

# Sharing the Faith

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Our community life ... Fraternal charity is the very heart of that life together with a willingness to place in common not only material goods but also our own personal lives in a communion of heart and soul.

*Constitutions 39*



Small group meeting during the Provincial Chapter of Indonesia (January 2013)

Last month I participated in the Provincial Chapter of Indonesia. One of the desires expressed by the Chapter was to improve the quality of communication between brothers in order to overcome a kind of superficiality and to get to the point of being able to speak about their feelings, their faith and even to correct one another fraternally when needed.

Considering that "The foundation of our being together is faith, faith in the call of the Lord and in his plan," (Thirty-eighth General Chapter, Mission 9) it's clear that dialogue among brothers about faith is something that can be very good for us.

Sharing faith is certainly not easy for us. The experience of faith is quite mysterious and ineffable. How do we speak of something that we are even unable to explain to ourselves? What's more, the action of the Lord in our life is something so intimate that we can feel violated if asked to open the door of our inner sanctuary. It is appropriate to protect the treasure we carry in our heart as in an earthen vessel with a certain reserve. Finally, when we speak of faith, often we do not share what is really happening within but get all caught up in high blown theological ideas and that becomes tedious for everybody.

How can we make faith part of this "sincere and patient dialogue" that the General Chapter (Mission 8) calls us to? Let me offer some ideas, for what they are worth.

## **1. Heartfelt acceptance of my brother**

The first thing necessary for sharing faith in community is to regard the brother with whom you live with heartfelt kindness. Look at him. Perhaps you don't know much about his life, perhaps the two of you don't spontaneously strike up a conversation, perhaps you sense that you have very different approaches to things, perhaps the natural affinity which is the foundation for friendship isn't there... but this brother is there, next to you, because of Jesus. The Holy Spirit has led him by a particular path (Const. 11) which has brought him to be your companion in community. Your brother is a believer, who has let his faith give direction to his life. God is working in him and is offering him to you as gift.

Reverential respect and kindhearted openness toward the mystery of your brother is already an extremely valuable way of sharing faith.

## **2. Common prayer**

We usually say that prayer is “shared” when there are times when we are able to participate freely (the homily, petitions, thanksgiving etc.). However all prayer is communal by the very fact that we are together praising the Lord, celebrating his paschal mystery. To do that it is enough that we lend our voice to the scripture readings, the psalms, the canticles, the prayers of the Church. It is not the quantity of our words and ideas that make our common prayer a true prayer. The essential thing is that we are together, as one, turned toward the mystery of God, immersed in the body of Christ at prayer.

Think of some time when your community is at prayer: lauds, vespers, Eucharist or communal adoration. It may seem to be kind of monotonous, perhaps there is no brilliant input, no one speaks at the time of petitions (as it is better not to make public many of our intentions), perhaps everyone is tired and someone falls asleep... Nonetheless at that moment you are the body of Christ in prayer before the Father, you are the Congregation united in the reparative work of the Lord. As at no other time, the bonds of faith that unite you show forth clearly, as simple as Nazareth and as profound as the disciples in the upper room. Praying together is the best way to share the faith. Prayer establishes a secret dialogue among us that makes us partners and brothers in the mystery of the risen Lord. By the movement of our lips, prayer shapes our hearts bit by bit and reminds us constantly why we are religious, why we exist. What usually has the greatest impact on people who come to visit us is just seeing us pray together in the simplicity of everyday life and rightly so.

## **3. The community meeting**

“The plan of community life must include regular meetings of the whole community. These meetings provide occasions for the brothers to share their experiences, to shed light on their lives in the light of the Scriptures read in common, and to pray together.” (Const. 45.4) The community meeting is the best expression of these regular meetings that the Constitutions refer to. A rhythm of monthly meetings would be the minimum, it would be preferable to have them every two weeks and even better every week. We don’t always feel like having a community meeting, at times it’s tedious. We would prefer to use the time doing other things. But this meeting is part of the “practical objectives that give real substance to our commitment to community” (thirty-eighth General Chapter, Mission 11). The asceticism required to build common life (ibid. 14) includes the effort to prepare the meeting well and to participate actively.

It’s good that the agenda for community meetings include some topics that would make us speak openly of our faith, taking sufficient time so the brothers can express themselves calmly. Listen to your brothers when they speak of their faith. Try to understand them and welcome their reflections respectfully. Enjoy what they say about the action of God in their lives. Be ready to participate appropriately in the meeting, meditate on the topic and your sharing beforehand. Offer your brothers something of beauty from the depth of your heart. It is always the Lord who presides at our meetings, for wherever two or more are together in his name, he is there in the midst of them.

#### 4. Apostolic work

In our pastoral work, each of us expresses and shares our faith. Watch your brothers working, listen to their homilies, try to catch something of the passion that they put into the work they do, discover the things that they are enthusiastic about and also the things that drain them and cause discouragement. Even though they are not speaking directly to you, they are expressing their faith, what moves them from within. Bring your pastoral work to your dialogues, talk about what each of you is doing or saying in your different apostolic responsibilities. You will grow to appreciate one another more and you will be able to “discern, share and evaluate” the each brother’s apostolic work. (Mission 10)

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I hope that these simple points can help encourage the brothers in our communities to share faith. Our faith, “more precious than gold” (1 Pt. 1:7), is the door to the grace, which “is better than life” (Psalm 63:3). May we build our common life and our missionary service on this faith.



By its nature the consecrated life is a pilgrimage of the spirit in quest of a Face that is sometimes revealed and sometimes veiled. May this be the constant yearning of your heart, the fundamental criterion that guides you on your journey, both in small daily steps and in the most important decisions.

Benedict XVI, celebration on February 2, 2013