

# C.Ss.R. SPIRITUALITY

ONE BODY (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Eph 4,4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÒ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ΕΙΝ ΓΕΙΒ (Εβρ 4,4)

## 06 - For the sake of those without hope

*In the place chosen for prayer we can place images of the blessed Redemptorist martyrs. Or of other prophets of our time.*

*The meeting begins with a greeting and a prayer.*

### Prophecy, another name for hope

The renewal of hope, which is so important in the theme of the sexennium and in the Final Message of the General Chapter, is not a matter internal to the Congregation. As Pope Francis has been saying from the very beginning of his pontificate, mission becomes a source of frustration and sterile introspection if it's not lived with Christ for the sake of **the people**, if it doesn't lead us to 'anoint with hope' those who have "absolutely nothing at all".

The renewal of hope thus becomes a tremendous responsibility, and challenges us to review our manner of being and working in this world. In the Final Message, the General Chapter pointed to **prophecy** as a way of expressing the radicality of our conversion (n.8). Putting to one side the use or misuse of the word prophecy, our era urgently enjoins prophecy on us. If we are able to read the signs of the times (Mt. 16,3), we'll recognize that prophecy is more urgent to this world than bread.

The whole of history behind us has had **salvation** as its untiring driving-force. Wars, invasions, theological enquiry and philosophical research, inventions, revolutions, emigrations of people and art in its thousand expressions: in so many ways, including the most deviant, humanity has walked in a horizon of salvation. The dream of casting down the mighty from their thrones and of raising the lowly has nourished hope for millennia. Today **resignation** predominates. The good news for the poor (Lk 4,18) seems now to be just one piece of news among many. Just one more twitter, but nothing more.

The **power** we run up against, defenseless, is too strong, its tentacles numberless: from the concentration of riches to the importunity of advertising, to the alienation brought about by the media, all is so powerful as to discourage us, especially in view of our own paltry means.

It seems at times that there are **no alternatives** to this way of living and thinking, in which the ego is flattered and seduced, and often alienated. We know that an alternative exists, and it belongs with those who live by faith, those who view reality not as it is manipulated by human beings, but as God has willed it. It's precisely this situation which calls with great intensity for a response, that of the prophets.

It's the Redeemer himself who tells us that it's sinful to conform, and it's proper to be angry in the presence of a lie which claims to be successful right along the line. Our 'No' must be courageous and strong in the face of the powerful of this world and of their kingdoms of papier maché.

### Your word is a light for my steps

*John 4, 34-38 is read aloud. After this there can be time for silence and free sharing. Here we'll confine ourselves to pointing to two motifs which make of this page an icon for the renewal of hope.*



- Jesus' view has **two focal points**: on the first level the fields of grain which are ripening; in the background are the Samaritans who arrive, after having encountered the woman Jesus met at the well of Sichar. They, the outsiders, the 'excommunicated', are the first fruits of the harvest. The same Samaritan woman, herself a person 'outside the law', has become a missionary among her own fellow-citizens. Hope is born where, humanly speaking, we don't see any grounds for hope.
- The **proverb** quoted by Jesus is also a source of hope: "one sows and another reaps". Sowing and reaping are two sides of the same coin. Jesus is the seed which produces fruit (Jn. 12, 24). His word is the seed which the disciples will spread throughout the world. It's the same word to which we listen today. The harvest is coming already in our lifetime. But the final harvest is still far in the future. Yet we rejoice already today in the vitality of this seed.

*A suitable period of silence comes after the sharing or the simple proclamation of the word.*

### From the Redemptorist Tradition

There is a place which we Redemptorists could take as a symbol of our hope: it's a little room in Ciorani where, on the evening of July 21st 1740, St. Alphonsus, together with Fathers Mazzini, Sportelli, Rossi, Villani and brothers Rendina, Tartaglione, Gaudiello and Curzio made their **vow of perseverance**.



The Congregation had not yet been approved by the Pope, and the King of Naples was making life almost impossible for the confreres. To keep these men together, there was no rule but only an 'intention' which Alphonsus, still under the tutelage of Falcoia, was trying to focus. No one offered these men any guarantees of survival. Each one of them was free to stay or to leave. And yet they **committed** themselves to give their lives for the abundant redemption. For them it was

sufficient to know that their work of preaching Jesus Christ to the poor people of the countryside would not be unsuccessful.

