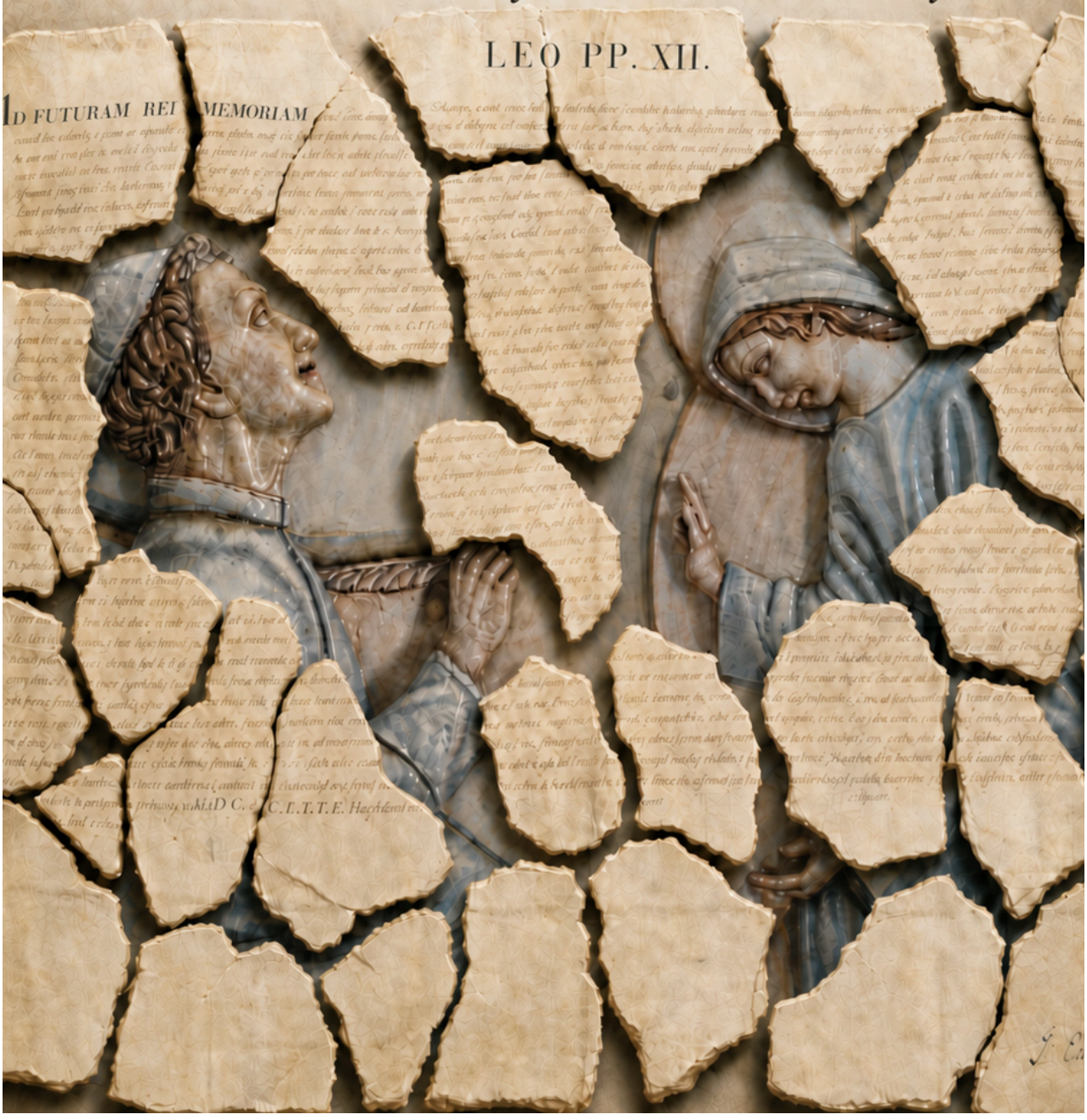
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The Spirit continues to say “yes”

A word to the confreres at the bicentenary



The Spirit continues to say "yes"

A word to the confreres at the bincentenary

p. Luis A. Costantino Avila omv
Rector Major

PRESENTATION

Dear confreres,

I share these pages with you with sincere affection and with the deep desire that they be received for what they are: a word born from the heart of our shared life. As we celebrate the bicentenary of the pontifical approval of our Congregation, we feel the need to give ourselves time to stop, breathe deeply, and recognize ourselves once again as brothers united by the same gift.

This text does not claim to exhaust everything or to offer definitive solutions. Nor does it seek to judge the past or condition the future. It is, quite simply, an invitation to walk with greater awareness, to let ourselves be looked upon by the Lord, and to renew the «yes» we once pronounced; that commitment which, while personal, is also ecclesial and communal, and continues to sustain our mission.

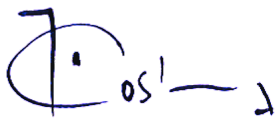
I wish to accompany you with respect and closeness. I do not speak from outside or from above, but from the experience of knowing ourselves to be a small, fragile, and beloved family. A family that knows light and weariness, silent fidelities and sincere searching, deep joys and wounds that still ask for care. All of this is our real history, and once again we place it all in the hands of the Lord.

I invite you to approach this reflection without haste and without defensiveness, with an open heart. Not as one who studies a document, but as one who allows himself to be accompanied. Each brother will find different resonances according to his present stage of life and current service. We do not seek uniformity, but communion.

May this reading help us listen to one another more, care for trusting fraternity, and sustain hope in the face of challenges. We do not walk alone: the witness of so many brothers goes before us, and the fidelity of the Lord sustains us in the work He Himself began.

I place this text in your hands with gratitude and trust. Under Mary's maternal gaze, let us continue walking together, sustained by prayer and fraternal friendship, convinced that, in our littleness, the Spirit continues to pronounce His «yes».

With fraternal affection.
In Pinerolo, August 5, 2026.



p. Luis A. Costantino Avila omv
Rector Major

NOTE FOR READING

The following text arises chiefly from the desire to accompany the personal and communal journey, and it asks to be read with time, pauses, and inner availability. And with mercy for the one who wrote it. It need not be read all at once. It may be read in parts, returned to, underlined, or simply allowed to rest.

Many hands have taken part in its drafting, and I thank them for their trust and openness of spirit. May each person take from these pages whatever the Lord grants him.

Thank you for reading.

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INTRODUCTION

ON

September 1, 2026, the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary celebrates the 200th anniversary of its pontifical approval through the Brief *Etsi Dei Filius* of Pope Leo XII.

The «yes« that the Church of Rome conferred upon that initiative born in Carignano — which had already gathered Pio Brunone Lanteri, Giovanni Battista Reynaudi, Ignazio Carrera, Giuseppe Loggero, Pietro Vigo Pallavicini, Luigi Craveri, Giovanni Antonio Ferrero, and Francesco Biagio Botto — is the formal reception of the charism that the Spirit brought to birth in the Church. Through the life and service of these men consecrated to God through the hands of Mary, the good God became present amid His People. And to those who follow in their footsteps, Mother Church — pointing to the Rule of life written by Father Pio Bruno Lanteri — says what Jesus said to the scholar of the Law: «Go and do likewise» (Lk 10:37).

We celebrate that, over 200 years, many confreres gave their lives to the service of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a simple and poor community such as ours. In different parts of the world and coming from different cultures, they tried to live and bear witness to charity and obedience in the best way possible. Today we are grateful for their fidelity; not only by recalling the most renowned figures of our history, but also all those who shone brightly while living in silence and recollection.

We give thanks to the Father and to the Son because the life poured out by the Holy Spirit through the mediation of our community did not come to a halt because of our sin. The same Spirit who said «yes» in the Church two centuries ago is the one who continues to say «yes» to every community gathered around the Lanterian charism, and to all of them together. We celebrate and give thanks, in fear and trembling, for the profound trust that the Lord places in the Oblates of Mary Most Holy.

For charisma does not belong to us; it is entrusted to us. It belongs to the Spirit of God and to the Church of Christ; it is a prophetic word that goes forth from His mouth and does not return to

Him barren but accomplishes all that He wills and fulfills the mission He entrusted to it (cf. Is 55:11). And yet, like everything that comes from God, we receive it through the witness — words and gestures — of our elder brothers. It is a free gift, born of the Lord's pure love, so as to give continuity to His own way of being among human beings: to serve and not to seek to be served; it springs from communion with the Church, never outside it, so that the promised, anticipated, and longed-for Kingdom may finally come.

The Lanterian charism, like every personal or communal gift in the Church, is incarnate: it is at the service of the Gospel, it enlightens every person in his real cultural context and precise historical coordinates, it is expressed in human ways, it counts not only on personal talents but also on constitutive human frailty, it embraces the cross and makes all crosses bearable. I am not sure it is correct to say that we possess a charism; rather, we have been seized by a passionate fire made a gift of the Church for the world.

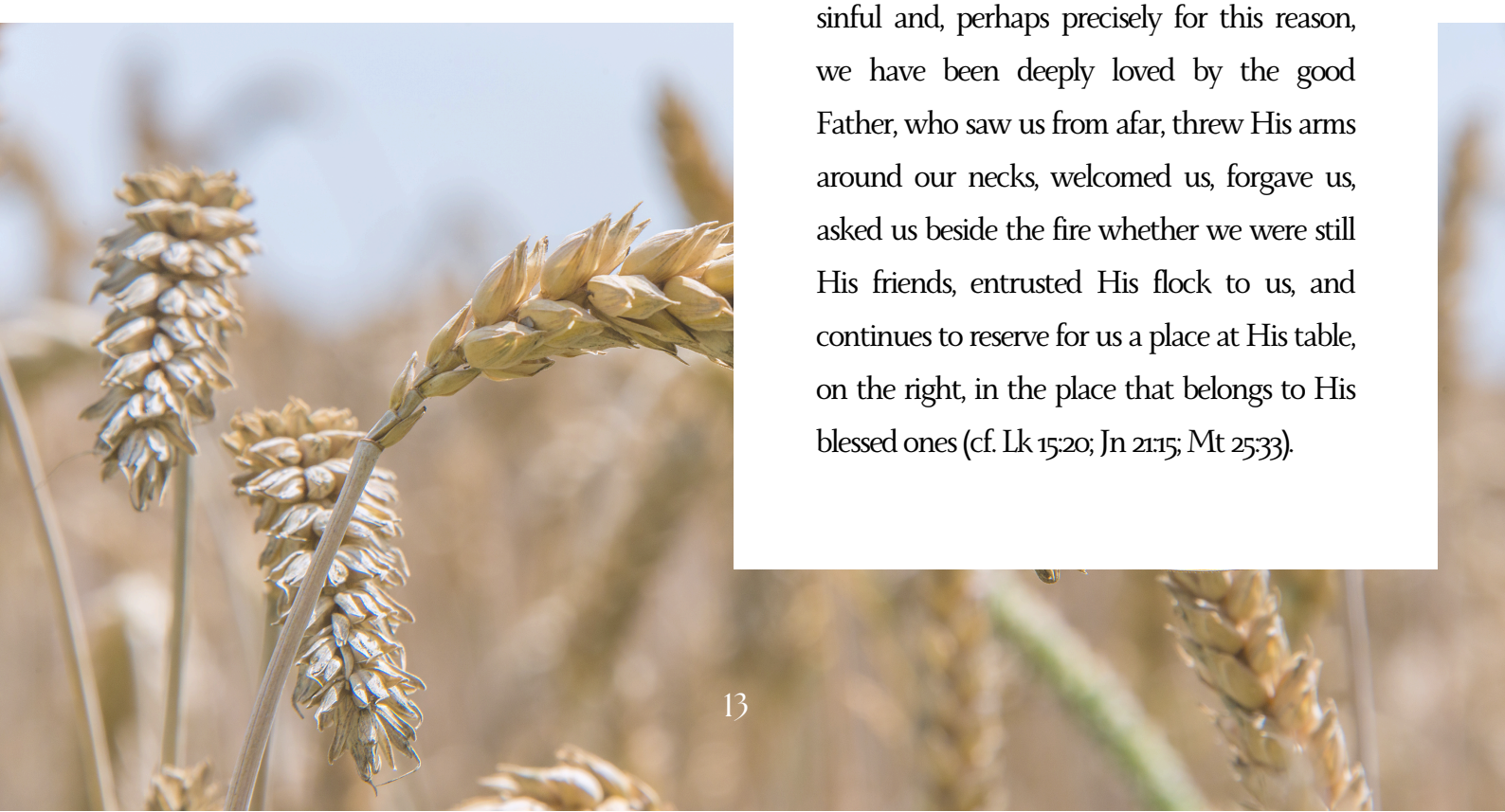
We celebrate that the brothers who preceded us interpreted in their own lives the implications of that charism for themselves and for their ministry among the People. Some set out for other lands, while others entered deeply into study and teaching. While some felt called to spend long hours in the confidentiality of the confessional, others gave themselves for long periods of preaching in churches and convents, in squares, or even beneath a tree. Challenged by that good Piedmontese priest whose health was fragile and whose tenacity was inversely proportional to it, not a few recognized that their own personal searching had been inwardly interpreted, and they embraced the charism as an expression of their own human and spiritual maturity. Thus, some found fullness in a life hidden with Christ in God, while others channeled their eloquence and liveliness into preaching and pastoral animation. While some built churches and cathedrals, others chose sheer exposure to the elements. Some stood out for their way of guiding the confreres, others for their obedience. Some knew how to become directly involved with the simplest and most neglected people; others went out to meet leaders and rulers. In one way or another, all personally experienced that this charism of divine origin impelled them to go out of themselves and to identify with Christ Jesus. Many were the oblates who did not feel authorized to settle — even if the world had collapsed around them — for «leading a quiet life, like a comfortable retiree, without troubles or sufferings». Indeed, they clearly foresaw that «if the Congregation itself had no concern other than conveniently closing each year's accounts, without concern for programs or duties, we could be sure that in a hundred years not even the seed of the Oblates would remain. But thanks be to God, we are not yet decadent or finished» **[1].**

[1] Fr. Domenico Pechenino omv, Rector Major, Dopo la Celebrazione Centenaria, 2 March 1927.

Nevertheless, it is right to say that throughout these two centuries there were brothers who made decisions and undertook actions that, at times, generated difficulties or misunderstandings. Even so, even when their initiatives were not always perfectly successful, we cannot help but recognize that a deep longing for fidelity to the mission received beat within each of them and to the charism entrusted to them. Imprudence or mistakes do not deny the authenticity of one's commitment; rather, they show the complexity of the human journey and the difficulties inherent in discerning the most appropriate way to live one's vocation in changing historical contexts. Thus, the whole body of work and choices carried out throughout the history of the Congregation reflects, despite everything, the sincere desire to respond to the Spirit and serve the Church, even when the outcome was not always what we expected.

We recognize that every charism comes from God as a seed and must return to Him full of fruit; therefore it falls to us today — to each one and to all — to give continuity to the warm welcome of the gift of the Spirit and to interpret it existentially, without leavining it to the sterility of misunderstanding, inconstancy, worries, or being overwhelmed by riches (cf. Mt 13:19-22). Is it possible to be unfaithful to that seed? Yes, every time we turn our backs on the love of God and our brothers and sisters. And in this regard, each of us must examine his own conscience and allow himself to be convinced once again that, without charity, our Congregation becomes inconsistent and each of its works, however spiritual they may appear, will be nothing more than a heavy burden on the shoulders of the People of God (cf. 1 Cor 13).

In any case, this is a time for joyful and humble gratitude. We are poor, little, and sinful and, perhaps precisely for this reason, we have been deeply loved by the good Father, who saw us from afar, threw His arms around our necks, welcomed us, forgave us, asked us beside the fire whether we were still His friends, entrusted His flock to us, and continues to reserve for us a place at His table, on the right, in the place that belongs to His blessed ones (cf. Lk 15:20; Jn 21:15; Mt 25:33).



IN THE BEGINNING, THE WORD

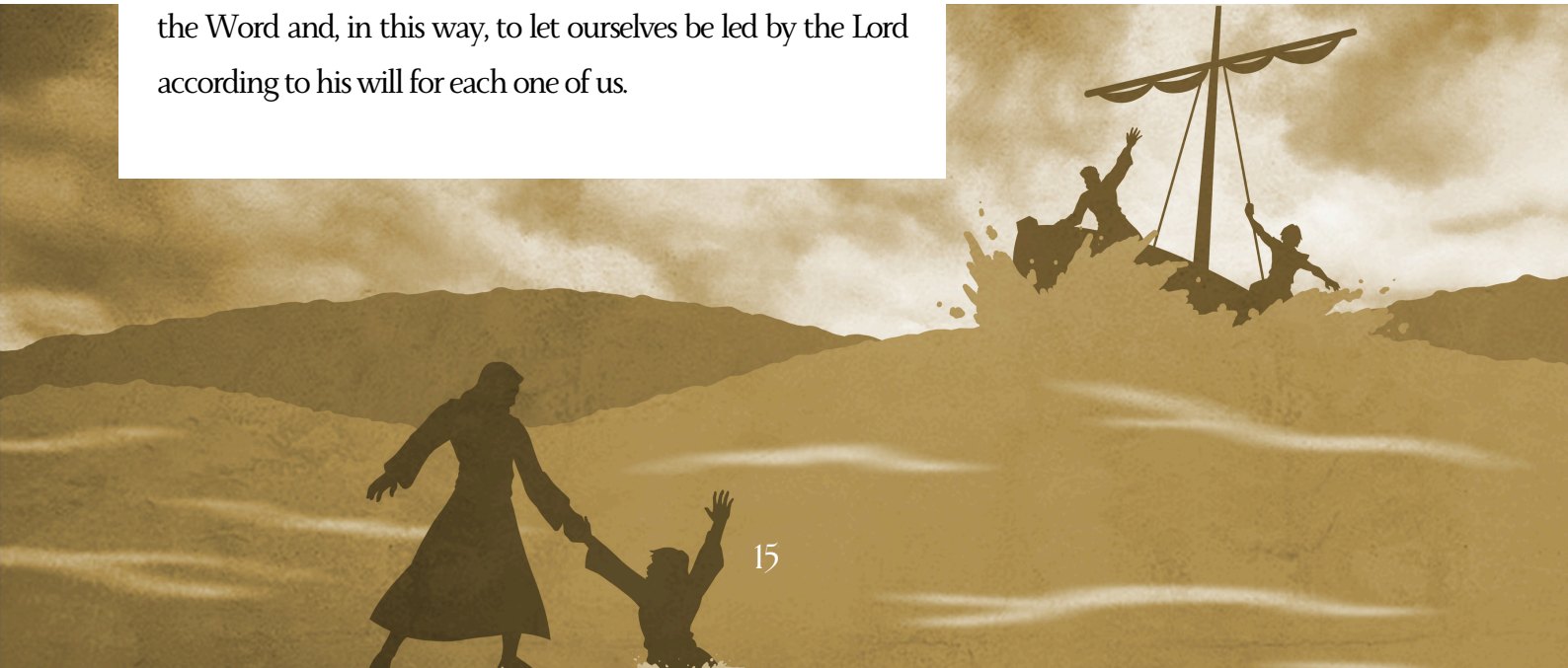
I invite you to enter this section without haste, allowing the Word to read you.

