

## “Called to the Cenacle”

- Father Eugênio Barbosa Martins, sss, the last Superior General from 2011 to 2023, shares his reading with us, starting from the very title of this message. It should be noted that Father Eugênio, now Monsignor, is himself one of the architects of this Chapter, which he presided over. His reflection provides a background to the Chapter's reflections, reinforced by the spirit of the Synod on Synodality and by the spirituality of the Jubilee Year.

The last Chapter Assembly, held in Vietnam in November 2023, was a great gift that our Eymardian Family welcomed as a concrete fruit of the Holy Spirit's action. The Spirit of God, who "makes all things new", put us in tune with the great ecclesial moment we are living. In its search for fidelity to the Risen Lord, the Church returns to its synodal origins, shares the gift of salvation and is enriched in the relationship of Communion, Participation and Mission. In fidelity to the Spirit, synodality is shaping our local Churches and, consequently, our SSS communities.

We are in deep convergence of content and chapter projects with the conclusions of the Synod, presented in the form of a document of the Magisterium of the Church. Pope Francis urges us to accept the Synod's final document as part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter. This implies a commitment to implement the indications of the text in the local Churches, through processes of "discernment and decision".

In this sense, as the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, we have a specific contribution, deepened and planned in the Final Document of the 36th General Chapter, to join forces in this journey called for by the Church.

## **Eucharistic Spirituality**

Eucharistic Spirituality is our understanding of the Paschal Mystery that nourishes our witness, which springs from the Eymardian charism. Over the last few decades, it has been matured and systematised in the General Chapters, finding its current relevance and foundation in the Rule of Life. As we have rightly said, our Rule of Life is based on a theology that is in full communion with the Eucharistic theology structured at the Second Vatican Council. In this respect, number 21 of our Rule is an expression that proves this statement.

*“The celebration of the Memorial of the Lord is at the center of our personal and communal life. It is the starting point for our understanding of the Eucharist and inspires our prayer and ministry.”*

The remembrance of the inspiration and biblical foundation of the context of the Institution of the Eucharist, reflected from Father Eymard's experience, that is, the Cenacle, offers a brilliant light and strength in our mission founded on the charism. The biblical quotations at the beginning of the Final Document, located in point 2, b, *The Cenacle*, are instruments that necessarily lead to a deepening of the Eucharistic Mystery. This content illuminates our celebratory practices and, consequently, nourishes a Eucharistic life that is embodied in the building of fraternal, prayerful and serving communities.

Father Eymard's understanding and experience of the "inner Cenacle", developed during the long and profound spiritual journey at the **Great Retreat of Rome**, is a prototype for our communities, which are always organised according to mission. The brothers who meet in a community environment, called by the Lord to follow him and identified by the gift of the charism systematised by Father Eymard, develop sensitivity to the current *hunger* of human beings and place themselves at the service of all baptised Christians. The Eucharistic

celebrations and the whole Eucharistic cult that springs from this source, that is, the **Cenacle**, celebrated and experienced as the People of God, illuminate the daily construction of **domestic Cenacles**, where ecclesial experience is concretised in family life. The various forms of Aggregation of SSS laity confirm this understanding and experience of the Eymardian charism.

With these indications, we can affirm and proclaim the relevance and urgency of applying Eucharistic Spirituality in the Church as a whole, but particularly in the local Churches, through our witness and mission.

### **Called to the Cenacle for synodality**

Delving deeper into the magisterial document of the Synod, we realise that it did not present any novelties, as expected, in line with the expectations generated by the contributions from all over the world. The controversial issues, which were not studied in depth or finalised at the Synod, were handed over to the various Dicasteries. These were charged with continuing their studies and reflections with a view to presenting proposals in due course. In the analysis of ecclesiology scholars, the great advance of the Synod was to affirm that the Church cannot go backwards. The Second Vatican Council, with all its content, applied and developed in recent decades, was reaffirmed in its strength and enlightenment for the life and mission of the whole Church.

For us, the Eymardian Family, we are also confirmed in our journey of conciliar renewal, concretised in the final draft of our Rule of Life. We take as an example the liturgical reform which is the most visible expression of our charism and mission. Taking on as a personal, community and congregational commitment what number 40 of the Rule of Life affirms is a visible response to our fidelity and communion with the Church.

*Liturgical research and apostolate are of particular concern to us. We devote ourselves to liturgical animation and formation using every available resource, and, in line with the directives of the Church, we look for expressions better suited to the needs of the faithful so that every celebration may become an experience of faith and a source of commitment.*

Our acceptance and deepening of Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter, *Desiderio Desideravi*, also reveals our filial spirit to the Church, strengthening our mission with ecclesial communities. In this way, the cenacular experience is lived as a true and transforming encounter with the Lord, who at the two tables of the Word and the Eucharist, enlightens us and nourishes our life of **communion, participation and mission**.

The Final Document of the Synod, as a Petrine magisterium, has helped us to deepen our understanding of the diocesan Church, inviting us to no longer call it a "particular" Church, but a local Church. In the ecclesial context, we have already re-appropriated the word **synodality** in our reflections and community experiences, and the implementation of the inspirations and decisions of the last Synod calls for us to welcome and deepen the reality of "**diocesanity**".

