

PRIESTLY FRATERNITY JESUS CARITAS
 International team
Preparing for the canonisation
of Charles de Foucauld



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OUR WAY OF EVANGELIZING

As diocesan priests, we share with the whole Church the only mission that she has: to evangelize. Pope Francis has given us very clear guidelines to do so in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium". We make all their proposals our own and we try to be inspired by them for our evangelizing action in our parishes, communities, centers of Christian formation, centers for the poorest, etc.

However, the question is valid if we, as priests of the IESUS CARITAS Fraternity, put some particular key points that are born from the charism of Brother Charles and from our spirituality. We think so and here are some of those key points.

1. THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

Our way of evangelizing is marked in the first place by **the mystery of the Incarnation**, a mystery that fascinated Brother Charles and is at the root of his spirituality:

"The incarnation is rooted in the goodness of God. But one thing appears, first, so wonderful, brilliant and amazing that it shines like a dazzling sign: it is the infinite humility that contains such a mystery. God, the Being, the Infinite, the Perfection, the Creator, the immense Omnipotent, sovereign Lord of all, becoming man, joining a soul and a human body and appearing on earth as a man, and the last of men "¹.

The incarnation always occurs in a certain time and place and culture. Brother Charles did a great job to learn about the culture of the Tuaregs, their language, their customs, their poetry, etc. We would always like to take into account the historical context, the characteristics of the time and the culture in which we evangelize, because we are convinced that God prolongs his incarnation in each age and the Risen Christ continues to speak to us from the signs of the times to invite us to build his Kingdom of life.

¹ Bro. Charles, Spiritual Writings, page 49

Considering that Christ enters the world through "the door of the poor", as Bishop Enrique Alvear said, we too would like to enter through this door in our evangelizing action and from there proclaim the Gospel to all.

2. THE PERIPHERIES.

In a spirit of availability to our Bishops, we would like to prioritize the most abandoned and farthest places to the Church. The geographical or existential peripheries, as Pope Francis says. They are the frontier places: marginal populations, distant fields, refugee camps, migrants, addicts, deprived of liberty, the excluded in general. Using poor means is basically our own friendly and merciful presence.

Brother Charles tells us:

"For me, always look for the last of the last positions, to be also small as my Master, to be with him, to march after him, step by step, as faithful servant, faithful disciple and - since in his infinite goodness, incomprehensible He deigns to speak like that - as a faithful brother and faithful husband "².

"This divine banquet, of which I am a minister, is necessary to present it not to the brothers and relatives, to the rich neighbors, but to the lame, the blind, the most abandoned and lack of priests souls ... I have requested and obtained permission to settle in the Algerian Sahara. ³"

If we are sent to more affluent places, we would like to be agents of social awareness and bridge the rich to the realities of the poor.

We come as brothers and friends of the poor. We discover God already present in their cries and aspirations. We in turn allow the poor to evangelize us and enrich our ministries.

3. THE PERSONAL TESTIMONY

In every place, but particularly in marginalized areas, we want to give priority to evangelization through testimony rather than through words. Testimony marked by closeness, simplicity, welcome, kindness, interest in what happens to the other, concrete service, inner joy. Brother Charles wrote to a friend:

"You want to know what I can do for the natives. It is not possible to speak directly about our Lord. This would be to make them flee. You have to inspire them confidence, make friends with each other, give them small services, give them good advice, make friends with them, discreetly encourage them to follow natural religion, show them that Christians love them⁴ "(ESE p.84).

² Bro. Charles, Spiritual Writings, page 68

³ Idem, page 80.

⁴ Idem, page 84.

Already in a retreat in November 1897, he had formulated his way of evangelizing with this phrase, placed in the mouth of Jesus: "***Access your vocation: to proclaim the Gospel from the rooftops, not with your word, but with your life***".

This does not mean that we neglect the ministry of the Word. We know that it is an essential part of our mission to arouse and nourish faith: "*faith comes through preaching, and preaching through the word of Christ*" (Rom 10:17). The Second Vatican Council says it clearly in the decree on "Ministry and life of priests": "*With the word of salvation faith is raised in the heart of non-believers and strengthened in that of believers, and with faith the congregation of the faithful begins and develops*"⁵"

4. OUR OPTION FOR THE FRATERNITY

From our option for fraternity, we privilege teamwork with other priests, be or not of our Fraternity, religious, deacons and lay people. We want to be more brothers than religious tyrants/masters or lords, as the Council says: "*presbyters dwell with other men as brothers*"⁶.

Br. Charles went ahead in this sense to the Council when he seeks and values the work with laity:

"Next to the priests, Priscillas and Aquilas are needed, to see those who the priest does not see, to penetrate where he cannot penetrate, to go to those who run away, to evangelize with a benevolent contact, with an overflowing kindness above all, an affection always willing to give, a good example that attracts those who turn their back on the priest and are hostile to them on principle" (from Assekrem, May 3rd, 1912).

For this reason, we want to give time to the formation of the laity, for their spiritual accompaniment and to support the formation of fraternal communities, respecting the rhythm of each person.

Likewise, our option for fraternity makes us to value brotherhood as a way of life. We believe in universal brotherhood even with the unchurched, characterized by friendship, reciprocity, dialogue of life.

Fraternity leads us, also, to favor the participation of the laity in the pastoral management of our parishes, avoiding all authoritarianism and clericalism on our part and all passivity on the part of the laity. The existence of Pastoral Councils, Economic Affairs Committees, Teams to animate the different pastoral areas, Parish Assemblies, Joint pastoral planning, etc. they should be a distinctive mark of the parishes or other pastoral structures entrusted to our care.

⁵ Vatican II, decree "Presbyterorum Ordinis" decree, n.4, "The priests, ministries of the Word of God".

⁶ "Presbyterorum ordinis", n. 3 "The condition of the presbyters in the world".

5. SPIRITUAL LIFE AND EUCHARIST.

This way of evangelizing supposes a very deep spiritual life in each of us that leads us to contemplate Jesus in the Gospels in order to configure ourselves more and more with Him, which is the work of the Spirit in us. He will enable us to enter into the dynamics of the descent, of the abasement, of the dispossession, characteristic of the mystery of the Incarnation, leaving many things for Him and for fidelity to the Gospel: prejudices, material goods, prestige, search for power, securities, etc. The Holy Spirit will give us inner freedom to find new paths and fields in the evangelizing task of the Church, always seeking the will of the Father, with infinite confidence.

Our missionary impulse above all urges/empowers us to reach and stay in the most difficult places, is sustained by the celebration of the Eucharist, daily Adoration and by the other means of spiritual growing of our fraternity. They enable us to become aware of the infinite Love of God for us, of His fidelity and mercy.

Eucharist should become a lifestyle of breaking bread/stories/word with people of other faith traditions.

We must promote a similar spiritual experience among the laity if we want to transform our parishes in the missionary sense that Pope Francis wishes: a Church on the way out that, without fear of accidents or getting stained with the mud of the road, goes in search of the far away and the discarded by society⁷.

The Eucharist, on the other hand, opens us to belonging to an ever-broader ecclesial body. We want to be very aware that Evangelization is a mission shared with the whole diocesan and universal Church. As diocesan priests we want to be the first to feel part of a presbytery, with its Bishop at the head, supporting the gestation and implementation of diocesan projects to which we contribute with our pastoral charism and accents.

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. Would you add any item to this outline?
2. Is my pastoral structure (parish, center of formation, etc.) walking in this direction?
3. What should mark my style of life to be coherent with our way of evangelizing?

⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 28.