I would like to begin this reflection by inviting you to reflect on God's Word together, especially on the biblical texts suggested in the opening paragraph of the Brief *Etsi Dei Filius*.

I do not want to offer an exegesis or a treatise, but rather to invite us to take up the texts themselves, to listen to them in the heart, to meditate on them, and to pause in loving contemplation.

The first two texts I propose relate to Peter's faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. Third, although it is not a single text, serves rather as a bridge for presenting Fathers Lanteri and Reynaudi.

With great simplicity of spirit, then, I invite you to pray with the Word and, in this way, to let ourselves be led by the Lord according to his will for each one of us.



1.

JESUS AND PETER WALK ON THE WATER

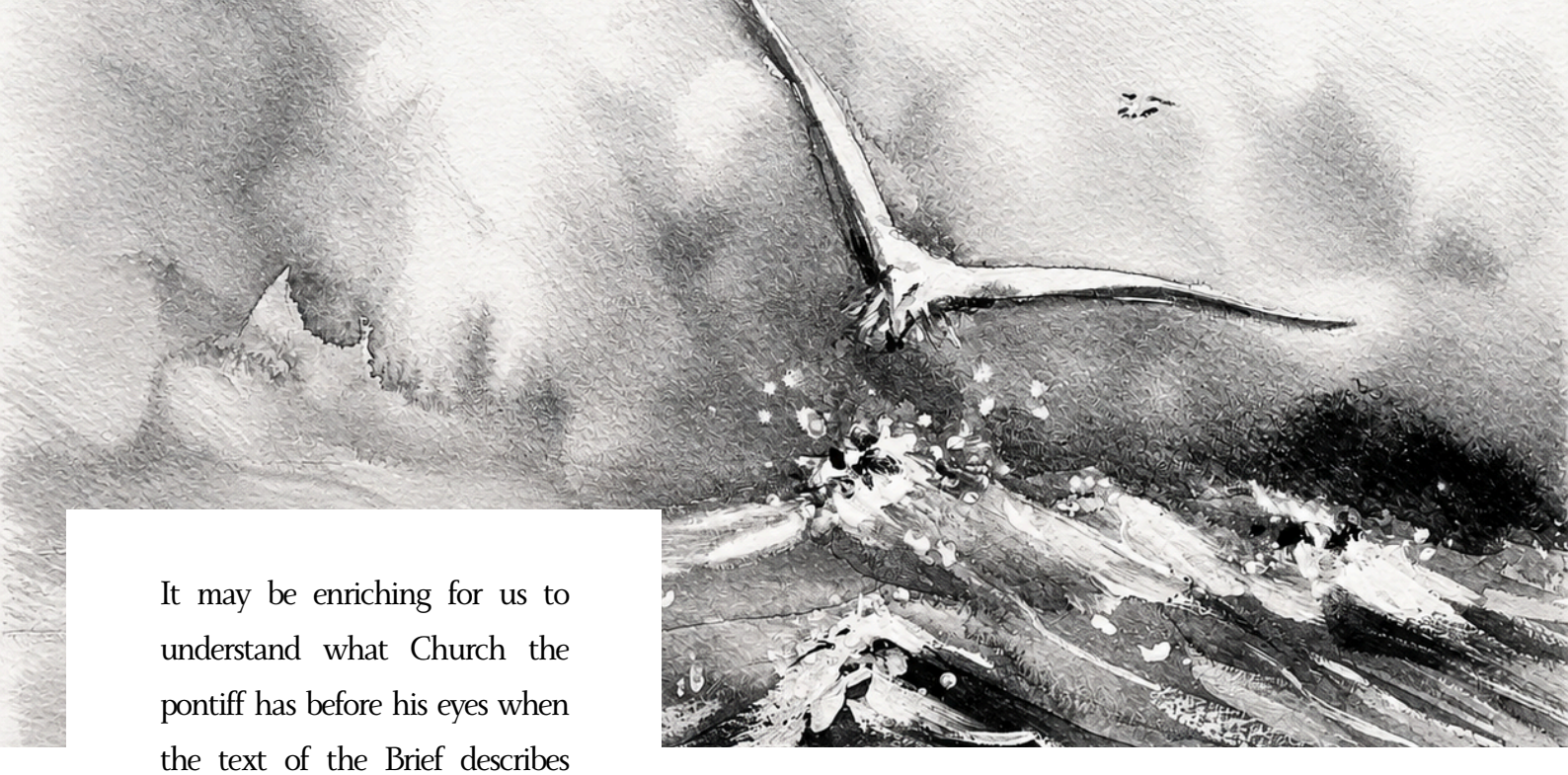
MT 14:22-33

«Then he made the disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When it was evening he was there alone. Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore, was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea.

When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. "It is a ghost", they said, and they cried out in fear. At once (Jesus) spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid".

Peter said to him in reply, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water". He said, "Come". Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how (strong) the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

After they got into the boat, the wind died down. Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God"».



It may be enriching for us to understand what Church the pontiff has before his eyes when the text of the Brief describes reality, and the pope himself, as walking upon the waters. This is a task that, of course, we leave to historians, who have helped us and will continue to help us draw ever closer to the historical context in which our small community was taking its first steps. Yet what matters today is to allow ourselves to be challenged once again by the image with which the text sheds light on life, so that we may understand it better. For, as we have said, our fidelity is at stake in this time, in these geographical coordinates, and in deep closeness to humanity that passes through them while building its own history. The biblical narrative in Matthew's Gospel is a beautiful image of the faith of the apostle Peter.

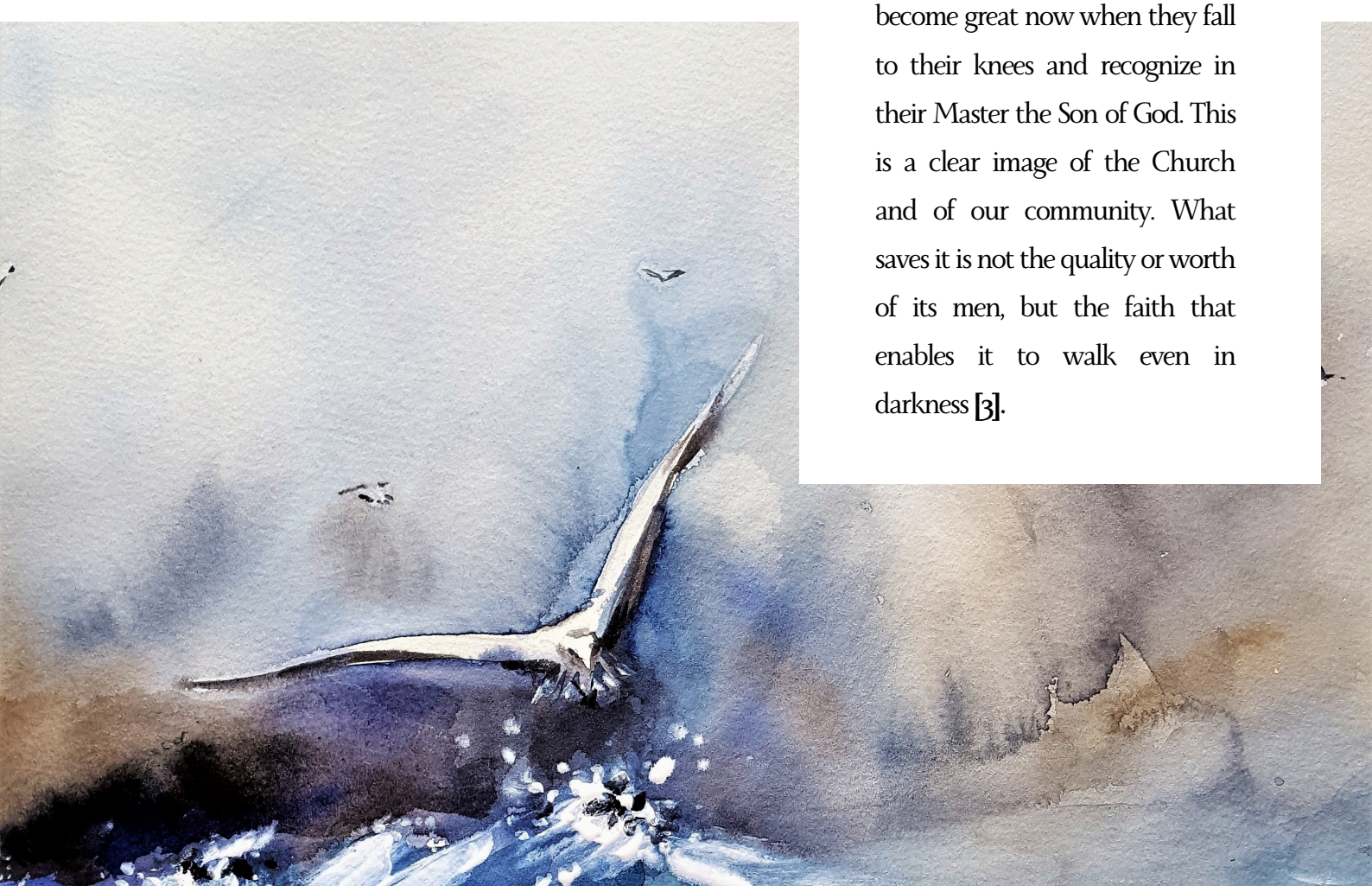
In the voice of Jesus saying to him, «Come!», Peter recognizes the echo of the first encounter on the shore of that same lake and, once again, leaves the boat and goes toward the Master. And he walks on the water! A trusting and prompt response to the Lord's call always enables us to do extraordinary things. But Peter begins to sink the moment he stops looking at Jesus and allows himself to be surrounded by the adversities around him. Similar to Peter's faith is the faith of the Lanterian community: always fragile and poor, restless and victorious; the faith of the Oblates continues to walk toward the risen Lord amid the storms and dangers of the world.

Can we name and describe the storms that battered our little boat and threatened to sink it? I am not referring so much to the sins for which we will ask forgiveness, but rather to the sufferings that, in solidarity with Mother Church, our community too has had to accept. What were they? Since your entrance into the Congregation, what adversities have struck the community? How did the community face them, and how did you face them personally? Later on we will be able to read a brief testimony about one particular situation that will surely shed light on this matter.

It is possible that the brothers, in the same storms, offered different and even contradictory responses; perhaps they experienced uncertainty and distrust in the boat's capacity to avoid shipwreck. Some, even without getting out of it, kept themselves at a sufficiently «prudent» distance so as to avoid the fatigue of rowing against the wind and the common desperation when everything seemed to be coming to an end.

The difficulties that the world hurls against the boat often put community leadership to the test, both formal and informal. At times, they have not risen to the demands placed upon them. And yet we must gratefully acknowledge that, like Peter, there is in our history a cloud of witnesses who jumped out of the boat not in order to abandon it, but to bring Jesus into it, even at the cost of their own lives **[2]**.

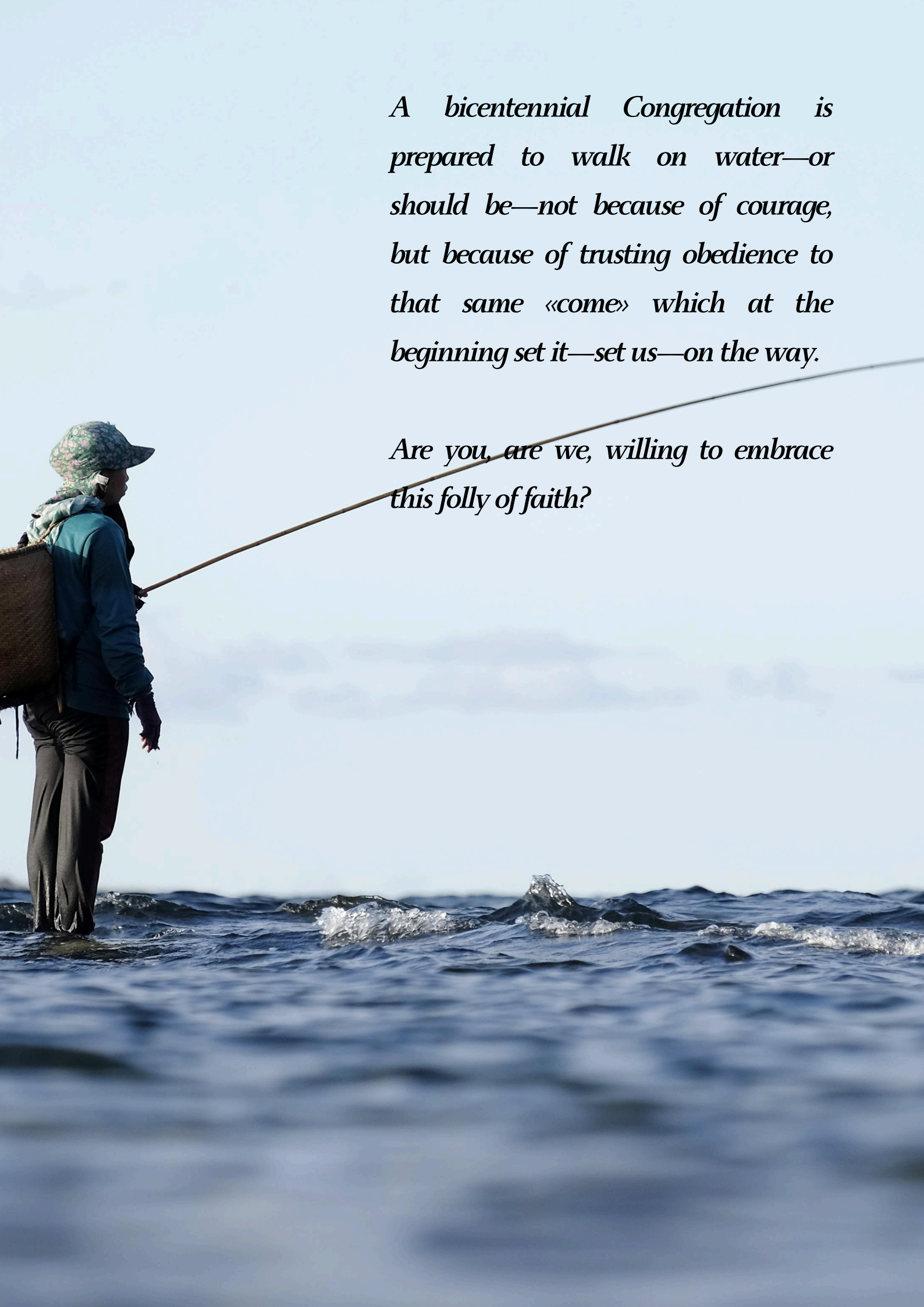
In the final scene of the text, we are contemplating, when Jesus gets into that boat, the atmosphere changes immediately: all feel united in faith in him. All the little and frightened ones become great now when they fall to their knees and recognize in their Master the Son of God. This is a clear image of the Church and of our community. What saves it is not the quality or worth of its men, but the faith that enables it to walk even in darkness **[3]**.



[2] I am thinking now of Fathers Felice Prinetti, Rafael Melis and Luis Pinamonti, to name but a few.

[3] Cf. Francis, Angelus reflection, 10 August 2014.





A bicentennial Congregation is prepared to walk on water—or should be—not because of courage, but because of trusting obedience to that same «come» which at the beginning set it—set us—on the way.

Are you, are we, willing to embrace this folly of faith?

2.