In the local Churches where we are present, respecting and strengthening their identities marked by different cultures, we are called, as SSS religious, to enrich them with the strength of the charism that was evaluated and updated at the last General Chapter and well summarised in the Final Message: "Called to the Cenacle". This Message is perfectly aligned with the Synod. It also shows a deep harmony with the content of the Papal Bull that summoned us to celebrate the Jubilee Year. Consequently, it responds objectively to the Spirit's call to our Eymardian Family. Broadening our vision of the world, the current challenges that call us to take an effective stance in the face of the culture of death and war, the "exaggerated love" that Father Eymard contemplated in the Eucharistic offering, expressed in

"take and eat, take and drink... this is my body given up, this is my blood poured out", involves us and commits us to the urgent search for answers that favour the fullness of Life (Jn 10:10).

In the local Church, the totality of the mystery of the Church is revealed and manifested. It is there that the **People of God**, that is, all the baptised, including those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders, take on the synodal journey of building a **Church of Communion, Participation and Mission**. This is what we have already taken on as a religious profession

- publicly celebrated in community,
- inspired especially by numbers 1 and 3 (Name of the Congregation and Our Mission) of the Rule of Life
- formulated as a prayer of surrender and consecration through number 102 (Formula of Religious Profession),
- and welcoming the conclusions of the Synod, lead us to be in full harmony with the missionary action in the local Churches where we are inserted.

Our acceptance of the calls of the Spirit, manifested in the 36th GC and the Synod, must spring from the free gift we receive from the Lord through our Eucharistic vocation. The Eymardian charism, historicised and made real by the Spirit of God, is confirmed by the Church. In the realisation of this gift, when we celebrate the paschal mystery, we experience the constructive dimensions and contradictions experienced by Jesus and his community. Contemplating this biblical reality sheds light on our progress and the contradictions of our religious and ecclesial communities. The succinct description presented in the Final Message, in point 2, b, with the title: The Cenacle, is invaluable!

The liturgical pedagogy of the mystery we celebrate, when applied and witnessed to with awareness and openness, will mould us and make us, like Father Eymard, into Eucharistic men, with the choices and attitudes of those who have "Eucharised" their own lives (Final Message, 2, d, *The Prayer*).

## **Called to the Cenacle in the Jubilee Year**

Our hope has a name, it has a solid foundation: Jesus Christ! So, like St Paul, we too can say: "Hope does not disappoint"! (Rom 5:5). Our Eucharistic awareness and experience lead us to concretise this hope in concrete actions, identified in the Final Message under the title: ***From the Cenacle to the World as Disciple and Apostle***. One of the urgent aspects is to increase our actions in caring for our "Common Home". The increase in illnesses recorded in the last decade, caused especially by the tragic rise in global temperatures, facilitates the proliferation of viruses and bacteria, making many environments veritable breeding grounds where pandemics are spreading. The aggression that this irrational economic model is inflicting on our common home leads us to believe that there is a real possibility that life on the planet will become extinct.

Let's join forces in the celebratory actions and alternative practices that are emerging from the celebration of the 800th anniversary of Francis of Assisi's Cantic of the Creatures, as well as the 10th anniversary of the promulgation of the Encyclical *Laudato Sí*. As a member of the international organisation, the Church is taking part in the preparation and celebration of COP 30, which will take place in the city of Belém, in the state of Pará, in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon. The Conference is expected to be bolder in advancing controls to reduce global temperatures. Our involvement in this great movement in favour of life on the planet is a response, as an Eymardian Family, to the Gospel and Eucharistic call. Our actions must be directed towards the impoverished and needy who are the main victims of the consequences of neglecting our common home.

The "Eucharistic materials", bread and wine, are the fruit of human action in the care and cultivation of the earth, in harmony with all of nature. Caring for the continuity of life on the planet, reducing the risks and aggressions to the environment, commits us to ensuring that bread and wine are not missing from our Eucharistic tables. As Pope Francis indicated in *Laudato Sí*, it is necessary to broaden our ecological

understanding in order to develop actions that promote **Integral Ecology**, where human beings feel more co-responsible in caring for our Common Home.

The synchronisation of the dates of the **Provincial and Regional Chapters**, which will be celebrated in 2026, will be another important opportunity for all SSS religious, communities and provinces/regions to evaluate the projects and the path they are following. As an act of obedience to the Spirit of God, let us allow ourselves to be guided by this content of the Final Message of the 36th GC, which is so timely and concrete in the incarnation of our charism. Let us, as a congregation, accept the invitation to enter into the dynamic of **pastoral conversion, which** is so necessary if we are to take on the Eucharistic mission more radically. In this way, we will be able to put our lives and our mission at the service of the local Churches in the different cultures where we are present, through projects that are feasible and drive new actions.

May the Eucharistic woman, Mary of Nazareth, mother of Jesus and our mother, mother who was given to Jesus' disciples in the person of the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the cross, help us to nourish our sensitivity and gratitude for the present moment in our congregational history. The final Message of the 36th GC is the illumination for the *kairos* in which we are immersed. May the Eucharistic man, Peter Julian Eymard, accompany us in this school of **exaggerated love**, translating our choices and actions into the construction of cenacle communities where fraternity, prayer and service are our identity.

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2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent - Transfiguration of the Lord

+ **EUGÊNIO BARBOSA MARTINS SSS**

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*Bishop of São João da Boa Vista*