

# The joy of being with the brothers

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**D**ear brothers:

I hope that each of you is well, and also the brothers in your communities.

In some places where we are present, we are gradually resuming pastoral activities. In other areas we find ourselves still living under the conditions of confinement. In any event, many of us will have shared daily life with the brothers of our community, as perhaps we have never done before. Living closely together has given us the opportunity



Brothers of different generations in Punta de Tralca (Chile)

to rediscover the meaning of our community life. Without doubt we have appreciated the different talents that exist among the brothers, whether in the kitchen, the garden, in recreation, in taking care of the common spaces or the maintenance and repair work in the house. Some of us may have discovered talents that we did not know we had, and – with simplicity - we have placed them at the service of community life. Moreover, by having fewer outside activities, we have been able to talk about subjects that we normally don't discuss among ourselves: about ourselves, about our fears, about the people with whom we are in contact and those who ask us for prayers, about the precarious situation of our countries where members of our families and the Christian communities are affected. The fact that we are able to meet more regularly in the common moments of prayer and meals, has allowed us to rediscover the value of our living together.

We all know from experience that living together is demanding, because it implies a death to our individualism so that we might live in a way that is more out-going and self-giving: this involves a process of decentralisation of 'me' and 'mine', being more open to others, showing interest in my brothers, being flexible and able to adapt to the unforeseen and to the different rhythms that exist among us, knowing how to accompany and support each other. This time of intense living together has tested our ability to build community. Many families and groups will have experienced the same thing, even in conditions less privileged than ours, conditions of overcrowding and precariousness.

I would like to propose some ways to deepen our sense of belonging to the community, to each other and our joy of journeying together, as brothers and sisters.

## **In the same boat**

This time has connected us more or less intensely with the fears that reside within us: the fear of being infected, the fear of dying, the fear of losing one's job, the fear of poverty, the fear of losing people who are dear to us, the fear of ourselves. Then there are the fears that we kept silenced and which reappear through images, dreams or words, especially in times when there is less a demand on us for external activity. Each of us can complete our own list of fears. It would do us good if we could name the fears we have felt during this time, share them with each other without shame or fear. Fear is a healthy reaction that arises when life is threatened by some danger. Our communities would gain in realism in the knowledge that in terms of fears we are all in the same boat. Sharing our fears would offer us a way of feeling accompanied. I think of the community of Jesus' disciples, who are in the middle of the lake and a strong wind is blowing. Jesus is with them, but asleep. The fear of perishing makes them wake up Jesus and say to him by way of a confession of faith: "Save us, Lord, we are perishing!" (Mt 8:25). Our confession of faith in Jesus deepens when it arises out of our fears.

## **Letting ourselves be found by the Lord and our brothers**

In many places we have sought ways to maintain contact with the people entrusted to us in pastoral communities or to whom we are bound by bonds of friendship and affection. We have all appreciated this closeness and attention. Also, in our houses, we have dared to visit each other more, to let the brother enter our room, to stay longer at table, without the urgency of the work that awaits us. Jesus spoke about the special joy that comes when something is found that we thought was lost: a sheep, a coin, even a child. so, let us allow ourselves to be found by the Lord and by our brothers, let us not put up obstacles, let us keep our doors open to encounters. It is Jesus who comes to seek me out and visit me in my brother. One way we could prepare to meet him is, as a sign, leaving the door of our rooms open.

## **The shared table**

Bread, health, work and shelter are basic needs that, for many people, have become precarious and unsafe goods. In our religious communities these needs are generally quite well met. Out of this security, we are able to give more of ourselves and share what we are and have. I know of many initiatives - that we are encouraging in our pastoral communities - to offer food to people who do not have it. Just as important as bread, is the closeness, the affection, the love between people, the deep-down knowledge that we matter to someone. This is what our brothers Quentin and Chadwick in France wanted to transmit by offering 10 young immigrants of African origin five days of conviviality, recreation and mutual knowledge. For these young people, who are having to manage to live from day to day, the possibility of being able, together, to have some days of rest, was unimaginable. It became possible when our two brothers decided to share their free time with them. I wonder if our fraternal life is being called to be enriched by initiatives of this kind: welcoming to our oratories and tables, even to our recreation, neighbours, lonely people we know, the poor who seek help in our churches, to simply share with them the affection, the love, to make them feel that they matter to us and to the Lord. I am also thinking about our residences where there are older and more infirm brothers. Could not the younger

brothers, during their time of vacation, dedicate some days simply to be with them? I am certain that we would all discover hidden "treasures" of the Gospel that would give a renewed taste to our community life.

### **The community offering**

In many of our communities we have had the possibility of celebrating the Eucharist daily. This has perhaps made us appreciate the fact that we are first and foremost the community of brothers who gather in the name of Jesus at his table. The Eucharist thus gains in simplicity. At the same time,

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it takes on new apostolic and missionary dimensions, making present the people who entrust their prayers to us, the poor, the sick, and the Christian communities that do not have regular celebration of Mass. There we unite ourselves to Jesus and ask him not to look at our sin, but at the faith of his Church and, in his faithful love, to grant her peace and unity. This gift of peace and unity can also be our contribution. Jesus reminds us of the importance of approaching the table as reconciled brothers and sisters. "If, when you go to present your gift at the altar, you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go first to be reconciled with your brother. Then go back and present your gift" (Mt 5:23-24). I wonder would not our fraternal life be enriched if, before we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we asked ourselves if my brother in community has something against me. And then, without delay and fuss I simply go and find him and ask him for his forgiveness. Then the peace that we receive from the Lord would taste of the forgiveness that we give to each other, as brothers. Our fraternal life would then be that of the brothers of Jesus, invited to his table, and reconciled among themselves.

Let us, then, dare to go out of ourselves and meet our brothers, starting with those in my local community. For is it not through the brothers who forgive each other, who love each other, that the attractive and demanding beauty of the Gospel shines forth?

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