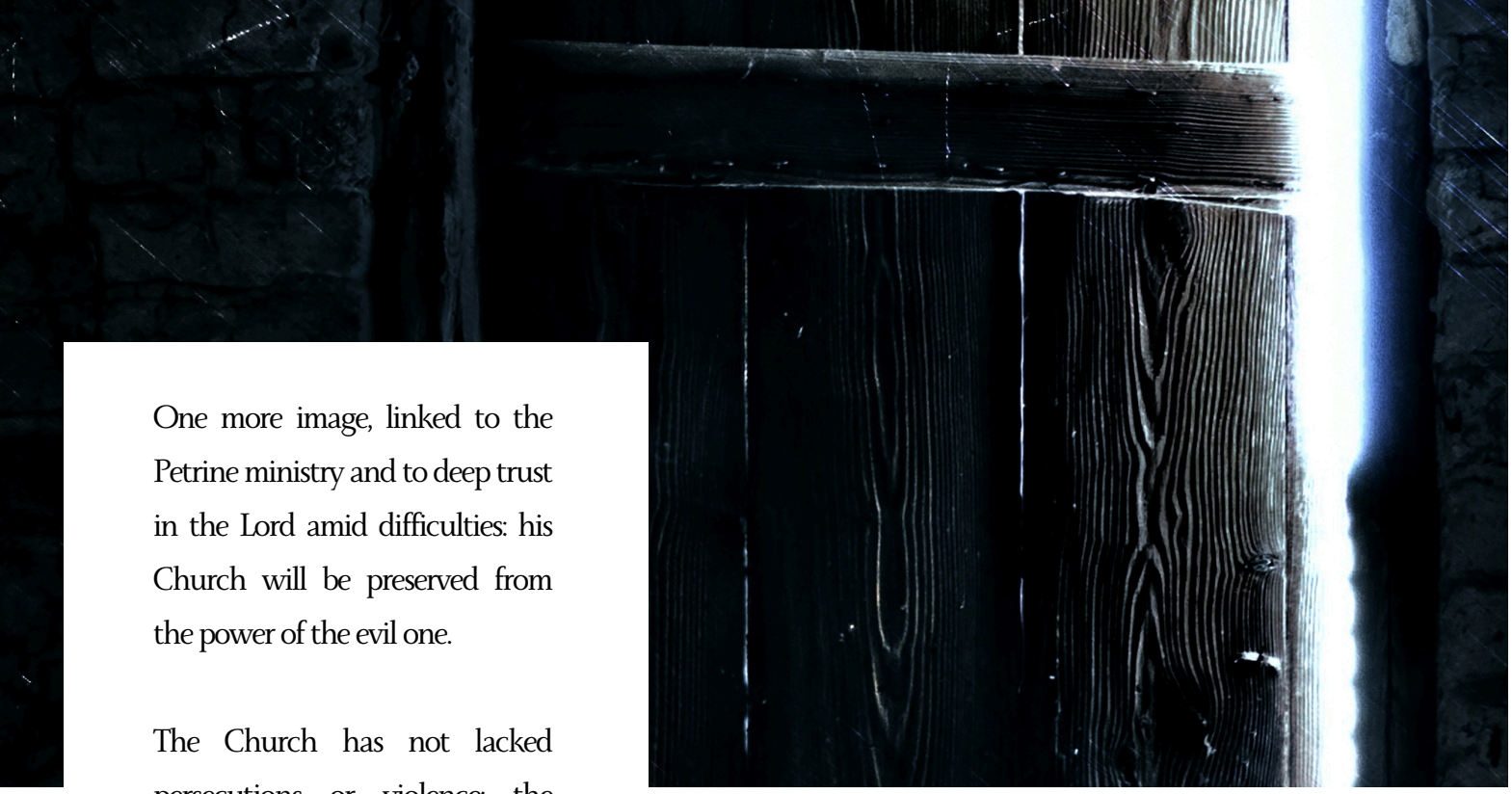
AT THE GATES OF HELL

MT 16:13-19

«When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets".
He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God".

Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"».



One more image, linked to the Petrine ministry and to deep trust in the Lord amid difficulties: his Church will be preserved from the power of the evil one.

The Church has not lacked persecutions or violence; the «white-robed army of martyrs» bears firm witness to this throughout the centuries. And yet this is not the evil that strikes and wounds her most deeply. The greatest harm, in fact, comes from what contaminates the faith and Christian life of her members and communities, eroding the integrity of the Body, weakening its capacity for prophecy and witness, and dimming the beauty of its face. Jesus' promise includes historical experiences of persecution, but it goes still further, for it seeks to ensure protection above all against threats of a spiritual order: divisions and inconsistencies, selfishness and vanity, pride and attachment to money **[4]**.

Evil comes from the human heart (cf. Mt 15:19); therefore, the Lord's word guarantees that grace will always be greater than the sin of Christians. It is for us, then, to cooperate with grace, to become its disciples, so that we may spare Mother Church the suffering caused by her children and by our brothers. Care for the Church is rooted in our freedom before the spirit of worldliness, which always tends to infiltrate our fraternities to contaminate everything. Peter himself—immediately afterward—had to learn, through Jesus' pedagogy, that it is not possible to avoid the cross if we truly love the Lord and his Church. Ecclesial communion - at the cost of any sacrifices - written into the DNA of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary. How, then, from now on, will we be willing —personally and communally—not only to care for it, but to increase it, working for it so that it may be salvific, visible, and joyful?

[4] Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily of 29 June 2010

3.

DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH

The first paragraph of the «Breve» presents a view of reality that may seem negative to us when it considers that the whole world lies under the power of the Evil One (cf. 1 Jn 5:19). Yet, always against a biblical background, the text invites us to a trusting mission, to be salt of the earth and light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-14), like the apostles sent by the Lord himself, who will not cease to call laborers to work in his vineyard (cf. Mt 9:37-10:1; 20:2). In this context, then, Lanteri and Reynaudi appear, «wholly consecrated to the salutary purpose of forming the clergy and evangelizing the faithful». Both are courageous men, raised up by the mercy of the Lord to preserve the faith of peoples and protect them from the errors of those who lie in darkness and in the shadow of death (cf. Lk 1:68-79). Reynaudi, Lanteri, and their companions, through their ministry and personal self-giving, are the tender and merciful visitation of the Lord to his people: like a physician to the sick, he came out to meet us **[5]**.

[5] Bede the Venerable, in his Homily on the Nativity of John the Baptist, adds that the Lord «has brought us the true light of his knowledge and, having dispelled the darkness of error, has shown us the sure path to the heavenly homeland. He has guided the steps of our deeds to lead us along the path of truth, which he has shown us, and to bring us into the dwelling place of eternal peace, which he has promised us». Omelie sul Vangelo, ed. Città Nuova, Roma 1990.

This view of reality, by referring to Luke's text, invites us to listen to that other passage which the evangelist contemplates from the newness of the Incarnation. In the «Book of Emmanuel» of the prophet Isaiah (Is 7-12), the feeling of abandonment and defeat experienced by the people is described through the image of «darkness and the shadow of death» (Is 9:1). These are not merely feelings of sadness, but the experience of collective collapse. The weariness of those people is the same weariness of modern humanity, which has lost hope. And yet, right there—as throughout the whole section—contrasts are emphasized: the light shining before the eyes of a people walking in darkness, joy and gladness as at harvest time, the yoke broken to pieces **[6]**, the fire that consumes bloodstained garments. «For a child has been born for us» (Is 9:5). In a world that is often harsh toward the sinner and indulgent toward sin, we need to cultivate a strong sense of justice... but also of tenderness. The sign Isaiah gives is not a monument or an army; it is a child **[7]**. We have briefly mentioned the hope that seems absent from the heart of modern humanity. We say that it «only seems» so because, despite the evils unleashed in this world, hope remains among men and women—though hidden—always within reach and in the gentle presence of its witnesses **[8]**. Later we will return to the invitation to care for hope.

To conclude our personal reflection, perhaps we can return to some words that seem to present themselves: the visitation of the Lord to his people; courage, referring to the first Oblates; the rescue of those who live oppressed in darkness. And let us draw near in order to see more clearly the forms of suffocation our world experiences, the choices and mechanisms of death presented to it as indispensable.

[6] «As in the day of Midian» (Isaiah 9:4) refers to Gideon's victory over Midian, but with a small army because God does not want Israel to take credit at his expense, «saying, 'It is my own hand that has saved me'».

[7] Pope Francis, Homily, 24 December 2015.

[8] In Greek mythology, although this is not universally accepted, it is believed that Hope (Elpis) is the daughter of Night (Nix). Her siblings include Death (Thanatos), Chaos, Strife (Eris) and the Fates (Keres), and Despair (Moroi). When Pandora's jar was opened, it released all forms of evil—the «siblings»—but it still holds hope hidden within it.



In what way will we make ourselves present in those hells? Will we prefer to point out evil and sin from a distance or, with courage and tenderness, draw near to their victims?



FORGIVING AND ASKING FORGIVENESS

These pages ask to be read with delicacy and truth, caring for one's own history and that of the brothers

«God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God». (2 Co 5:19-20)

CELEBRATIONS

of «round-number» anniversaries often create a fitting climate for sincere requests for forgiveness, joined to the resolve to become better insofar as it depends on us. Therefore, on the bicentenary of the pontifical approval, it is fitting that we bow humbly before the judgment of the Lord and ask forgiveness. More than that, it is a very good opportunity to offer our sincere forgiveness to anyone who may have offended us.

For this reason, I offer below a few suggestions

1- to deepen, personally and communally, the purification of memory;

2- to ask forgiveness and to forgive, keeping in mind some of the most important aspects of our history;

3- to celebrate reconciliation together with the holy faithful People of God.

1.

THE PURIFICATION OF MEMORY

We owe to Pope Saint John Paul II that beautiful initiative which became an intense sign of the Jubilee of the year 2000. Purifying memory consists in that process directed toward freeing the conscience — personal and common — from every form of resentment or violence that the inheritance of the faults of the past may have left within us. It requires an act of courage and humility in acknowledging the shortcomings committed by those who gloried and glory in bearing the name of Oblates of the Virgin Mary **[9]**. The underlying conviction is a deep and unconditional trust in the power of Truth.

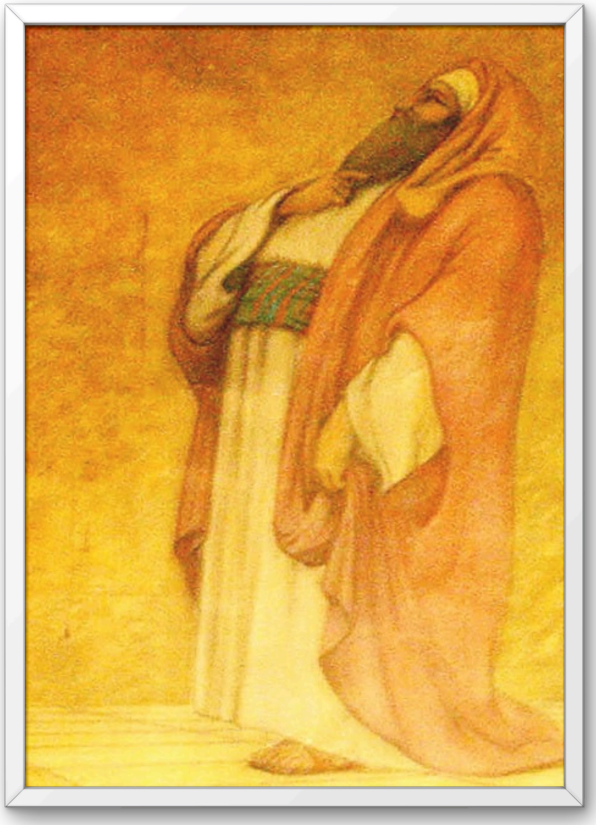
Following the example proposed by Pope John Paul II at the arrival of the new millennium, we too accept the invitation to the purification of memory, forgiving and asking forgiveness. With the same spirit of the Church that asked forgiveness for the faults of her children, our congregation embraces its own, of the past and of the present, in a real communion, taking upon itself the weight of their faults in order to live the renewal of heart and life according to the will of the Lord.

The ultimate purpose of every act of purification of memory consists in living obedience to divine Truth and to its demands; this leads us to confess, together with our faults, the mercy and eternal justice of the Lord. The confessio peccati opens the way to the confessio laudis addressed to God, because it is sustained and enlightened by the confessio fidei. The Truth that leads, frees, and saves (cf. Jn 14:6), and before whose presence alone it is possible to recognize ourselves as in need of forgiveness, urges us to be reconciled by Him and with Him, the only Savior of the world, so that we may be capable of offering forgiveness to all who may have offended us **[10]**.

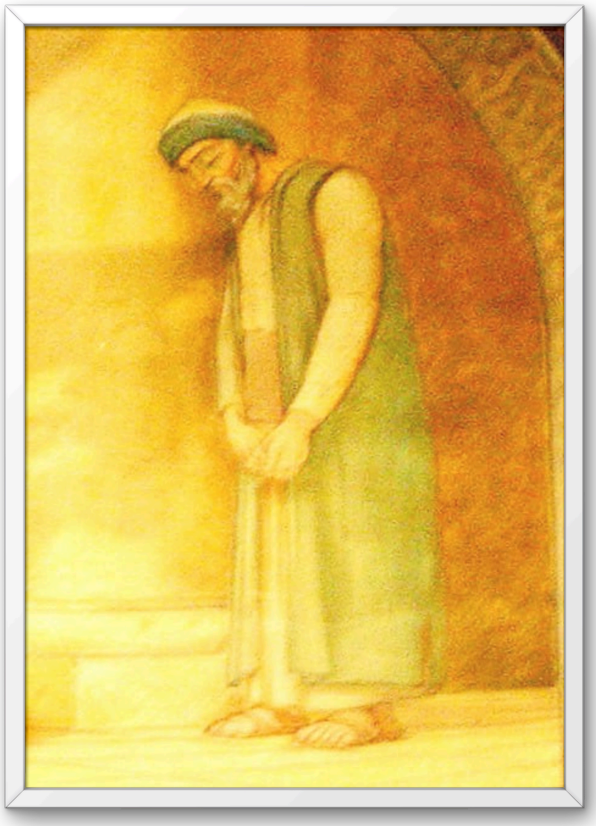
[9] Prayer for the Congregation, by Fr. Melis

[10] It may be useful to study in greater depth the document issued by the International Theological Commission, «Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past», dated March 7, 2000.

Readiness to ask forgiveness and to forgive can put us on the defensive, insofar as fears arise — personal and communal — that old wounds may be reopened and mishandled. Many times, precisely to avoid repeated pain, we prefer not to touch certain subjects. And yet experience tells us that what we try to avoid and postpone remains omnipresent; it is there without being fully named, but constantly lying in wait, creating and sustaining behaviors that, by the mere passage of time, end up becoming heavy structures from which, even if we wish to, we cannot easily flee. We are invited to ask forgiveness and to forgive whatever has meant a rupture with the Gospel and whose consequences still persist in the present, with a real risk of being repeated or already very well camouflaged and resignedly accepted. In that sense, a correct understanding of the events and words of the past will allow us to discover their potential and stimulus for changing the present, while at the same time it will bring forth something new thanks to freedom of memory.



In this context, we must be very attentive to the temptation of dispersion that often besets consciences disposed toward reconciliation, attempting to divert the gaze toward a multitude of errors and failures, conflicts proper to human coexistence, or personal antipathies, thus avoiding touching the core of sin.



Allow me simply to recall two significant examples which, I am sure, will help us better understand the invitation to which we are being called.

Pope Benedict XVI, having heard numerous complaints, addressed the Catholics of Ireland because of the seriousness of the crimes of abuse «and the often-inadequate response they have received from ecclesiastical authorities» in that nation. The Holy Father showed himself close to them and explicitly proposed «a path of healing, renewal and reparation». At the same time as he invited them to walk that path of reconciliation, in the name of the Church he echoed «the shame and remorse that we all feel» **[11].**

Later, Pope Francis made himself present in the path of healing that the Church in Chile should also undertake because of the wounds caused by abuses committed and covered up in previous decades. The special envoys of the Holy See had stated that they felt «overwhelmed by the pain of so many victims». Later, the bishops were summoned to Rome with the aim of discerning «measures that, in the short, medium and long term, must be adopted in order to restore ecclesial communion in Chile, with the aim of repairing the scandal as far as possible and restoring justice». For his part, the Pope concluded, «I acknowledge, and I ask you to transmit this faithfully, that I have made grave mistakes in assessing and perceiving the situation, especially for lack of truthful and balanced information. From now on I ask forgiveness of all those whom I have offended, and I hope to be able to do so personally» **[12].**

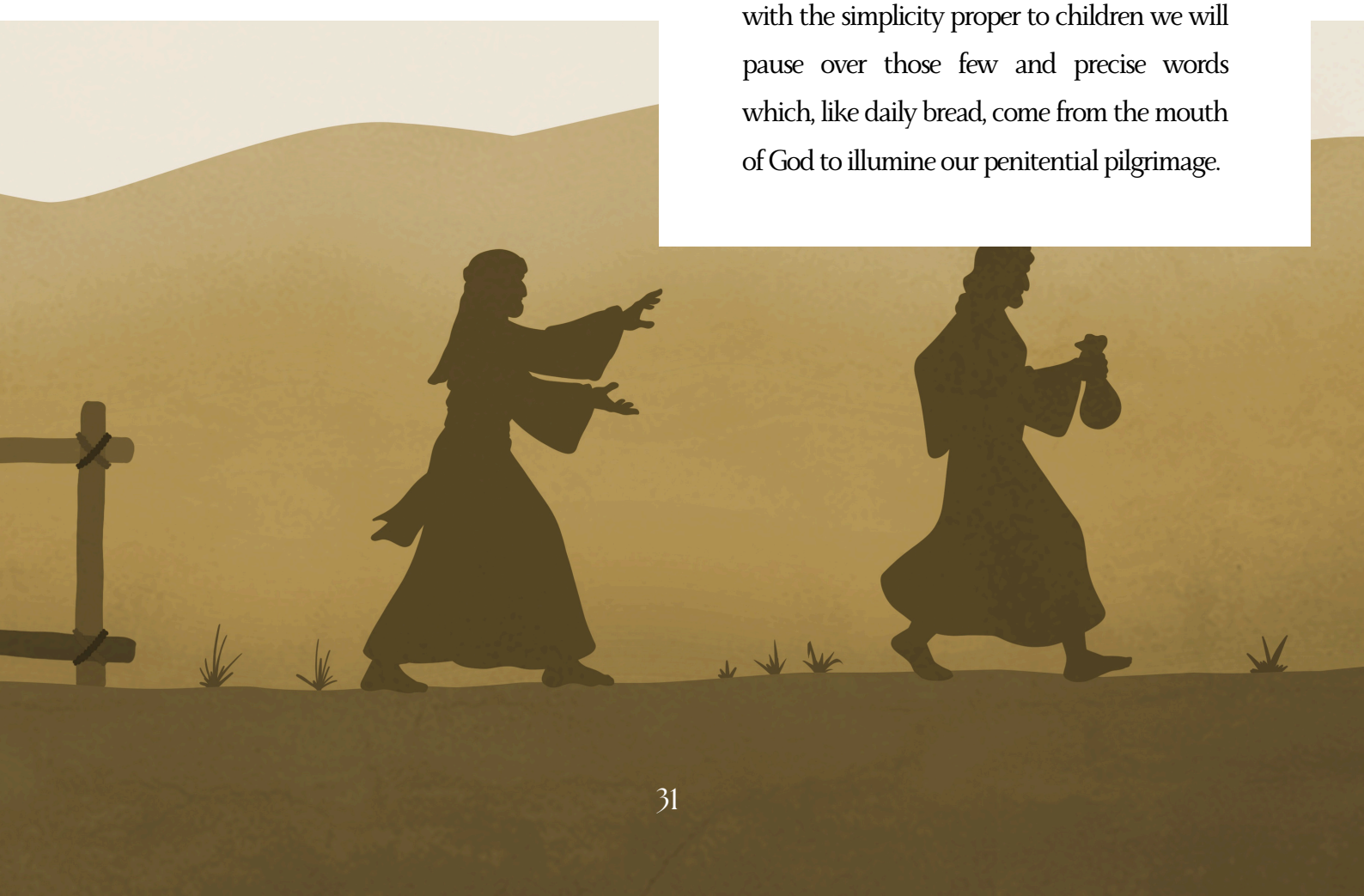
[11] Pastoral Letter from the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland, 19 March 2010.

