

Pastoral and missionary conversion - in three dance steps

Alberto Toutin ssc
Superior General

INFO SSCC Brothers No 133 – June 4, 2019



Feast of the Holy Cross in Huaripampa (Peru)

Step One: handed on through generations

During a recent visit to the brothers in Peru, I had the privilege of being with the community that is based in Miraflores, Huaripampa. On one of the days, we celebrated the feast of Holy Cross. Many people came to town from different places to join in the festivities. We began in Church with a celebration of the Eucharist. At the end of the Eucharist, we left the church to begin a procession with an image of the Cross of Christ. At the end of the procession, everyone danced around the Cross, to the music of the band. There was a small child, dressed for the occasion, who followed the steps of the dance. I approached him to ask him and his parents: "Who taught you to dance? Was it your parents?" And the child answered: "No, my grandpa". I could imagine that child watching his grandfather dance and thus learning to walk and dance at the same time. And now he is praying with his feet to the Lord of the Cross, alongside the community, sharing in their joy in the village of his ancestors, a village which has summoned those from far away and those who still live in the village to another rhythm where work fatigue is interrupted.

Today we know that meetings and dialogue between generations is not so simple. It is true, technically, we have the possibilities of being connected at the same time with people from different places, but it is more difficult for different generations to be present - together. In the transmission of faith, parents are often deprived of the ability to pass on the faith they have received - perhaps, from their parents or catechists - to their children.



However, I do believe that faith, with its vision, its values and rites, can be communicated today from one generation to another. I believe that the communication of faith passes through the same channels as that of language, customs, values, tastes, rites of a people and culture - in a way similar to the child who learned to dance alongside his grandfather. A festive faith, of dance and images, of rites and costumes, of meetings and shared food. I think today of so many grandparents who spend a good part of their time taking care of and accompanying their grandchildren. In turn, through time spent with their grandchildren, they feel useful and worry less about the pains and limitations that come with age. More importantly they can their share affection, time and resources with their grandchildren. In that time together, it is the grandparents who often teach their grandchildren the first steps in the life of faith: the prayers, the sign of the cross, the going to mass. **Paul** praises the sincere

faith of his disciple **Timothy**, which is rooted in his grandmother **Loida** and his mother **Eunice** (Cf 2 Tim 1,5). Also among us, within the SSCC community, younger brothers can see what our consecration means by looking at and sharing with older brothers who live reconciled with their age and at peace with the reality that things today are not done as before. Even where there are only older brothers, the quality of relationships between them, the way they relate to the people who care for them, testifies, without many words, to the vitality of our inner self, of our faith. Even though the outer self may age, we need to ask, 'what is it that we communicate, what witness do we give to our inner self to our younger brothers?' And to the younger brothers we might say, 'would not it be nice to spend less time "stuck" to the cell phone and a little more time being with the older brothers, caring for them and learning from them?'

Step Two: dancing together with eyes on the Lord of the Dance

I asked the brothers in Peru 'when do young people meet, other than coming together for youth ministry?' "They come together to dance", they answered. It is true that, from childhood, children in school learn to dance the typical dances of their region. Also young people, at their own initiative, meet up in squares or in rooms to learn to dance. They gather together and look for a dance teacher, putting together a little money to pay him. There, they perfect what they learned about traditional dances in school and learn other dances as well as traditional or contemporary choreographies. When there is shared interests and tastes, the same young people will invite other young people to join them. If you want to improve your dancing, it is better to join with others and have a dance teacher. All of this helps them to take their place at religious festivals or in family or local celebrations, and even at times earn a small income. Knowing how to dance is like knowing another language - it puts you in communion with others, doing something together. In dance groups individuality counts less than the ability to coordinate with a couple or with groups in choreographies. Seeing someone with more experience, you learn better. Jesus himself, when he was observing his generation, helped them see that they did not know how to dance to the music of God. "We have played the flute and you did not danced ..." (Lk 7:32). His generation did not know how to tune in either to the presence of John the Baptist or to that of Jesus himself. In line with a Church stepping out to meet people where they are, in this case young people, how good it would be to have the presence of young

people - from our communities, pastoral workers, brothers and sisters - in the dance groups! That which helps us to live as disciples of Jesus could be shared via the channels that young people use when they let themselves be taught by a teacher in order to learn to dance together. In dancing together we would meet young people from the Church and beyond, and from there we might be able to create bonds of friendship and support. Would it not be good for us to ask ourselves where do people come together, apart from our chapels and in youth ministry? Is it not a good thing to be interested in what interests them, to make our own their concerns and tastes? In fidelity to the intuition of our founders who sought to discern, welcome and support the action of God, ought we not to listen more to the music that God is playing so that we might dance to its rhythm? Moreover, who is there among us today who can ask others to join in the dance to which God invites us? From whom, by looking at their lives, can we learn the steps of the dance of God?

Step Three: to dance and know how to wait

In one of the chapels of the parish of Our Lady of Peace in Montenegro (Lima), during the Sunday Mass, there was a blessing for the leaders of a confraternity of the Holy Cross. A cross that would preside over the festivities was also blessed. There was also the sprinkling of the dance group that would accompany the procession from the chapel to the neighborhood where the members of the fraternity live. Everything was ready, but the procession could not begin, because the band had not arrived. Without the music and the band something essential to the party was missing. For the party to go well, everyone is important. And if one of the actors in the party - in this case the band - is not there, one has to know how to wait. The band finally arrived and the procession was able to start.

Paul, paying attention to this fact, recommended to the members of the community of Corinth that when they meet to celebrate the Lord's Supper, they should know how to wait for one another (Cf. 1 Cor. 11:33). I wonder if the long-awaited pastoral and missionary conversion has to go through something similar. We need to recognise the various agents involved, that everyone counts and that all are variously important, according to their function and specific contribution to the whole. And so, by knowing how to wait, we take into account the vital rhythms, the ecclesial sensibilities and the diverse worldviews that exist between the people we serve and also among us, the brothers.

In this month of June when we celebrate the hearts of Jesus and Mary, let us pray that our pastoral hearts be enlarged, that we may keep pace with God dancing in our midst, that we may learn from one another (the elders and the youngest), that we go out to meet people, "outside" our chapels, that we tune in to their interests and concerns and wait for each other. It is never too late to learn to dance to the music that God is playing in our Church and in our world. Even if our steps are hesitant, we can rely on the steps of the more experienced. And if the slowness of the institutional changes of our Church sometimes gives us the impression that we are dancing with dinosaurs, let us still dance together, in the hope that we can rejuvenate her.

Alberto Toutin ssc
Superior General