It's not an accident that a recent biography of our founder was entitled "**a saint for those without hope**". It was the discovery of those who had 'absolutely nothing' which upset Alphonsus' plans and made him say that to give life to these people "he might have to remain alone". His sons however were to go beyond the Cape of Good Hope .

The choice of these men was **prophetic**, even if they did not make any great to-do. Their way was to proclaim, in the face of the government of the Kingdom and of the Church, the dignity of the person, the dignity of entire populations which were simply 'forgotten', left to themselves. To come from the side of the **abandoned**, and to offer themselves as a help for human and spiritual growth, was like "a loud cry" in the face of a politics which had repudiated it only *raison d'être*, namely service.

It was in this path of humble and courageous prophecy that our **saints and beatified** confreres moved. Some of them had to "*set their face*", as the Greek text of Luke 9,51 puts it, speaking of Jesus who set himself decisively to go to Jerusalem. This is what our Spanish martyrs and those of Eastern Europe did, some of them in the midst of even more atrocious suffering.

"*No prophet of the past or the present died a natural death*", said Leonardo Boff. This could perhaps frighten us.

### The Constitutions today

"To become a sign of hope for the poor": this is our vocation. But it will become possible only if we have a **life-style** which is really poor, in conformity with that of the people whom we must evangelize (Const. 65). This also means being prophetic.

Once again, it's to **Christ** that we must look. Unlike the Scribes, Jesus based his authority on **the example of his life** (Mt. 7,29) and not on the strictness of theories or the charming power of words. Jesus was **close to the people**, he shared their sufferings and for that reason he was angry. Jesus was effective in his preaching because he **incarnated** what he said.

On our part we must admit that the Church throughout the centuries has been more concerned with being effective than with being **exemplary**.

What would Christ say to each of us now? Perhaps he would not ask us merely to make place for his word in our frozen hearts; he would implore us to enter into the affliction of this world, to go towards all the **peripheries**, the geographical but also the existential, to listen at least to the cry for salvation which rises from them.

He would ask us also to do everything possible so that our personal life-style and the way we project ourselves as a community might express something different from and indeed **alternative** to a world in which the strong powers of this world want us to "toe the line" and even be submissive. *"The real crisis is not in statistics, but in passivity"*, as Communicanda 3 of 1904 already said, when it invited us to read the signs of our times.

Jesus would ask us to proclaim, with greater courage and pastoral choices, his gospel to the **young**. If Pope Francis told these "don't let people rob you of your hope", it's because he knows how much young people are exposed to the illusion of facile and deceptive solutions. And on our part we know how much young people demand of us, in terms of self-denial, but above all in terms of authenticity.

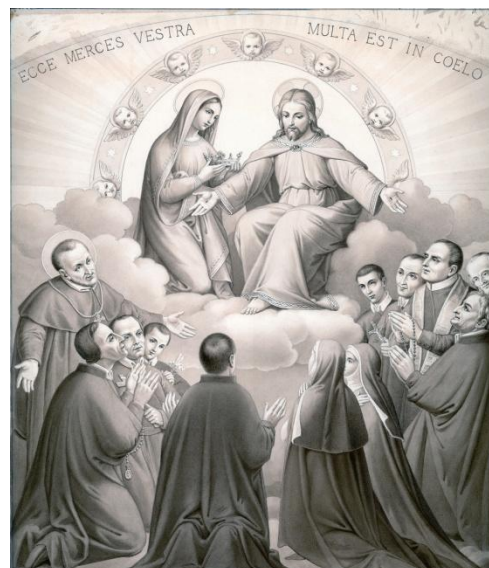
*It's appropriate that a reflection on the theme should take place, either through sharing or led by whoever is presiding. In particular we should reflect on the situations which summon our community or group to make prophetic choices, either in the proclamation of the Gospel or in our life-style.*

## Conclusion

*It's well to express our intentions freely in prayer. In particular we should remember:*

- the victims of injustice
- the poor and abandoned who live near our communities
- young people and their desire for real life.
- Redemptorists engaged in courageous and prophetic choices.
- The lay-people who collaborate with us in the proclamation of abundant redemption.
- Prophetic men and women of our days.

*We finish with a Pater noster and a prayer taken from the liturgy. And a hymn to the Blessed Virgin.*



ONE BODY is a monthly text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality

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