[12] Letter from Pope Francis to the Bishops of Chile following the report by His Excellency Bishop Charles J. Scicluna, 8 April 2018.

2.

FORGIVING AND ASKING FORGIVENESS

To enter into the marvelous mystery of divine compassion, with the simplicity of children, we will listen to and give voice to the prayer that the Lord taught us and teaches us each day: «Pray then in this way: [...] forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us» (Mt 6:9, 12). Certainly, it is the prayer we learned as children and the one that has generated more commentary than any other; but — and forgive the insistence — with the simplicity proper to children we will pause over those few and precise words which, like daily bread, come from the mouth of God to illumine our penitential pilgrimage.



2.1 COMMON PATHS OF RECONCILIATION

It will be of no use to prepare a formal document or a prayer asking forgiveness «for the errors of the past» if each person does not personally take responsibility for his own errors in the present. Therefore, the first invitation is to let ourselves be reconciled personally with the Lord, to walk through this time of grace with the hope of being merciful, as the Father is being merciful with each one of us at this very moment. Without a humble and sincere acknowledgment of our own sin, we would run the risk of turning the call to conversion into mutual accusations or into the frantic search for scapegoats. Personal contrition prepares and enriches communal contrition.

Because we could not disassociate ourselves from the sin of the world, of which we have become solidary accomplices and to which, with greater or lesser awareness, we have given space within our fraternities. It will be everyone's task humbly to recognize that we too, «at home», have lived according to worldly criteria without being overly concerned; indeed, at times we even nourished and sustained them. In this sense, Saint Teresa of Ávila's insight is very enlightening, for she sharply denounced the harm suffered by young women who, with high ideals and desires to leave the world behind, entered the monastery, but sadly did not encounter the Lord «in religion»; rather, they found «ten times the same world» they had wished to abandon. «And all this very justified and considered good. A very great evil of religious where religion is not observed» **[13]**.

It is possible that personal identification with what we shall mention below may be uneven or even absent. It is not necessary to go looking for sins in order to recognize ourselves as sinners. And, as we shall say later, what one group of brothers lived in a particular region and period was not lived by others, or perhaps, with a different degree of maturity, it was recognized and assumed with greater simplicity. Forgive the insistence or redundancy: recognizing sin in our common history is not a euphemism that allows us to enter into «accusatory mode».

[13] Cf. Saint Teresa of Avila, El Libro de la Vida, cap. VII.

Therefore, allowing ourselves to be led by the pedagogy of Jesus, let us turn our contemplative gaze to the pain caused by the world:

1- when it stubbornly insists on division;

2- when it discards life and oppresses consciences;

3- when it creates and sustains ideological trenches.



2.2 THE SIN AGAINST UNITY

Perhaps the most painfully commor sin of the world is **division**; we see it every day expressed in insults, threats, war, and death. The countless innocent victims who suffer fragmentation and violence bear witness to this.

«IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU» (MT 20, 26).

We Oblates are called to examine ourselves regularly about unity (and division). It is the commandment of Lanterianity that best explains our existence in the Church. The care for unity with a spirit of sacrifice is the first charismatic witness, long before preaching to multitudes or the long lines for the confession of sins at our confessional. «He commanded us to remain united. Communion, mutual sympathy, all this is a prescribed duty; and sin and harm arise from having many parties, from separating oneself from that one body which He has appointed; for when men divide the one Church of Christ into fragments, they contribute to destroying it completely» **[14]**.

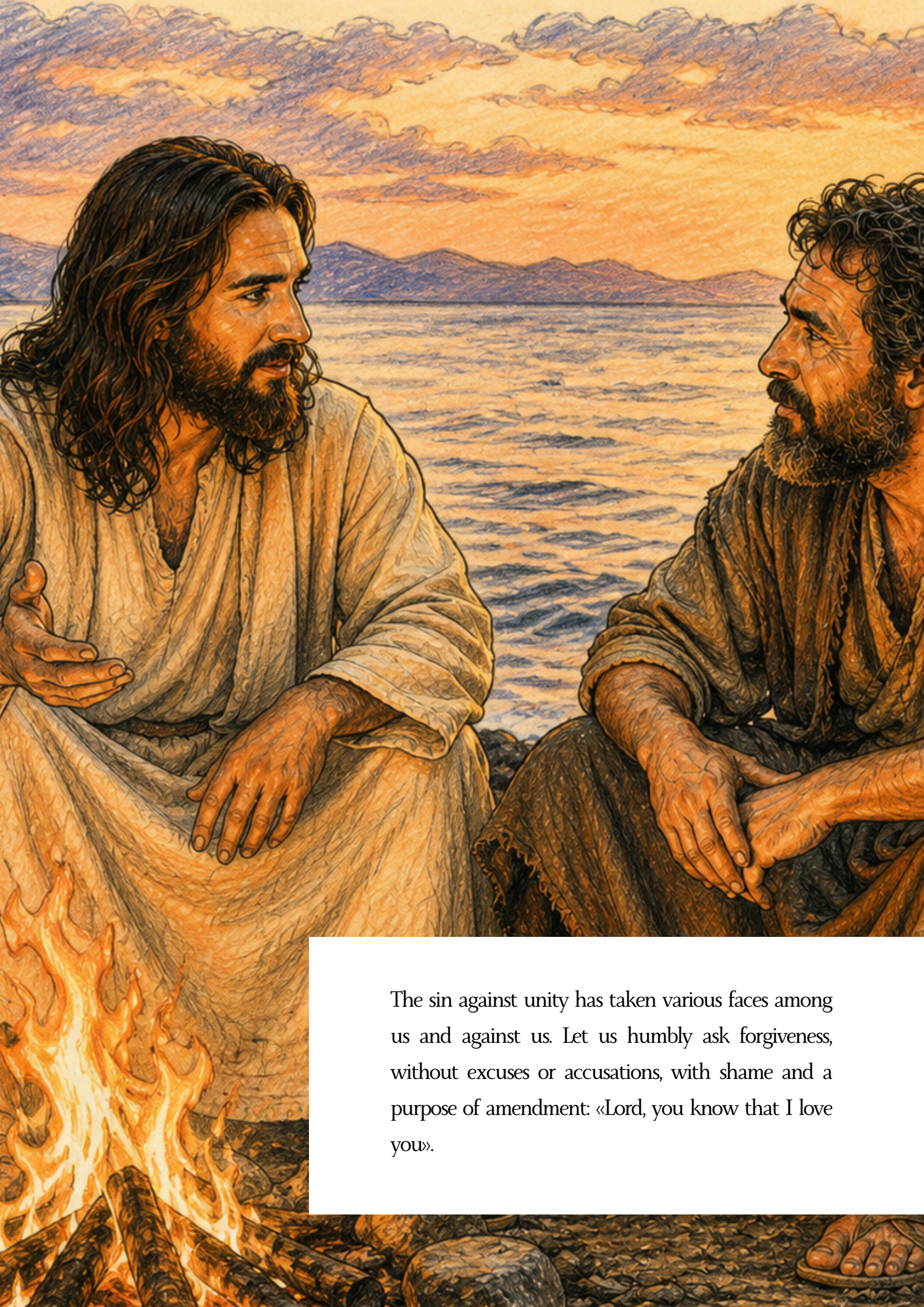
[14] John H. Newman, Simple Parish Sermons, Volume 7, Sermon 17.

Patrice Veráquin, in a letter addressed to a confrere, recalls their meeting and, in pointing out some points of agreement, remembers that

> *We spoke about the challenges of the present-day world and about how our Lanterian charism can help us evangelize it. Our conversation quickly centered on a challenge that today seems to us particularly decisive: that of the polarization of minds. You are a witness, as I am, to this tendency which today appears in the fields of politics, culture, and religion. Individuals or groups are identified (or identify themselves) as opposed to one another based on somewhat reductive, though significant, sociological categories: left - right, liberals (woke) - conservatives, progressives - traditionalists, etc. The judgments with which they address one another are often harsh, categorical, and intolerant. Algorithms, moreover, do not exactly help to calm the debate. I am concerned, as I told you, that in this process of polarization religious feelings are frequently instrumentalized by politics. In this way, simple political opinions become clothed with an absolute character. The consequences of this, as we can imagine, are profoundly problematic* **[15]**.

In this regard, we humbly acknowledge that we have not always borne witness to unity in the Church; many times we have opposed one another as brothers, even appealing to the charism and to the life of the Founder in order to sustain conflicts, justify unilateral views, and validate individual projects that bore only our own name as their title.

[15] Fr Patrice Veráquin, OMV, Rector Major, Letter to a Brother, 10 February 2026.



The sin against unity has taken various faces among us and against us. Let us humbly ask forgiveness, without excuses or accusations, with shame and a purpose of amendment: «Lord, you know that I love you».

2.3 THE SIN AGAINST THE DIGNITY OF PERSONS

This world, wholly «under the power of the Evil One» (1 Jn 5:19), teaches people to **discard** life and to **oppress** consciences because it has placed itself at the service of money.

«IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU» (MT 20, 26).

«Human beings are treated increasingly naturally as objects, in a range that extends from countless forms of statistical-administrative comprehension to the inconceivable oppression of individuals, of groups, and even of entire peoples. And this not only in exceptional situations and in the paroxysm of war, but as a normal form of government and administration» [16].

Peter Gojuk recalls his entrance into the Congregation and his first stages lived in the community in Rome, and acknowledges that:

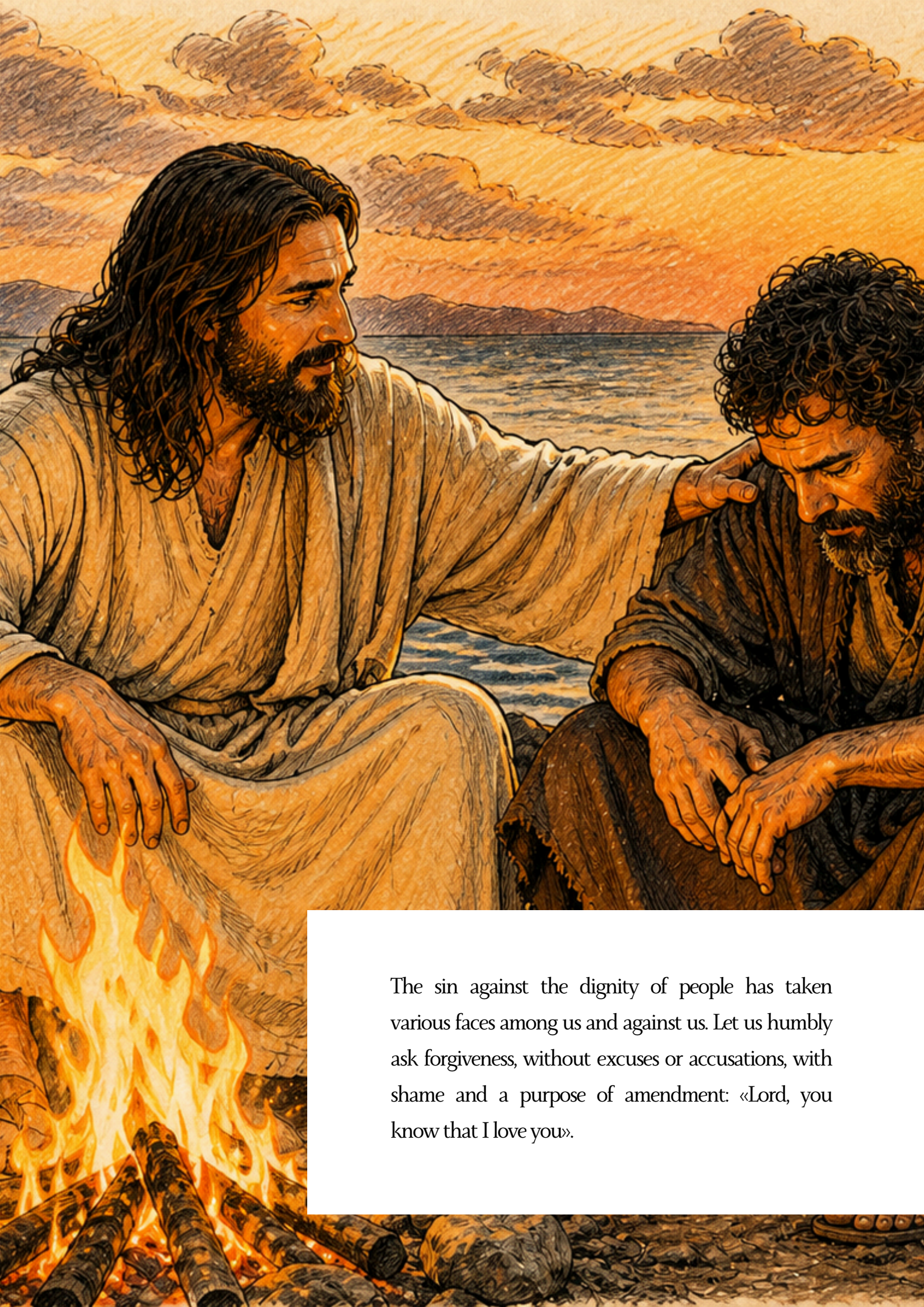
I too felt a call to the priesthood, but the changes taking place in many seminaries in the United States did not appeal to me when I was a very young man. One day I met an American Oblate seminarian; everything he said about the Congregation impressed me deeply. I then decided to find out more: it seemed to me the perfect place for me, exactly what I was looking for. Over time I realized that there was also a person very present there, and common sense and intuition told me that something in that situation was not quite right.

[16] Romano Guardini, El ocaso de la Edad Moderna. Ed. Guadarrama, Madrid 1963.

The superiors told me to pray and study diligently. I was aware that some of my confreres — good men — were not fully free in the discernment of their vocation because of this man's influence. When years later his truthfulness was called into question, the vocations of those young men to religious life, to the priesthood, and to the Oblates in particular were also shaken. The Congregation went through a very painful crisis. It was deeply regrettable that so many good people were wounded by those events. I believe that, given the circumstances, the Congregation faced the situation as best it could. Nevertheless, as a small and humble group, we must continue doing what we have always tried to do: proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must leave the past to the mercy of God and the future to his divine Providence **[17]**.

We acknowledge that, as a Congregation, at certain moments of our history we did not know how to live up to the mission received and we neglected the consciences of the young men who wanted to discern their vocation and follow the Lord in religious life or who, quite simply, wished to become better. And, almost without noticing, dynamics of community life were created in which many of them felt compelled to wait with patience and dedication for better times to arrive so that they could live their consecration more fully; others preferred to hide their personality and their deepest searches in order not to feel marginalized, while some found a legitimized way to exercise power over their peers. And so, some consciences were manipulated and the intimacy of some people was exposed.

[17] P. Peter Gojuk omv, Rector Major, I can only account, February 2, 2026.



The sin against the dignity of people has taken various faces among us and against us. Let us humbly ask forgiveness, without excuses or accusations, with shame and a purpose of amendment: «Lord, you know that I love you».

2.4 THE SIN AGAINST THE RICHNESS OF THE CHARISM

The world tends to shut itself within innumerable **ideological trenches** from which it fires against everyone, turning its perception of reality into the only and definitive truth.

«IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU» (MT 20, 26).

