

Brothers: what will be left of us?

*Alberto Toutin ssc
Superior General*

INFO SSCC Brothers No 162 – 1 February 2022



A few days ago, Damiano Tonegutti ssc, who accompanies our elderly and sick brothers in the community of El Escorial (Spain), sent me this photo. Argimiro Llamas, 83 years old and his older brother, Manuel, 87 years old are two blood brothers who are also brothers of the congregation. The former has Alzheimer's and is kissing his older brother, who is also ill. The first is coming out of COVID and the other was recently diagnosed with the virus. Perhaps never before have they been so close as in this time of shared frailty. The whole story of service and mission, of dedication, is summed up in this gesture.

I see in these brothers, and in so many of our other older brothers, a kind of health check for our SSCC religious life: How do I cultivate friendship with Jesus, with Mary, with the saints, familiarity with God and his Word? How do I continue to love and serve the Church and its mission? How do I live my love for the brothers with whom I live? How do I live my relationships

with family and friends? How do I embrace that inseparable companion that is loneliness? How do I prepare myself to welcome "sister death"? How do I associate myself today with God's action in the congregation, in the Church, and in our world?

These are the fundamental questions that accompany our religious life. But in the elderly, they surface alongside a life bestowed upon them and, at times, taken away from them. In the elderly, these questions are posed without any possibility of any escape. And the answers we can give are always to be found in that fragile and vulnerable first person singular that is each one of us. In short, a long life gives us the opportunity to see if what we professed some 60, 70, 80 years ago and more - is still made flesh in us: "consecrated to the hearts of Jesus and Mary, in whose service we want to live and die".

What keeps us alive, in sickness and in health, as brothers of the Sacred Hearts? And more radically, brothers, what will finally remain of us? What memory – something that does not depend on us - will we leave, other than the way that we lived and offered our religious life for others. Perhaps the risen Lord is calling us, simply and forever, to be "his" brothers through simple gestures such as a kiss or other manifestations of caring for my brother.

**Alberto Toutin ssc
Superior General**