and of making innovative and transcendent proposals. The ancient consideration that the vow of poverty leads us to renounce material goods, chastity to the goods of the body and obedience as a renunciation of rational goods²⁵ is not so clear now, but it can recover its sense of going against the current. In this sense, it is said that the prophetic life is *"provocative"*, that is to say, capable of nourishing the desire for a new personal and community conscience where power, wealth and sexuality make possible the utopia of social friendship and fraternity²⁶.

Does the way we live the evangelical counsels today represent a clear alternative to what is lived in this century? Allow me to make some reflections that point to where to go in order to revitalise prophecy in our consecration:

1. Stability: this vow, which is the proper *"Vincentian"* vow, is based on the firmness and stability of the Son of God in the accomplishment of his Mission. His way of realising the *"incarnation"* and his definitive *"commitment"* to carry out the will of his Father, especially in relation to the *"incarnate ones"*.

²¹ Is. 6,5-8

²² Ps. 51, 1-19: We pray it always: "Create in me a **pure** heart, O God; renew within me a steadfast **spirit**. Do not remove me from your presence, do not take your holy **spirit** from me. Give me back the joy of my salvation ..."

²³ Cf. S. THOMAS, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 186, 1 Through poverty the ambition for material goods is purified; through chastity the possessive and dominating tendency of the body is purified; and through obedience the tendency to control and manipulate rational goods is purified.

²⁴ Recall that the Greek word "mysteria" translated into Latin as "sacramentum", refers to God's Plan, revealed by Christ, but still hidden and unveiled in the course of the believer's life. Mysteries was not only about the Greek divinities, but also about the plans for combat and city care that the high military commanders had for protecting their citizens.

²⁵ Cf. S. THOMAS, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 186, 1.

²⁶ It is true that Fratelli Tutti does not directly address the members of consecrated life, but in an effort to understand their mission in today's society, a profound reflection on this subject is essential.

poor, they do not hesitate at any moment and do not commit themselves to anything different from the will of their Father. Jesus, with his word, his actions, with his whole life, is a very clear sign of full communion with the Father and with the Spirit; and of a total participation in the building of his Kingdom, to the point that he advises his disciples: "*Seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and the rest you will receive as well*²⁷".

Therefore, to make this vow means to say **one word**, definite and true, as the gospel counsels: "*You, too, have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, and you shall fulfil your oaths to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, which is the throne of God; nor by the earth, which is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, which is the city of the great King; nor swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair of your head black or white. Let your word be yea, yea; nay, nay. Whatever is added afterwards is from the Evil*^{One28}".

It seems clear enough to me that, in this throwaway culture, where everything is "*use and throw away*"; a culture of fear of sacrifice, mortification, firm and lasting commitment, making this vow is a true "*virtue*": it is an authentic "*attitude of men, of men who do not change*". It is here that life becomes prophecy: it speaks of God not only because one remains a priest, or a missionary, but above all because one remains faithful to the Spirit of Jesus Christ, a spirit that loves with the Heart of God and serves with the whole being of the Father and the Spirit, with whom he lives in communion and from which, everything he does is "*participation*" in the realisation of the Kingdom, of the plan that God conceived from the beginning for those who love him and wish to serve him.

2° By Obedience today, "*he who is to speak in the name of God*" means "*going against the temptation of idolatrous power*": that impulse to dominate and control that we carry within us, capable of creating power struggles in the community, or in any human group; which is often disguised as a spirit of service or justified as compliance with the law. In such a way that this source of discipline and organisation, so useful for generating harmony and peace, ends up turning human coexistence into a disaster where elementary respect for human dignity, justice and peace are absent. - The prophet further understands that his Obedience also consists in - "*going against false freedoms*" often justified as the right to individuality, ^{autonomy29}, freedom, but which end up objectifying, manipulating and instrumentalising others. These aspects contribute to dehumanisation, which is contrary to God's will.

The basis of this vow is "*listening*" ... to obey means "to open one's ear" (ob-audire). To be attentive to what God says, to what others say, to what reality cries out, to the cry of the poor, etc. If consecrated obedience were to omit this listening, it would be a very bad thing. Without listening and without its indispensable complement, discernment, how can the prophet presume to renounce his own will and his own word, in order to seek at every moment the will and the Word of the one to whom he belongs? How can he "*listen to the other*", someone who is easily intoxicated by "listening to himself" and riding on the backs of others? Will it be possible to commit oneself to peace and justice for someone who allows himself to be carried away by the tyranny, arrogance, lies and aggressiveness so characteristic of power? Will someone who has no control over his desire to dominate be able to create the social friendship and fraternity we dream of?