«Symphony means consonance, harmony. The contrast among the different instruments must be as marked as possible. The world can be compared to a great orchestra, which makes all its instruments sound. The plurality of instruments acquires meaning when it interprets, under the direction of Christ, the symphony of God. The unity of the composition comes from God. For this reason, the world was and is plural and will continue to be ever more so. Evidently, the world cannot take in its own pluralism at a single glance, because unity has never resided in it, neither before nor now.

But the meaning of its pluralism does not consist in rejecting the unity that resides in God and is communicated by Him, but in adhering to the symphony and adjusting itself to the unity that is above» **[18].**

[18] Hans Urs von Balthasar, La verdad es sinfónica, Ed. Encuentro, Madrid. 1979

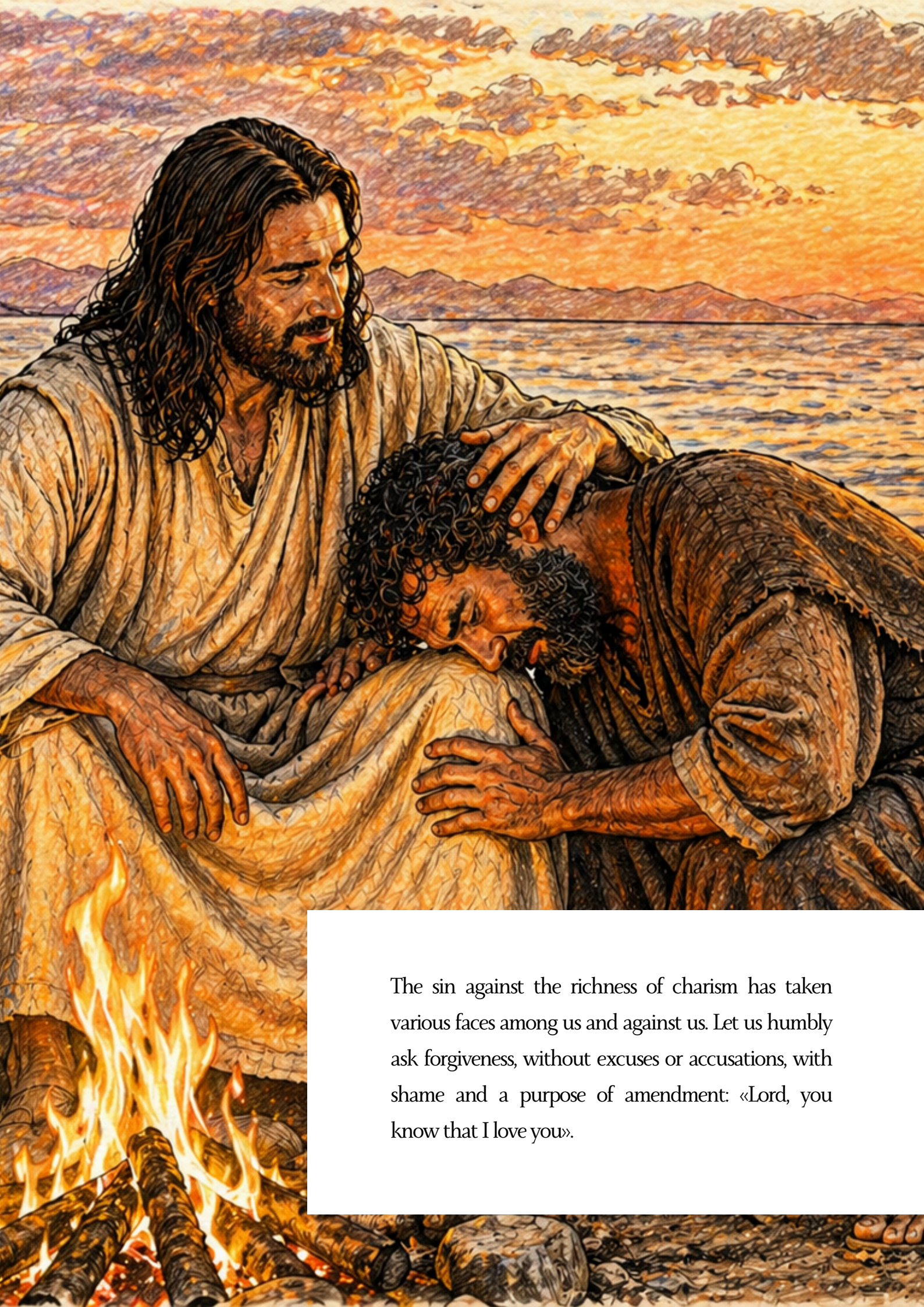
Father Julio Cura, Rector Major, used to repeat that the charism of the Congregation is like a liqueur that gathers and creates its flavor by drawing from various kinds of plants and flowers, all cultivated in the common field of the Church; although they are within reach of every hand, a certain wisdom is truly needed to combine them harmoniously and integrate the disparity of their elements.

The genius of Lanteri, Julio would say, consists in having known how to distill that flavorful liqueur, considering some elements and setting others aside. Today the entire Congregation «produces» that distillate, the body in its totality and each of its members without excluding anyone; and yet no one could claim for himself the totality of the expression of a polyhedral flavor that is always new in the whole of its nuances.

We acknowledge that we have not always known how to receive and transmit the harmony and diversity of the charism of our religious family; on the contrary, we have made fragmented readings devoid of an ecclesial criterion. We involved many lay brothers in our partialities, leading them into confrontations that ended up distancing many of them from the Church.

We have measured in our brothers — and forgive the expression I borrowed from a sister — the amount of «Lanterianity in the blood», in order then to decide for or against whether there was, or whether there still is, enough fidelity to the Founder.

We have felt obliged to defend ourselves by raising walls. Then, some of us were of Saint Ignatius and others of Saint Alphonsus; some of Lanteri and others of Reynaudi; some of the exercises and others of the parishes... We managed to make the sacred become indifferent for some, and family traditions difficult to bear.



The sin against the richness of charism has taken various faces among us and against us. Let us humbly ask forgiveness, without excuses or accusations, with shame and a purpose of amendment: «Lord, you know that I love you».

3.

CELEBRATING RECONCILIATION

Probably some communities will not see themselves reflected in the «three sins of the world» mentioned above, but they will recognize other matters which, although not cited here, have caused no few conflicts and bitterness. In any case, pedagogically guided by the Major Superiors and Delegates, we shall go on recognizing our own sin with its consequent need for forgiveness, then putting it into words and finally turning it into prayer and fraternal celebration.

For this reason, each one of us must examine his own conscience, knowing that he belongs to a community that precedes and welcomes him. Synodality is also expressed in the way we walk through, assume, and offer forgiveness. Therefore, the path must not be walked in solitude, for we shall touch wounds and some will require of us greater care and dedication. Protecting the brother's pain without exposing it, walking without haste, respecting personal times and resistance, understanding fears and sensations of vertigo — all this will be a delicate expression that fraternal love is genuine and reparative.

As we ask forgiveness for the errors committed, it is necessary to recognize the importance of reparation wherever possible. The Holy Father, like his predecessors, insistently emphasizes the urgency of listening to victims, inviting us not to pass by before their pain and to offer enough space in our pastor's heart to heal and renew hope. This attitude, beyond being a moral requirement, is a call to inner transformation and to the building of a more just and compassionate community.



The concrete gestures of reparation that we can offer become a clear manifestation of our desire to live according to the Gospel.

I therefore propose a period of one year to undertake this path of reconciliation, so that from **September 1, 2026 until September 1, 2027,** each Delegation and Province may have the possibility of drawing near to forgiveness with penitential joy and celebrating it communally with a humble heart before the Lord, like the publican in the temple.

Within the framework of the 200 years, the communities united in a single jurisdiction — led and animated by their Major Superiors and Delegates — must give shape to their own way of preparing and celebrating reconciliation, according to their common spiritual and cultural traditions. For each Delegation and Province carries its own history, to the point that its own crossroads are not always linked to the entire body of the Congregation; nevertheless, those experienced realities remain very significant for the brothers who have lived and served in those places.

At the level of the Congregation, this task belongs to the Chapter. During the preparation of the next one, an ad hoc commission will prepare a written proposal to be presented to the Capitular Assembly, considering the journey undertaken in the various Regions.

ALTER FUNDATOR

Father Giovanni Battista Reynaudi omv

He was born in Carignano on August 10, 1782. In 1816, together with Biancotti, he began the experience of the first foundation in Carignano. Later we find him alongside Lanteri in the second foundation experience, in 1826 in Pinerolo, where he entered on July 6, 1826. There he received the habit from the hands of the Founder on February 2, 1828, and made his profession on August 15, 1828. Elected second Rector Major in 1830, after the death of Fr. Lanteri, he remained in office until 1836. He died in Carignano on December 24, 1838, at the age of 56; he is buried in the crypt of the Consolata.

ALONGSIDE

Pio Bruno Lanteri appears the other founder whom, I believe, it is right to remember. Not only does he take nothing away from Lanteri—if that clarification were needed—but, as they mutually enhance one another, he also allows us to understand a little better the complexity of the early years of this religious family. For this reason, I asked Sergio Zirattu, who is passionate about the historical figure of Reynaudi, for a reflection on the matter, which I gladly share below in a summary **[19]**.

[19] Cf Fr. Sergio Zirattu omv, Rector Major, Due nomi, un solo carisma: riscoprire il ruolo di Reynaudi accanto a Lanteri, 5 April 2026.

The celebration of the two hundred years of the Congregation's pontifical approval represents a valuable occasion to pause and reflect on those «things new and old» (cf. Mt 13:52), often hidden within the folds of history, which can become an opportunity for growth and renewal. This allows us to look with renewed eyes at our roots and at the challenges of the present, to safeguard what we have received and, at the same time, to open ourselves to what is new with trust and discernment.



The document that gives light and meaning to this celebration is, without doubt, the Brief *Etsi Dei Filius* of Pope Leo XII. It constitutes a significant sign not only for the canonical stability of the Institute, but also as confirmation of the validity of its charism in the Church. Thanks to the bond with the Apostolic See, the Brief gives the Institute a more universal breadth, allowing it to drink from the richness of the Church and to share it with all the faithful. For this reason, I wish to reflect on the role that the Brief attributes to Fr. Giovanni Battista Reynaudi and on how it might be interesting—and perhaps appropriate—to deepen the official recognition that the Church attributes to him in the foundation of the Institute. We all know, at least in its essential lines, Reynaudi's path, although not all aspects are fully clear or historically documented. Precisely the complexity of this history—the so-called «Reynaudi case»—ended up progressively weakening his recognition as co-founder. With the passage of time, his name became increasingly separated from that of Lanteri, until the exclusive title of Founder was attributed solely to the latter **[20]**.

[20] Cf A. Brustolon, Alle origini della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria Vergine, pag. 162-166, which highlights the historiographical interpretations that have progressively downplayed Reynaudi's role as co-founder.

No one can doubt that Father Lanteri is the true Founder of the Congregation. But it would be equally unjust and historically incomplete to ignore those facts which, in the founding process, associated Father Reynaudi's name with his, giving him a relevance that deserves to be recognized and explored more deeply.

Gastaldi, in the Life of the Founder completed in 1867, refers to the Carignano group and summarizes its apostolic project. It should be emphasized that within this Carignano group Reynaudi emerges as the undisputed leader: he is the one who perceives with insight the pastoral urgencies of the time and, together with the other two companions, coordinates the common initiatives. He does not limit himself to managing immediate action, but also conceives the idea of a stable community, marked by shared life and oriented primarily toward ecclesial purposes.

During his stay at La Grangia, Reynaudi lived the experience of the spiritual exercises guided by Father Lanteri. This shared time proved decisive for his journey: in it he matured a deep esteem for Lanteri, whom he recognized not only as a man of great spirituality, but also as a sure guide, almost a «father», capable of accompanying and sustaining the emerging community. For this reason, without hesitation, he asked him to assume its direction. The encounter between the two brought to light different but complementary pastoral sensibilities, which over time would be harmonized until they converged in a common project. If Reynaudi contributed love for his own land and direct contact with the people, Lanteri offered the method and the universal vision capable of transforming a local group into a solid and structured congregation.

The encounter with Bruno Lanteri represented for Reynaudi a decisive moment of interior maturation and clarification of his own vocation. Through dialogue, spiritual accompaniment, and the concrete guidance he received, Reynaudi recovered renewed vigor, both personally and apostolically.

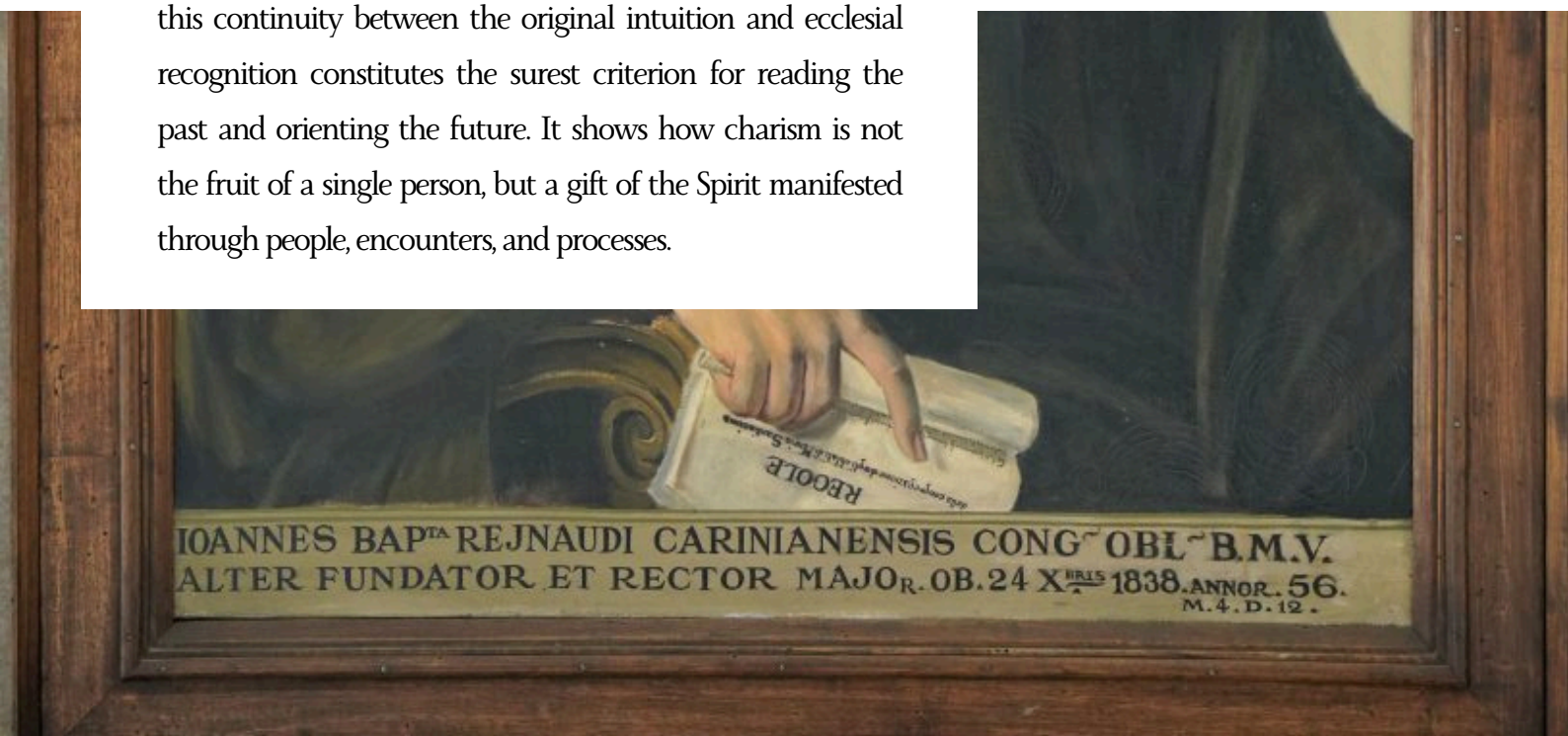
What proved decisive was not only Lanteri's help, but also that of the theologian Guala: thanks to the collaboration among these figures, within a relatively short span of time all the necessary elements were put in place to obtain official recognition from the ecclesiastical authority on November 13 of that same year. The Brief *Etsi Dei Filius* integrates and broadens the initial project that had arisen and been approved in Carignano. First, I dare to say that the «Breve» preserves, in a recognizable way, the heart of Reynaudi's initial project. At the same time, certain distinctive features of his spirituality are not only maintained, but reinforced and institutionalized: Marian devotion and

fidelity to the Pope.

The celebration of the bicentenary is not only a moment of grateful remembrance, but also an occasion to seek the truth and to deepen the charism. The pontifical Brief clearly recognizes that the work was born from the joint initiative of Pio Bruno Lanteri and Giovanni Battista Reynaudi, «who were the first to begin this work», and that together they promoted its apostolic development in the early period.

If Lanteri is rightly recognized as Founder because of his spiritual depth, ecclesial vision, and capacity to give the Institute a stable and universal form, in Reynaudi there clearly emerges the role of concrete initiator, animator of the first nucleus, and bearer of decisive pastoral intuitions. His collaboration therefore does not appear as something accessory, but complementary: each is needed to understand fully the origin of the Congregation. Recognizing Reynaudi's contribution does not mean diminishing the figure of Lanteri but rather restoring to history its integrity and to the Congregation a fuller awareness of its roots. The Brief *Etsi Dei Filius*, moreover, shows how the project born in Carignano is assumed, purified, and universalized by the Church: what was a local intuition becomes an ecclesial mission. Precisely this continuity between the original intuition and ecclesial recognition constitutes the surest criterion for reading the past and orienting the future. It shows how charism is not the fruit of a single person, but a gift of the Spirit manifested through people, encounters, and processes.

In the end, to look today at the figure of Giovanni Battista Reynaudi together with that of Pio Bruno Lanteri means rediscovering the richness of a charism born from the convergence of distinct gifts: living contact with the people and an immediate pastoral sense, on the one hand, and spiritual depth and universal vision, on the other.



LOOKING TOWARD THE HORIZON

This is not a program, but a horizon from which to keep walking.

«Do you not say, "In four months the harvest will be here"?
I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest».
(Jn 4:35)

AT

this point, I would like us to reflect together on the four avenues through which we give meaning to our presence in the Church. These are the four pillars upon which our consecrated life and the service to which we have been called—both personally and as a community—are founded. They are also channels of evangelisation through which pastoral creativity is expressed and towards which all our efforts to proclaim the Gospel converge.



1- THE CENTRALITY OF THE LORD JESUS

He is our foundation, for what gathers us is not an idea or an efficient organization, but the person of Jesus Christ. He is the «Alpha and the Omega» of our service; to him we direct everything, without reserve.

2- SYNODAL COMMUNION

Because it reflects the light that flows from Trinity. Synodality is not a meeting technique; it is the very nature of the Church walking together. In the same way, we too, from within our religious family, are called to be an ecclesial «we». Perhaps there lies the most credible sign that the Kingdom of God is already among us.

3- BE LIKE MARY

The «fiat» that becomes service. As with her at the Annunciation, our mission begins with listening and availability. Her style is the pedagogy of tenderness and the strength of one who knows that God works wonders in every littleness.

4- FOR THE POOR AND THOSE CAST ASIDE

This is the invitation to touch the flesh of Christ. Our option to reach out to the most vulnerable, far more than social assistance, is a theological demand. In the face of the poor, the discarded, and the suffering, we recognize the wounded flesh of Christ. To serve them is to adore the Lord.

1.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE LORD JESUS

Saint Paul says: «we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake» (2 Cor 4:5). As protagonists of evangelization, each one of us individually and the Lanterian family can express ourselves in his very words. For none of us preaches himself; nor is it our charism that we announce, nor our founder, nor our works, nor our greatest historical achievements, but Christ Jesus, the Lord; and this congregation, gathered by its humble founder in charity and obedience, is nothing other than a servant for love of Jesus.

Along this path, temptations often appear—allow me simply to point them out—presented as initiatives, generally all good, which slowly try to divert us from the one subject of our love and of our word. They seek to replace the liberating kerygma with an organized and sustained repetition of ideas in which the predicate is the preacher; in which the ecclesial sphere is slowly and imperceptibly transformed into a faction chained to the charismatic leader, and the message of the Gospel ends up replaced by a «rehash of conspicuous and strange doctrines» (cf. Heb 13:9).

When the Lord becomes just one more element in the believers' pantheon, spirituality turns into wellness **[21]** and, therefore, the Gospel has no room left for the cross.

[21] A spirituality reduced to the pursuit of peace of mind, emotional balance or personal fulfilment.

From a personal perspective, we must always return to a spirituality whose praying and missionary experience is rooted in the Lord Jesus, dead and risen. In the personal encounter with the Lord, he inwardly convinces us to walk as he walked (cf. 1 Jn 2:6), so as to pass through this world doing good (cf. Acts 10:38); he draws from us a new «yes» to embrace the cross (cf. Mt 16:24) and restores us to trust and joyful self-giving (cf. Ps 37:4-5). Life in the Spirit is identification with the Lord Jesus; it preserves and frees us from the multiplicity of viewpoints that darken and cloud the heart, as well as from partial readings of reality. In passing, it saves us from becoming «prophets of doom» who forget that he is the Lord of history.

David Nicgorski bears witness to the centrality of Christ in this way:

The final day of discussion marked the most challenging aspect of our time together **[22]**; *at that moment, without worrying about official texts, we were able to immerse ourselves in the raw data of our experiences. It was an intimate and unfiltered sharing, almost too visceral to take in during only a few sessions. The comments and stories that emerged during our discussion were fiery, emotional, honest, cathartic, and filled with frustrating accounts and many examples of things that had gone wrong or were unpleasant. All these stories came from a group of sincerely good and hardworking brothers who were trying to express as best they could that they wanted to be fully committed to their mandates yet still felt exasperated and exhausted. Having spent time as Rector Major, few things frightened me, but hearing those stories sincerely unsettled me. I felt that I was facing the death of the Congregation. How could so many good Oblates feel so hopeless about vocations and their promotion? As our sessions ended, the somber outlook was so overwhelming that I wondered where or how we would move forward. I felt that I was facing the death of the Congregation. How could so many good Oblates feel so hopeless about vocations and their promotion?*

[22] This refers to the meeting of trainers held in Fontenay-aux-Roses in July 2025.

As our sessions ended, the somber outlook was so overwhelming that I wondered where or how we would move forward. And yet, at the end, something inspired a brother, his thought captured the emotional trial our small group had just gone through (although he was not part of the group), and he said: «If, by the Lord's decision, our religious community had to die, I would prefer to die embracing the cross rather than a bank account. If death finds me, let it be on the cross». That was the moment when I felt that the Lord had been present among us, for only the Lord could have addressed our sadness. That phrase confirmed that, in some way, the Lord had descended into hell with us. And that truth, namely, that He had descended with us, was the beginning of a new dawn for me. Our fears did not want to face the possible death of beloved things and, at the same time, were struggling against the darkness by identifying what we truly feared more than death: living with a spirit that seeks an easy way out. No one in the room wanted to live like those sad religious who see problems ahead and then cushion the road by seeking things that anesthetize or numb the pain of a difficult path, such as money, illicit relationships, or a comfortable retirement plan. Yes, we were facing a difficult situation with no answers, but the next step was not to abandon ships, but to remain in discomfort. Later, I was able to connect the whole experience with our Bicentennial celebration when I read the opening paragraph of Etsi Dei Filius. Frankly, I never would have imagined that a papal bull would be the beginning of a remedy for me. It speaks of God raising up vocations: men who will be salt of the earth and light of the world. It sheds light on two great truths that combat pessimism. The first is that we are not the first to feel the bitterness of difficult times without obvious remedies. Indeed, our first Oblate brothers, including Lanteri, went through such complexities. Second, God made promises. Promises that are an assurance and a covenant, and we pray that they may be manifested in powerful solutions for all our ministries, if we believe in those promises. We are in good company **[23].**

[23] Fr David Nicgorski omv, Rector Major, Reflections following the Convocation, 31 January 2026.

For this reason, we Oblates of the Virgin Mary confess and proclaim a God who loves every human being infinitely, and who confers upon each an infinite dignity.

We confess and proclaim that the Son of God assumed our human flesh and that, therefore, every human person has been raised to the very heart of God.

We confess and proclaim that Jesus shed his blood for us and, therefore, we can retain no doubt whatsoever about the boundless love that ennobles every woman and every man who comes into this world. We confess and proclaim that the Holy Spirit whom the Lord Jesus sends from the Father acts in everything and in everyone and, therefore, we recognize that He seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds **[24]**.

[24] Cf. Francis, Evangelii Gaudium n. 178

2.

SYNODAL COMMUNION

The Church of Christ «subsists in the Catholic Church» **[25].** It is this reality, so simple and so profound, that reminds us that «when they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together was shaken». And then «they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness» (Acts 4:31). It seems that common prayer can make both the gathering and those gathered tremble through the presence of the Spirit, a beautiful experience that many will surely have had. Yet the same Spirit does not allow the joy of fraternity to become inward self-satisfaction, but impels us to go out in search of those elements of holiness and truth that dwell «outside» **[26],** in order simply to offer, to those who do not know it, that good news which, by attraction, created the gathering.

Ecclesial communion is expressed not only spiritually — in prayer and preaching — but very particularly in «remaining united», both in suffering and in the sharing of goods. Those first Christians asked the Lord to look upon the threats and to enable them «to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus» (Acts 4:29); but, without disregarding one another, they supported each other in a love made of concrete gestures, to the point that «the multitude of believers were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common» (Acts 4:32). That primitive and permanent experience of communion is perhaps the good most insistently threatened, to the point that, within the very heart of the Church, ideologies and groups attached to them have appeared (cf. 1 Jn 2:19), dressed in old garments and new patches (cf. Mt 9:16). We shall return to this reflection later.

I apologize if I now pause especially over some ecclesial challenges; I believe that, in celebrating the bicentenary of that universal breath given to our religious family, it will be good for us to make visible the fractures that threaten the community of believers.

[25] Lumen Gentium n. 8

[26] Ib

Someone once said that we often give answers to questions that no one is really asking. And another said that, just when we had managed to have all the answers, suddenly the questions were changed. The challenges reality presents to us are often like this: difficult, always new questions that call for integrating perspectives more than for recipes that bring relief for only a few days. Some challenges are, in fact, temptations that simply and courageously require a return to the purity of the Gospel in humility and conversion of life.

Others, however, are the work of the Spirit of God acting in human history. In that sense, the same Spirit who brings about newness also provides the best tools for approaching the new reality. Knowing how to distinguish temptations from challenges is a key to all discernment which, in a context of synodality, requires deep communion of spirit. For this reason, synodal communion encourages us to create bonds with other communities or forms of ecclesial life.

It is through that communion that we come to realize that all communities of consecrated life are moved by the same wind that moves the whole Church; and it would make no sense to try to distance ourselves in order to find a better solution to our problems. It remains better to choose to walk the path of integration and fraternity.

We must therefore point out that, linked to fraternity and to the vows—particularly the vow of poverty—there comes the whole universe of economy and administration. At present, almost all communities — especially long-established ones — are discussing internally the purpose and re-signification of enormous buildings of very great historical value that have become a burden for life and mission. The «criterion of the market» has brought only debts, discouragement, and deep rifts within fraternity itself, with governments almost entirely absorbed in administration and without energy for the animation of mission and community life. It seems an ironic description of us, but many congregations experience the same internal contradiction, perceiving it as what it truly is: an oppression. The path that moves in the direction of the «evangelical criterion» is the great challenge, calling for courage, boldness, and much communion of spirits. **[29]**.

[27] At my first USG Assembly in Rome, a superior general of a French congregation invited anyone who wished to do so to meet at the end of the day to discuss the issue of «large buildings that no longer serve any purpose» (sic). Half of those present accepted the invitation.

On the other hand, we must set our hearts on the respectful and attentive care of children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults. In this area too we are called to walk at the pace of the Church, allowing ourselves to be guided by the sisters and brothers who have greater experience. It is not merely a matter of drafting protocols or precise indications of what is permitted and what is forbidden, for the problem does not truly lie there. The Church invites us to look at a reality that is taking place around us and that awaits a compassionate and close response. That foreigner (cf. Lk 10:30-37), who was traveling the same road as the unknown man assaulted and abandoned by the roadside, did everything he could; putting his own plans aside, he devoted time and resources, while also involving others in creating a system of solidarity and care. Abuse of power, of conscience, economic abuse and sexual abuse are wounds in the heart of our society that usually affect the most defenseless. And they are never isolated events, but rather structures formed in networks that tend to cut across all public and private levels because they are consolidated in anonymity and fear. What is expected of each of us individually is the evangelical attitude required to approach every human wound: much oil, much wine, and much patience. And collectively—since we are speaking of transversal networks — much passion is needed, little impulsiveness, sufficient organization, and an ecclesially organic approach.

Another frequent topic in our conversations is concern about certain forms of traditionalism present among the younger generations. Although this is a phenomenon common to almost all Christian Churches, among Catholics it is often expressed—more in some regions than in others—in specific liturgical forms. Like every historical movement, it must be viewed serenely in its complexity and multiple causes. For these are often relatively proportionate responses born in very precise cultural contexts where, for example, the constant search for deep and new spiritual experiences predominates, together—paradoxically—with the secularization of society.

The psychological aspects present in these searches must be taken into account with great respect, for they reveal realities which, when lived intensely, are not always fully manifest or clearly addressed; in this way, they end up becoming personal and collective motivations that, sooner or later, will compete with the Gospel and with ecclesial belonging. In other cases, still related to what has just been said, it has to do with that subjective perception generally understood as postmodernity, which brings with it an experience of the end of history.

I am referring to the symptoms proper to a change of epoch, such as the search for refuge in an abstraction of the past—because the present and the future appear as threats—and

the adoption of a rigid defensive attitude **[28]**.

Although they are diverse movements, they often present themselves as a single reality with rather blurred boundaries. However, the challenge becomes extremely complex when expressions of a neo-Jansenist type intersect with them, as if they belonged to them. I insist these are not identical movements, but when they merge, they create no little confusion and pain. Here again we mention the necessary discernment to distinguish temptation from challenge. For with neo-Jansenisms comes a Christ without Jesus, a divine anointing without a face, and a religiosity that does not cross the borders of «our own». And so, the emphasis placed on law to the detriment of grace is transferred to every level of life. And in Christian contexts, the decline of mercy unleashed against the most fragile sectors of society ends up being justified with religious arguments **[29]**.

Veráquin says precisely in this regard that

As a reaction to the relativistic thinking predominant in society and in the face of the often-lukewarm responses of Christians, groups have emerged that claim a 'true fidelity' to Christ and to the Church. They present themselves with more radical attitudes, with more demanding practices, often quite rigid, and with strong determination. In France, along these lines, currents of a Lefebvrist type are particularly notorious. But similar phenomena are also found in the so-called «new congregations». Many young people, in search of identity, find in these environments a structured and reassuring framework, as well as a simple and clear ideal of life. Unfortunately, experience has shown that the claim to greater «fidelity» has frequently concealed serious abuses **[30]**.

[28] Zygmunt Bauman, Retrotopia, Introduction: «For centuries, humanity looked to the future. «Utopia» was a place in the future that we would build through progress and reason. However, in liquid society, the future has become a source of fear (unemployment, climate change, terrorism, precariousness) ... it has been transformed from a scenario of hope into a nightmare scenario... The past, by contrast, has been reclassified as a territory of hope; as a place where (humanity) can still place its trust, having been expelled from a future that has become inhospitable and has ceased to be the home of our expectations».

[29] One of the victims of early Jansenism was Saint Vincent de Paul, who was accused of helping the galley rowers rather than baptising them.

[30] Fr. Patrice Veráquin omv, ib.

And finally—though not least—we cannot fail to mention that, in recent decades, both the event of the Council and the ministry of the Bishop of Rome have been called into question. «Through some crack the smoke of Satan has entered the temple of God. There is doubt, uncertainty, questioning, restlessness, dissatisfaction, confrontation. Trust in the Church is no longer given» **[31].** Many will surely still remember the voice of Paul VI in that homily, which we might call prophetic. Toward the end of his address he states that his desire is to be able, «now more than ever, to exercise the function that God entrusted to Peter of confirming his brothers in the faith; we would like to communicate to them this charism of certainty that the Lord gives to the one who represents him, even unworthily, on this earth, and to tell them that faith gives us a truly secure certainty».

Dear confreres, among the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, not even under the appearance of catholicity or theological rigor, shall the Universal Magisterium of the Bishop of Rome be called into question in any way. Still more: no one can profess vows in our community who—whether by words or by concrete actions—disbelieves the voice of the Spirit of God manifested in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

On the day we pronounced our vows, we were solemnly told: «You will have everything in common with us». In that simple declaration, the community that welcomed us indicated the model by which we must measure ourselves, a model that is at the same time the hopeful proclamation that universal fraternity is possible in Christ Jesus. The way we relate to one another calls for a «mystical, contemplative fraternity, one that knows how to look upon the sacred grandeur of the neighbor» **[32].** Let us return each day, brothers, to that first and foundational Christian experience that makes the foundations of our structures tremble at the passing of the Spirit and, as a gift, softens our hearts! Let us return with confidence to the Church of the Council, which is the Church of Communion, the Church that knows how to engage in dialogue with the different realities inhabiting our world, the Church that does not hasten to enclose itself in order to condemn and preserve itself in its purity!

[31] Paul VI, Homily, 29 June 1972.

[32] Francis, Evangelii Gaudium n. 92

3.

BE LIKE MARY

Mary's motherhood, deeply imbued with her spousal attitude as the «handmaid of the Lord», constitutes the first and fundamental dimension of the mediation that the Church confesses and proclaims about her. Before anyone else, God himself, the eternal Father, entrusted himself to the Virgin of Nazareth by giving her his own Son in the mystery of the Incarnation. She is the strong woman who knew poverty and suffering, flight and exile; situations that cannot escape the attention of anyone who wishes to second, in an evangelical spirit, the liberating energies of humanity and society [33]. Mary is the one who knows how to turn a cave for animals into the house of Jesus, with a few poor swaddling clothes and a mountain of tenderness [34].

[33] Paul VI, Marialis Cultus n. 37

[34] Francis, Evangelii Gaudium n. 286

The constant witness of so many believing and particularly Marian peoples, poor in ordained ministers and in organized catechesis, confirms that, among them, the Catholic faith is sustained and handed on to new generations through simple devotion to the «little Virgin». They tend to defend themselves with great tenacity against the temptations that seek to strip the Mother of the affection of her children. We have much to learn humbly from that faith of the holy faithful People of God. For they have learned to care for joy and closeness, even when life is overwhelmed by sorrows and uncertainties.

Mary's Magnificat proclaims without hesitation that the Lord makes himself present among the humble and the hungry. And he remembers his mercy.