It seems that today, obedience as a structuring of power ceases to be unidirectional and tends to be "*shared*³⁰": it generates respect for the dignity of the brother or sister, who has the right to have his or her say, to be heard and to be taken into account in decisions and in the execution of God's will. The vow of obedience, from this perspective, seeks to be a "model" of a style of community that does not allow divisions, injustices, manipulations, abuses of power, etc., and on the contrary, builds the foundations for fraternity and social friendship.

3° Poverty today would consist in "*going against the idolatry of money and riches*³¹", two elements that seduce, create addiction and, therefore, corrupt, even when they are useful and necessary in human life. Ambition and greed, the eagerness to accumulate goods, the compulsion to use them for personal pleasure, are "*deification*" of money or material goods.

²⁷ Mt 6, 33.

²⁸ Mt. 5, 33-37; Jas. 5,12 "First of all, brethren, do not swear: neither by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let yes be yes, and no be no, and so you will not be condemned.

²⁹ Autonomy is certainly a right, but it should not be confused with "independence" and "lack of responsibility" towards others. Sew has often said, and it is true, that "my freedom ends where the right of the other begins".

³⁰ There are those who have ridiculed this aspect and turned it into a joke. However, it is an aspect that takes on a great deal of seriousness when talking about synodal obedience.

³¹ Col. 3,5

Consequences of this idolatry are: the forgetting of the "other" as a child of God and our brother; insensitivity and indifference to their pain and to the suffering of the growing number of poor; the destruction of the natural sources of wealth intended by God for the common sustenance and well-being, but which end up in the hands of a few; financial scandals (it should be remembered that the Church has also been involved in this issue) and national indebtedness (which end up being paid for by the workers); the tendency of technicality to free itself from human labour, etc.

The worst thing about this picture, which only reflects some of the reality of the new economy, is the "exclusion" of a huge number of human beings; in other words, in order to get rich, the powerful no longer need the poor. A phrase that really struck me: and now.... who will be able to free the poor from the new global economy that is coming upon us!

Having money and wealth is becoming a central concern in the lives of many humans, how to act prophetically in the face of all this? It seems clear that it is indispensable to learn to focus on the true value of money and wealth here on earth, since it has a very limited and relative significance compared to transcendent goods. In this sense, there is talk, for example, of "*an economy of solidarity*". Many institutes of consecrated life have set up funds for their support in difficult times, which is reasonable and intelligent, but what about the conviction that our goods belong to the poor, what about the economy of solidarity?

There is no doubt that poverty in terms of "*detachment*" and "*voluntary impoverishment*" is still a value by which we renounce to dispose of our own goods and to depend on the community (the superior) for our material needs. But it is still said that we are personally poor, but communally and socially rich. We also have no doubt that the materialistic and consumerist society is "*provoked*" when the prophet detracts from the value of earthly goods because he considers them "outdated"; but it is urgent to accentuate the prophetic awareness of redirecting economic goods to the good of the poorest and neediest of our brothers and sisters, without denying that they are also necessary for us.

We will agree that we are lacking creativity and prophetic imagination. To encourage it is in fact an exercise in Christian hope. The Jubilee's invitation to remember that the Church is a pilgrim and that her waiting is not passivity but "journeying", "advancing" towards consummation, will open the way to new ways of presence in the midst of the poor.

4° Consecrated chastity: in its prophetic sense it consists in "*going against the idolatry of hedonism*" so prevalent in today's world. And it is better understood if it is understood as a "*capacity for relationship*". Ask the consecrated person how he or she lives his or her relationships of love: with God, with myself, with others and with nature? Do you manage these relationships from pleasure, or from love? from renunciation and deprivation, or from giving, from self-giving? In the history of the Church, much emphasis has been placed on the "privative" aspect or on the renunciation of "*bodily goods*". And the fact that bodily deprivation is, above all, a gift, an unequalled expression of total love for God and for one's brothers and sisters, has been somewhat neglected. The consequence is that everything related to the vow of chastity before the world is unnatural. What, then, should we think of this vow today?