We Oblates are called to make ourselves present wherever life grows under threat; and we do so lovingly, caring for and protecting it. Just as the elderly Bruno preserved until the end the memory of the «caresses with which so good a Mother» cared for his littleness, may every man and every woman—whether

suffering or causing suffering in others—that is, every person to whom we are sent or whom we simply encounter along the way, be able to discover in his or her own life the revolution of tenderness that, through Marian mediation, dwells in our hands.

In the life of Father Bruno Lanteri, the name of Jesus and the name of Mary were never separated. «For when we pronounce the name of Mary, we do not do so as when we call upon a creature whom we know simply exists. There is much more: we are aware of her fullness, complexity, and greatness» **[35]**.

Together with the Mother of the Lord, our small Oblate family sings the greatness of the Lord and trembles with joy in God, its Savior. Mary's pure, free, and perfect self-gift to the Father becomes Lanterian for us now when each one makes the Virgin's unconditional «yes» his own. And in this sense, our own pure and free self-gift also becomes perfect when, in return, we desire only the freedom of those who live trapped in slavery, particularly the slavery of sin **[36]**. With Mary, we proclaim the victory of hope over anguish, of communion over solitude, of peace over disturbance, of joy and beauty over tedium and nausea, of eternal perspectives over temporal ones, of life over death **[37]**.



[35] Fr. Andrea Brustolon omv, Il cuore materno di Maria, Neos Edizioni, 2023

[36] Cf Fr Mauro Oliva omv, L'oblazione mariana nella spiritualità di Pio Bruno Lanteri, Roma, 2024, pag 313.

[37] Paul VI, Marialis Cultus n.37



4.

ON THE SIDE OF THE POOR AND THE DISCARDED

In the synagogue of Nazareth, on his «programmatic discourse», Jesus made the hopes of Yahweh's poor his own: «The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor, to proclaim release to captives and sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim a year of the Lord's favor» (Lk 4:18-19). That day it became clear that the reality of the poor is structurally and intrinsically Christological.

Poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon; it is manifested in the many faces of those who are pierced by it: those who lack the means of material support, the socially marginalized who have no voice to defend their dignity, and those who suffer moral, spiritual, or cultural poverty. We are referring to the fragility of those who have no rights, no space, and no freedom **[38]**.

The Servant of God Dom Hélder Câmara expressed with simple lucidity the problem that arises whenever someone pauses before the reality of human poverty: «When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist». Brothers, I invite you to look at this double reality: the world may admire philanthropy, but it often persecutes—even to the point of death—those who question the structures of sin that generate poverty.

To give food, drink, or healing implies an option for the person, even when the gesture seems as insignificant as a cup of cold water (cf. Mt 10:42). This act, stripped of ulterior motives, creates bonds of life. It is a maternal gesture that does not interrogate in advance but creates the conditions for the vulnerable person to take charge of his or her own existence. The *nunc coepi* of the poor person is pronounced at the very instant when «someone» ceases to be «no one» (cf. Lk 10:33).

[38] Cf. Leo XIV, Dilexi Te n.9

In the multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6), everything begins with a particular gaze of Jesus. His first question is not about catechesis, but about food: «Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?» Jesus reasons like a mother or grandmother with a full house: people must be fed rather than asked where they come from or whether they intend to change their lives. The compassionate heart of the good shepherd leaps for joy because the people are there. That «catechesis of loving gestures» is more eloquent than a thousand words. For giving food is not a strategy for evangelizing; it is already evangelization, which, moreover, prepares and awaits the word.

Jesus knows that the poor live subject to immediacy and to the difficulty of planning for the long term. For this reason, he does not ask of the people what they cannot give; he organizes the service by involving Philip, Andrew, and a child. Everything seems little, but organization bears fruit when the recipients become protagonists.

In this way begins the irruption of the poor in the Church. The preferential option **[39]** is a two-way current that implies going out toward the poor and the irruption of the poor in the community. This second movement is often the most questioned and surrounded by precautions. For people living in poverty, associated in a community of brothers and sisters, begin to think. And many of them, listening to the Gospel, identify themselves so deeply with the Lord and his Mother that they feel called to act in the same way, going out to meet those who, like themselves, live in a state of defenselessness. Any parish priest who has had to organize a soup kitchen or a community center can attest that organization arises and is sustained by the people themselves. However, the organized poor are a force that, from the thrones of the powerful (cf. Lk 1:52), is often perceived as a threat that must be corrected, limited, or simply eliminated; shameless political manipulation also bears witness to this. The numerous testimonies of the martyrs confirm this reality dramatically, such as the Martyrs of La Rioja **[40]** or the various figures who

[39] Some prefer the simple phrase used by the CELAM Assembly in Medellín: «option for the poor»; others prefer «prophetic option for the poor».

[40] Bishop Enrique Angelelli, the Franciscan friar Carlos de Dios Murias, the priest Gabriel Longueville and the layman Wenceslao Pedernera were murdered in 1976 by the military dictatorship – which publicly professed to be Catholic – that ruled Argentina (1976-1983). Their commitment to the poorest people in northern Argentina unleashed violence against them, fuelled by the slander of military authorities linked to local economic powers. Blessed Pedernera, killed in front of his children, told them before he died: «Do not hate!»

form part of the collective known as the Martyrs of the Amazon **[41]**.

The option for the poor is not cost-free; it entails a cross that can be truly heavy. Yet the cross borne, in solitude and in perfect anonymity, by multitudes of children, adolescents, young people, women, men, and the elderly is much heavier. Why is this world so afraid of poverty? Why are there so many reservations and fears among Christians regarding pastoral service in favor of the organization of those whom society discards? «Why, even when the Sacred Scriptures are so precise concerning the poor, do many continue to think that they can exclude the poor from their concerns?» **[42]**, even by appealing to the founding charism. We are not immune from falling into the trap of some fashionable ideology in our regions, or into slogans that avoid —or cite only partially — the Gospel in order to go and hide behind a smartphone. But if, for fear of falling, we do not walk, perhaps we shall never walk, as the Father Founder might remind us. We are not permitted to separate the experience of mercy from pastoral service in favor of the people whom this world discards.

Veráquin concludes, in the letter to a brother, by recalling:

In our ministry, we encounter many wounded, vulnerable, and fragile people. We ourselves are such. As disciples of the Venerable Lanteri, we cultivate a spirituality of the goodness and mercy of God. «Our Father is infinite in mercy» **[43]**. *«The characteristic of Jesus is mercy, compassion. The characteristic of human beings must be hope. Let us therefore promote both»* **[44]**.

[41] Bishop Alejandro Labaka and Sister Inés Arango, murdered in the Ecuadorian Amazon in 1987 for protecting indigenous groups from genocide and oil development. Sister Dorothy Stang, killed in Pará (Brazil) for her campaign in favour of land reform and against illegal deforestation. Salesian Rodolfo Lunkenbein and layman Simão Bororo, killed in 1976 for defending indigenous lands. They are joined, among others, by Chico Mendes, Bruno Pereira and Dom Phillips (Brazil), Edwin Chota and the leaders of Saweto (Peru).

[42] Leo XIV, Dilexi Te n. 23

[43] Pio Bruno Lanteri, Pre, 6201 c:74,4,2.

[44] Pio Bruno Lanteri, Asc, 2278 : T4, 16.

Lanteri's mercy was also manifested in the attention he paid to the poor and the sick, as well as in the affability he showed toward everyone. We were fully in agreement that at the center of our Oblate spirituality is mercy in all its breadth. That is why I was surprised when you told me that a brother was using harsh and legalistic language in his homilies. The Magisterium of the recent Popes strongly insists on the centrality of mercy. If you are interested, Cardinal Kasper's book on mercy is very beautiful; in it he develops a theology of mercy as a key to the Christian life **[45]**. *Finally, we also agreed that social and political questions cannot be foreign to our task of evangelization. In harmony with the Magisterium of the Church, our mission promotes the values of life, from conception to its natural end, as well as the values of social justice. The political and economic tyrannies that are emerging in the world today oblige us to defend democratic values. You did not seem entirely convinced when I told you that these values are also threatened in our Western world. When the separation of powers—political, economic, juridical, and cultural—is called into question, in particular freedom of expression, and when the powerful cease to respect the rule of law, the danger is imminent. Do you not think so? In any case, in this field too we find many luminous points of reference in the social teaching of the Popes* **[46]**.



[45] Walter Kasper, Misericodia. Concetto fondamentale del Vangelo. Chiave della vita cristiana.

[46] Fr. Patrice Veráquin omv, ib

To conclude, let us turn our gaze to Saint Paul, who, evoking the controversy in Jerusalem, assures us that everything ended with a handshake and the recommendation «that we remember the poor, which is precisely what I have been eager to do» (Gal 2:10). Like Jesus, Paul and so many others went about doing good; may the Lord grant that each one of us, and our whole community seen as a whole, may also be remembered simply in the same way: the Oblates went about doing good and never forgot the poor, the weak, and the suffering.

HIGHLIGHTS

«Martha, Martha, you are anxious
and worried about many things.
There is need of only one thing.
Mary has chosen the better part
and it will not be taken from her».
(Lc 10:41-42)

IN

this chapter, I'd like to introduce you to a few tools for our personal life as well as for our community and pastoral life. They are only a few tools; they do not cover all aspects of life or all options, maybe they can help us in this actual time and in each Church, we are sent to serve.

On the first Centenary of the foundation of the Congregation, the Rector Major Claudio Toesca offered the brothers three brief «summaries» which, seen in perspective, be useful to us today as well as a «backdrop», since they keep preserving their full pastoral energy. In fact, he points out that «Father Lanteri proposed three means, valid and foolproof, provided they were used with method and perseverance:

1- The living voice of the missionary who, on major occasions such as missions and exercises —as the voice of a new prophet sent by God to the peoples— warns, threatens, urges, and persuades.

2- The calm but solemn voice of the book —of apologetics, piety, or history—which enters everywhere, can be read and meditated on by everyone, creeps in, attracts, captivates, and persuades.

3- The voice of the spiritual director, who descends into the mysterious depths of the soul, enlightens it, shakes it, sustains it, and guides it amid the storms of life» **[47].**

Therefore, turning first at the personal dimension, I would like to emphasize the importance of prayer and discernment as an obedient search for the will of the Father.

As for community dynamics, I (once again) propose the search for silence and peace of mind and a special effort to avoid isolation.

Finally, from a pastoral perspective, I emphasize hope rooted in compassion, missionary spirit, and Ignatian pedagogy; youth-vocational ministry; shared mission with the laity; and the special relationship with our sisters.

[47] Cf. Fr Claudio Toesca omv, Rector Major, Circular Letter on the First Centenary of the Institute's First Approval, 13 November 1816 - 13 November 1916.

We shall never insist enough on the need to care for and increase life in the Spirit. Pope Francis, whenever he had the chance, has asked consecrated people and pastors not to to give up adoration; that is, that simple being at the feet of the Lord to listen to his Word, like the little dog waiting for the crumbs that fall from its master's table. I remember that, when I was a postulant, Father Julio Brugnoli warned me about prayer as a time for reading or study: «It's actually a moment of love», he told me.

The centrality of listening to the Word of the Lord **[48]** opens us up to a greater capacity to welcome others; it shapes our heart as shepherds and sends us out to serve in the manner of Jesus. The time «spent» beside him is the marrow of the path of accepting and integrating our fragility; it frees us from hidden narcissisms and makes us soft bread to feed the people.

And if you are tired or tempted, if you feel far from the Lord or too too withdrawn, it's time to recognize what you are, confess your weakness and «Then turn to God's infinite goodness and cry out without ceasing: the abyss of misery calls upon the abyss of mercy. Yes, cry out, cry out now, again and once more repeat: from the depth of my limitations, of my struggles, of my burden, I cry out with great confidence to the infinite depths of your love, of your mercy, of your compassion» **[49].**

Returning to the roots of spirituality does us good; it makes us simple and humble. There will always be a temptation revolving around us, flattering our «spiritual maturity» with the sole aim of keeping us from simple, austere prayer, stripped of «fireworks» and the search for new sensations; that same temptation will also make spiritual dialogue with a guide difficult and will place obstacles—even guilt — to prevent us from comparing our proposals and our choices.

[48] «And as we listen to the Gospel of the day», insisted Julio Cura.

[49] Cf. Fr Timoteo Gallagher omv, If You Want Peace in This Life: The Spiritual Letters of the Venerable Bruno Lanteri, 2025

2- LISTENING, DISCERNING AND OBEYING

The ability to listen grows as the ability to love matures; how can one listen to God, whom he does not see, and does not listen to his brother, whom he does see? (cf. 1 Jn 4:20). For this reason, the heart that does not listen grows hard (cf. Ps 95:7-8) and becomes unable to discern; that discerment which is never individual, but personal and ecclesial. Even when we may have to make very intimate decisions, these never mature apart from a living community. An open ear is the premise for finding and carrying out the Father's dream in the life of each one of us and of all of us together.

Obedience is inscribed within this framework of the common search for the Father's will. Here too—and forgive me if this may seem an oft-repeated obviousness— we could paraphrase John's statement on love and confirm that obedience to the Father which does not take flesh in a real fraternal community runs the risk of being, at the very least, illusory; nevertheless, in daily life we see that many consecrated persons prefer to discern apart from their community, perhaps imagining that in this way they «obey God rather than human beings» (cf. Acts 5:29).

Just an example, a short time ago the Superior general of a Spanish Congregation shared the astonishment he feels when he observes the impassable barrier he encounters when trying to accompany the discernment of the brothers, particularly of those who wish to leave the Institute. He said he could not understand a very precise dynamic: the religious family that sustained the brothers' vocational discernment is not considered capable of being—or in fact is not—equal to the task of discernment in times of crisis **[50]**.

[50] This general lamented the fact that, in such situations, the roles of the spiritual director and the confessor are often compromised; and that of the bishop, who will appear on the scene to (attempt to) resolve the problem.

The service of authority, not always exercised according to the spirit of the Gospel—and for which we have already asked for forgiveness—does not invalidate the Lord's constant invitation to personal identification with Him who became «obedient unto death, even death on a cross» (Phil 2:8). That is difficult obedience; and it is difficult because it is accepted.

The trusting matured «yes» introduces us into our own Gethsemane, where we shall argue face to face with the Father.

The surrendered «yes»—even if small and frail—makes us interlocutors and «partners» of the God who deeply loves this world and has only designs of salvation for it.

3- BE SILENT

I have heard many brothers express the desire to update the old binomial «silence and recollection», not so much in order to replace it with something better and send it definitively to the attic of old things, but rather to recover all its newness and power in a world in which mutual relationships are permeated by the noise of technology and by distraction that numbs.

It is true: it is urgent to recover the modesty of silence and stillness, for each one personally and for our ways of relating to one another. We are called to pass through an age in which much is said, and little is communicated. We know all the details of the world and of people at the very instant things happen; but we do not have—we cannot have—enough human capacity to digest what in fact does not nourish.

Moreover, consecrated people and very especially those of us who exercise the ministry of reconciliation—must take great care over what we say, what we keep silent, what we consume, and what we produce. We are traversed by a silence that makes us safe havens; and perhaps for that very reason it recalls, without concealment, that the Father is merciful.

This silence often comes through in a few words, but above all it shows up in a clear conscience. Word and silence are forms of communication that intertwine in balance with one another. They are ways of being in the world, because we consecrated persons are made of the Word and of the Silence of the Father.

4- PREVENTING ISOLATION

Technologies - as we have just mentioned - represent a structural part of our relationships; they function as almost obligatory mediation without which many do not find a way to enter dialogue with the other. However, we observe that «digital communication accentuates isolation. There is the paradox that social media undermines society; they undermine social cohesion. Contact replaces relationships; we do not have a relationship with one another, we live in a society in which we do not deal with one another because, unlike relationships, contact does not create proximity. The relationship with the other is spoiled when the other, who for us was a "you", has been degraded into an "it", into an object that satisfies only my needs and my ego. Once the other has been reduced to a mere reflection of myself, he or she loses difference and otherness. Society then becomes increasingly narcissistic, relationships are lost, and anguish becomes more intense» **[51]**.

[51] Cf. Byun-Chul Han, El espíritu de la esperanza, Herder, 2024

What is needed is the pedagogy of good treatment, capable of creating a truly human encounter without intermediations. The time we devote to being with someone makes us blessed and brings to light that the other bears within himself or herself a luminosity that is perceived only from nearby and with time, in shared silences and with much listening. Perhaps more than ever, we must be artisans of friendship and accept that intergenerationality and interculturality are that beautiful testimony which manifests the possibility of building a better reality and that the heart of the world can beat for better reasons. Then, only then, when it is placed at the service of the culture of encounter, does digital mediation find its direction.

Recovering dialogue requires much teaching. We already know this: speaking does not always mean being in dialogue. And this too is not simple, because the value of the word offered with the intention of seeking agreements has been replaced by the imposition of arguments sustained by aggression and mistreatment. Communicating is much more than speaking and creating spaces for dialogue is still more so.

5- KEEP HOPE ALIVE

In our daily pastoral service, we see that hope is often renewed in the hearts of so many women and men who live amid difficulties and threats. Helping to keep it alive, without disguising it as optimism, is possibly one of the best services we can offer. For hope «sharpens our senses to perceive what does not yet exist, what has not yet been born, what is only just appearing on the horizon of the future. It is the midwife of the new; it is an interior source of dynamism and activity. Beyond mere bustle, hope inspires us toward the breeze that brings us the freshness of the unborn» **[52].**

Both in the silence of the confessional or of spiritual accompaniment, and in the din of the pulpit, hope—the «midwife of the new»—is renewed in forgiveness and compassion. Any person, even the most violent of human beings who experiences real clemency, can discover that there exists a new opportunity that only gratuitous love can create.

«There was a moralist in Turin whom Lanteri surely knew, Alasia, who had written a treatise on moral theology on which most of the Piedmontese clergy of that time were formed. He said that "experience teaches us that the best way to distance these men from sin was by deferring absolution". And it is not true: experience says precisely the opposite. The same was said by the bishop of Foligno: "the best remedy for reducing the number of sins is to be very severe in confession and not give absolution until one is certain of conversion". The result is completely negative, and it was a line that was maintained for a long time. One of Lanteri's very great merits is to have been the model of the contrary judgment» **[53].**

[52] Byun-Chul Han, ib

[53] Giacomo Martina sj, Il contesto storico dell'opera evangelizzatrice di Lanteri, Lanterianum 1994-1

In this sense, Pope Francis's indispensable insistence is understood even better: always forgive and forgive everything.

Even more: the Oblate, in excusing, decides to contemplate the human heart with the same attitude with which the Most High justifies the publican in the temple or embraces the crucified man at the final instant, while becoming the advocate of the conscience accused by the evil one (cf. Lk 18:9-14; Rev 12:10).

6- MISSIONARY SPIRIT

The energy everyone puts into their communities is truly remarkable; sometimes we feel like a lot is being asked of us, even amid misunderstandings and a lack of recognition; but we cannot forget that the Lord will greatly thank us for having lovingly cared for a little flock that does not belong to us. «Efforts and misunderstandings, however, can also be an occasion for reflection on the pastoral challenges we must face. In particular, regarding the relationship between Christian initiation and evangelization, we need a clear change of direction; indeed, ordinary pastoral care is structured according to a classical model that is concerned, above all, with guaranteeing the administration of the sacraments. But such a model assumes that faith is also transmitted by the surrounding environment, both by society and by family setting. For this reason, it is urgent to announce the Gospel anew: this is the priority. With humility, but without allowing ourselves to be discouraged, we must recognize that part of our baptized people does not experience their belonging to the Church, which invites us to be vigilant about a "sacramentalization" without other forms of evangelization. In this context, Christian initiation needs to be reviewed: it is necessary to experiment with other ways of transmitting the faith, outside the classical paths, to try to involve children, young people, and families in a new way» **[54]**.

From that perspective, two brothers spoke to me about the missionary initiative in their parish on the anniversary. Another, with the good excuse of the patronal feasts, celebrates the novena amid the houses where people readily gather. Another meets to pray in the village hair salon. I am sure that each of us could make a list of initiatives carried out in his own place of mission, always taking cultural coordinates into account. For many people, that is the only possibility of an encounter with the Oblates and with the Lord Jesus, which always means a moment of joy.

[54] Leo XIV, Address to the Clergy of Rome, February 19, 2026.

Any occasion is a good one for pastoral creativity to be renewed and to go out to meet those who do not feel connected—for whatever reasons—with the Christian community. Evangelization, the new evangelization, and catechesis are different ways of announcing the Gospel and, therefore, require different methods **[55]**. The mistake we most habitually make, particularly in Churches of long-standing Christendom, is to apply catechetical methods where a pedagogy more closely linked to evangelization is clearly needed.

And it is from that perspective that we cannot lose sight of the various forms of gathering that are not strictly «parish or Catholic», where nevertheless we can converge with many families and very many young people: clubs and the world of sports, culture and art, politics and human rights, the wonderful and complex educational universe, workers' associations, centers for recovery from addictions and problematic consumption, etc.

When we were speaking earlier of technologies and digitality, we were referring to personal aspects, since we make use of them to create communion and encounter.

From the point of view of evangelization, this field is truly vast and attractive. Its constant development and updating make it difficult for many to find pastoral approaches that endure over time. Here too it is important not to mistake the method, so that the fleeting nature of the digital ecosystem does not conspire against the enduring beauty of the Gospel announced on virtual platforms.

To conclude this emphasis, I want to mention something very well known and experienced by many: namely, that at present we can no longer speak of «mission lands» in the sense that this expression had in the past.

Any nation, especially those of ancient Christendom, is today mission territory. Nevertheless, in regions that are poor and battered by violence, the Gospel and the evangelizer are God's caresses for a people whose life is always under threat.

This is the case of the Church in Nigeria, a martyred and persecuted community, whose «amount» of vitality and joyful self-giving continues to be greater than the violence regularly unleashed against it.

[55] John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio n.33

And it is for this very reason that, as many have been hearing me say for some time, I continue to insist on the invitation to keep growing on the African continent in the direction of the francophone region, as well as to seek new strategies for returning to India. These are perhaps my own follies or ambitions, or almost certainly they are. I am very aware of the scarcity of resources and of the reservations regarding new horizons. I also know that our spirits often become restless whenever we are invited to set ourselves in motion toward what we do not manage or cannot fully control. Nevertheless, I continue to leave the invitation open.

In the Congregation, the experience of the Spiritual Exercises is quite uneven. Even so, I believe that for many they continue to be the inspiration for their preaching, conferences, and spiritual accompaniment. The methodological flexibility of the Exercises favors their openness to whatever situation people may find themselves in; nevertheless, I would like to underline only the centrality of discernment, particularly as the guiding thread of all spiritual accompaniment.

Today, the old «spiritual direction» is no longer limited to the priest or the religious; women religious and lay people are also great companions in the spirit for those who want to seek and find the will of God. In other words, and without entering into the causes, we observe that in many Churches—not only those of ancient Christendom—Christians, and not only Christians, do not necessarily go to the priest, but rather to the wise person. Alongside this search there coexists that other reality—we mentioned in passing when speaking of technologies—in which anyone can offer answers to everyone and to any problem, in thirty-second videos, produced and published without too much responsibility for their real consequences in people's lives.

The exercise of fatherhood in the spirit is a precious, charismatic gift which, when lived with patience and compassion, is validated by the People of God. One example is the Ministry of Listening—with different names and forms according to the region—which, made up of priests, consecrated persons, and lay people, places itself at the service of those who truly seek the Lord.

It is desirable that every Lanterian community be a center where it is easy to find the Lord because, beyond the ordinary religious services, there are trustworthy people who, with time and sufficient affection, are willing to accompany pedagogically those whom the Lord seeks, calls, and gathers.

8- YOUTH AND VOCATIONAL MINISTRY

I recognize that, perhaps for many brothers, this continues to be one of the key issues to address. Because of bad experiences in the past, motivations foreign to ecclesiality, or meager results, vocational ministry has become for many a utopia without a horizon. Even so, we must place emphasis on it, without being frightened by the great cultural diversity and diversity of criteria that especially affects a small congregation like ours.

Each region must organize it in an ordinary way, just as pastoral ministry is planned at the beginning of each year. Many already do so. We must ask the criteria of the charism itself, because every vocational proclamation also arises from there, always remembering that the Church grows by attraction, because it is Christ who draws us all to himself **[56]**.

To go out to meet the difficulties, I allow myself to highlight two possible temptations that often prowl around communities and dioceses and that could mire us and discourage us:

One lacks interest disguised as trust. It is the one that takes for granted that the Lord will send young people when he decides, arguing that «in the past there was no vocational ministry and vocations were not lacking». Like every temptation, this one also confuses elements and creates paralysis; and at the same time, it abandons individual initiative what must be communal. Someone will always occupy, with his own criteria, the empty space left by the community, which usually turns out well only on very few occasions. One gets out of this temptation through an integral program that sets objectives, tools, roles, and periodic evaluations.

[56] Cf. Benedict XVI, Opening Address at the Fifth CELAM Conference in Aparecida, 2007.

Another is alternativism disguised as spiritual fatherhood. It refers to forms of recruitment that take advantage of structures already in operation—congregation, diocese, movement—but that bind candidates rather to the person who recruits, because of a certain spiritual legitimacy **[57]**. And thus, with the excuse of not suffocating youthful ideals in outdated structures, parallel itineraries are created that no longer bind people to the whole, but to one or several individuals dependent upon one another **[58]**, with the aggravating circumstance that, in order to achieve stability over time, it is sometimes necessary to appeal to the manipulation of consciences. It is prevented—forgive the repetition—through transparent programming for all, which clearly defines objectives and roles.

[57] In recent decades, we have seen dioceses with two seminaries, one of which serves the «founding father/mother» more than it does the diocese. Something similar has happened with many new religious movements.

[58] It was striking that some consecrated persons, during the Jubilee of Consecrated Life in October 2025, even while in Rome, chose to meet separately rather than gather for the joint events.

9- LAY FRIENDSHIP

A few days ago, a confrere parish priest told me that he could see very clearly the realization of the spirit of the Friendship in the parish he is called to animate today. People gather weekly, maintain sacramental regularity, and know one another; many take an active part in parish services, particularly in charity, while also devoting a good amount of time to their spiritual formation. Our conversation went deeper into the challenge of friendship as a pastoral tool, so dear to the Founder.

More than twenty years have passed since Father Patrice Veráquin published the «Letter to the Friends and Collaborators of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary». In these two decades, the world, the Church, and the Congregation have changed profoundly.

Nevertheless, in a culture that seems to want to rid itself of structures, the essential question that must guide our reflections still stands: in what way is the Lanterian charism, lived by us in the priestly and religious form of life, also experienced by lay people in their own lay form of life? Our objective is not to draw lay people toward ourselves, nor even toward Lanteri, but to place at the service of the laity a gift that we have received and in which we believe, so as to be able to follow Christ better and announce his Kingdom more effectively **[59]**. The Lanterian family finds stronger bonds of cohesion within itself because it is ecclesial, and at the same time it serves better because each one does so according to his or her specific vocation.

Shared mission is the path that many religious families have deepened upon discovering that, in collaborative service, the various vocations of the Church are better expressed. In this interaction, no one turns away from the other; rather, all support one another in the demands proper to their state of life. For this reason, the key lies not in multiplying regulations, but chiefly in a constant return to the sources of all Christian life and in their appropriate adaptation to the changing conditions of the times.

[59] Cfr. Letter to the Oblates on Our Relationship with the Laity, November 21, 2004, Lanterianum 2005-1.

And in this sense, our religious family is invited to rediscover the role of the coadjutor brother as a bridge between the clerical charismatic experience and the lay form of life. The Church has taken consistent steps in recovering and resignifying the role of the coadjutor.

The Church defines the brother not by what he «does» or by what he «is not» (not being a priest), but by his deepest being: a living memory that all Christians are, before all else, brothers and sisters **[60].** His vocation is a prophetic sign that breaks with clericalism, recalling that service and the radical equality of the baptized are the heart of the Gospel.

The brother's vocation is a complete state of life, necessary and complementary for the harmony of our community.

[60] Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church, December 14, 2015.

10- TOGETHER WITH OUR SISTERS

The Daughters of Saint Joseph and the Oblates of the Virgin Mary of Fatima are a gift that the Lord and the Church have given us, and for which we continue to give thanks. Our sisters are a source of joy, a beautiful reason to live daily in brotherhood and sisterhood as real as it is simple, and an opportunity to serve in communion and pastoral closeness.

Beyond the formal relationship that the three institutions must continue to cultivate—and we are doing so with genuine desires to grow together—there exists that other bond sustained in the pastoral mission of the different religious communities in the same territory.

Because, first, we are brothers and sisters; this reality alone deserves to be celebrated. Like all brothers and sisters in the Church, we too need to return to the sources of the communion that gathers us, asking forgiveness of one another whenever necessary so as to set out on a path of fraternal-sororal collaboration and thus converge ever more in shared mission at the service of the holy faithful People of God.

With our Oblate sisters, we too make of our life a total and perpetual oblation for the glory of God. And to Saint Joseph, together with the daughters of the venerable Father Felice Prinetti, we ask for faith, affectionate union with Jesus and Mary, prompt and serene obedience, industriousness, silence, and humility.

CONCLUSION

«Woman, behold, your son»

«Behold, your mother».

(Jn, 19:26.27

ON

reaching this last page, I simply want to thank you for the time you spent reading and listening inward. Beyond this, I want to thank the Lord and to thank you for your daily self-giving in service to the Kingdom. You were placed, out of pure love, in the hands of the Mother so that she might lead you to God. Everything passes through her hands; everything is kept under her gaze.

I don't know if you ever pray the rosary, every day, or never; nor whether you have her image among your personal belongings. I have learned that one must not invade with questions about what happens in another's conscience, because in that place dwells a mystery that asks for respect and silence. But I do know—I am sure—that each of our names—from the holiest to the most fragile, perfectly individualized, clear and distinct—is being pronounced by Her loving lips, and that we dwell in the sound of Her serene voice.

So, when you are celebrating your own Cana of Galilee, do not worry about anything else: She thinks of you and will take on your needs. You won't be short of good wine; do not doubt it.

And when it falls to you to remain standing and endure the cross, do not be troubled: She thinks of you and will take care of your frailties and fears. You will not be short of consolation, provided you do not doubt. And you will receive Her into your home, as your own; She will receive you into hers, as her own.

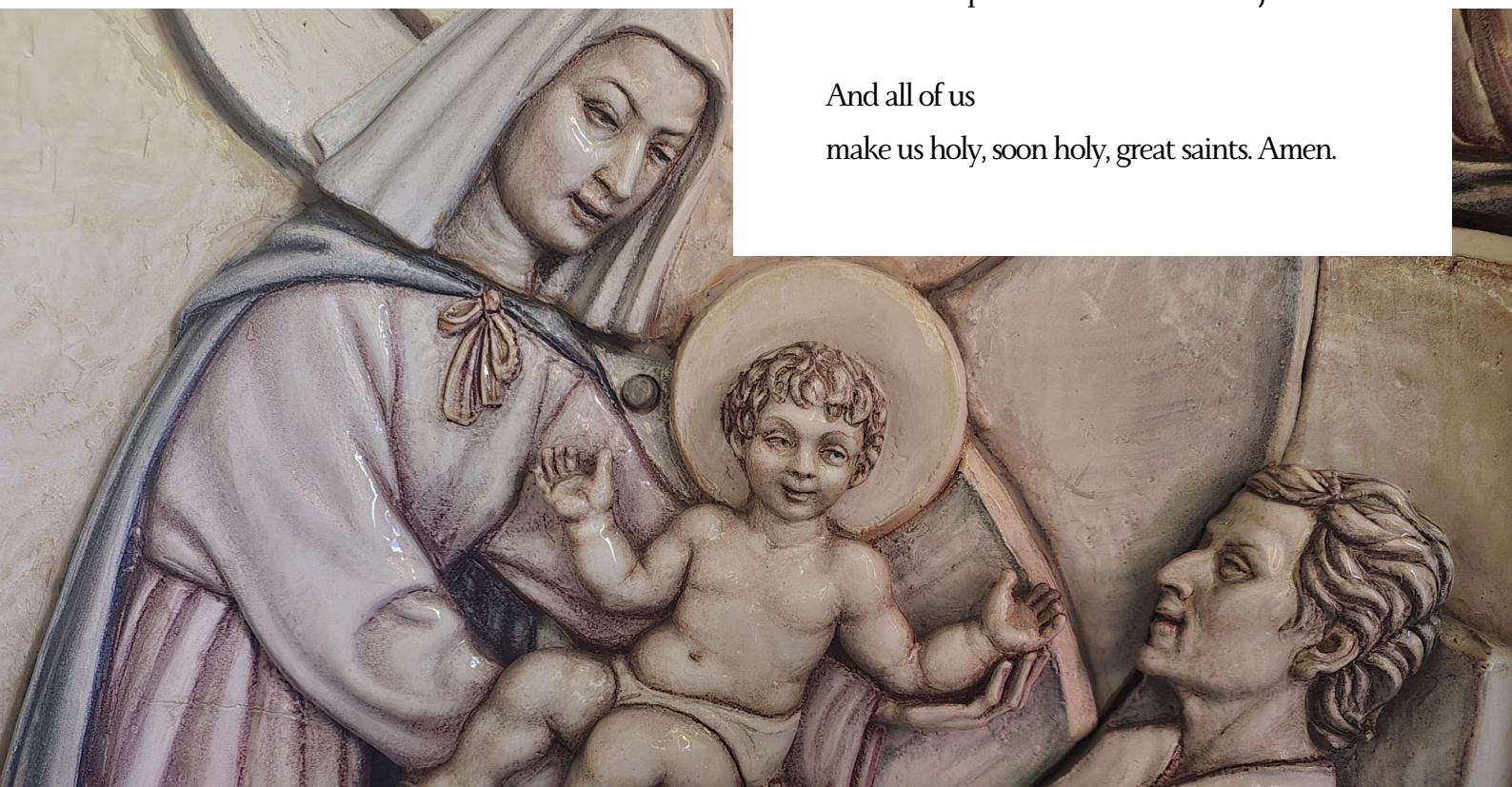
We invoke Her with the prayer we have learned and made our own, which we have adapted and corrected countless times and yet continue to repeat daily:

Virgin Mother,
preserve, increase, and make fruitful in
goodness the work of your Congregation.

Loving Mother,
extend your heavenly mantle
over all who today glory
in bearing the name
of Oblates of the Virgin Mary.

Mother of Grace:
send new postulants to our community;
smile with maternal tenderness
upon our dear novices;
guide the professed in formation;
sustain the fathers
in the difficulties of the apostolate;
may the daily work of the
brothers coadjutors be gentle and humble;
grant peace and eternal rest
to our dear deceased;
reward our benefactors and collaborators;
and bless in particular the Rector Major.

And all of us
make us holy, soon holy, great saints. Amen.





Oblates of the Virgin Mary
General Curia

Viale Trenta Aprile 17 - 00153 - Roma - RM - Italia