Today there is a greater attempt to unify everything related to the vow of chastity. Consecrated persons understand that chastity is the surrender of the heart and soul to God. Celibacy and continence is the surrender of the body, exclusively to God. Chastity, celibacy and continence reaffirm a sense of total belonging: "in body, soul and spirit" to their Creator. And, fundamentally, all this lived not as mere privations, but above all as a "*gift of love*" similar to that of God, who goes out of himself, who forgets himself to "go" to "seek the lost sheep". Chastity, celibacy and continence unite the "pastoral and prophetic" senses. Pastoral because all the love for God is turned towards his "sheep" and is transformed into Salvation (zeal for the salvation of souls). Prophetic, because it rejects the deification of pleasure and channels the giving of the body in service (The poor, face of Christ).

In the face of certain characteristics of our times: a compulsive sexuality (which creates confusion in relational language, where tenderness, closeness, touch and other relational values of sexuality are interpreted as "seduction" or "aggression" towards the other); disordered passion; the manipulation and commercialisation of the body; the lowering of human dignity which divides and

dehumanises the person, the practice of continence, celibacy and chastity are "*signs*". which, when well lived, make God's love and love for our brothers and sisters credible and meaningful in the world.

The consecration of body and heart to God in the manner of Jesus Christ is, at the same time, a sign of fulfilment and anticipation of the Kingdom of God³². This point is of great importance: total dependence on God makes you independent, free from those affective and emotional attachments that end up enslaving the person: to take care of myself and beautify myself for the desire to be seen, to oppose "*worth*", "to be appreciated" and "to be taken into account" for my bodily endowments. In other words, refusing to sell image and to fight to "be" in truth "what I have to be".

Being chaste, continent, celibate, is not a function of self, nor is it something that is added to the search for compensation. These are signs of a freedom conquered through self-control or self-mastery: I am free when I do not react to those who seduce me and make themselves desired, but when I decide to "give myself to the one I love, to the one I truly love"; and "to give myself entirely" without divisions or partialisation. Before the world, chastity is a prophecy because it frees love from selfishness, self-referentiality, abuse and so on. It is another form of covenant, which realises what is desirable in the marriage covenant that God himself so often used as an image of the relationships he sought with his people.

To sum up:

The prophet and the practice of his theo-signs play an important role today in the transformation of human relationships: from hatred to love; from the idolatry of having to fraternal and friendly sharing; from dominion and control over the other to unity, communion and walking together: "The prophetic word of the charism today, more than poverty, even more than chastity, more than prayer... is that of fraternal relationships³³". If the new dream of the Church is to build fraternity and social friendship, consecrated life is called to show "the joy and beauty of fraternity; to experience and transmit the "mystique of living together" (EG 87).

All Christians are invited to live the evangelical counsels³⁴, but the vital witness of other Christians, and especially the witness of those who have consecrated themselves, beyond baptism, to radicalise their dedication to God and to the service of the poor, is never superfluous. By creating communities where witness is given to "going against" "the desire to have (poverty), the lust for power (obedience) and the desire to be worth (chastity)", the foundations are laid for deep fraternal relationships, and the realisation of partnerships more in line with the Kingdom of God is facilitated.

All that we have reflected on will undoubtedly have a lot to do with "God's will". Everything invites us to conclude with Amos: "*If the lion roars, who will not fear? If the Lord Jehovah speaks, who will not prophesy³⁵?*" The desire that God roars is compelling: "*Would that all my people would prophesy³⁶*". Thus, the prophet, conscious of the dignity of every human being, motivates his brothers to satisfy the great truth reaffirmed by Saint Augustine when he says: "*You have made us, Lord, for yourself and our heart will be restless until it rests in you³⁷*".

³² Mt 19 14-15 Remember that Jesus spoke of "eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God". In Jesus' time many slaves were castrated by their masters, so that they would not procreate, nor marry, but devote themselves totally to their masters. Thus, they had no defined physical, biological, or social identity. Understandably, it is not that they were chaste, but they emphasise the value of being totally for the person they serve. In this same sense of total dependence on the Father, Jesus said the phrase: "unless you become as little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven".

³³ Bini fr. Giacomo, "Ultima conferenza", Frascati (7.05.2014), [Bini], p. 6, on the Internet: <https://ofmroma.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/noi-si-semina-fr-giacomo-bini.pdf>

³⁴ LG 42 - All Christians, lay, religious, single, married, are called to evangelical perfection.

³⁵ Amos 3, 8-10

³⁶ Num. 11,29; 1Cor. 14,5; Joel 2,28; Acts 2,17

³⁷ Confessions 1,1,1