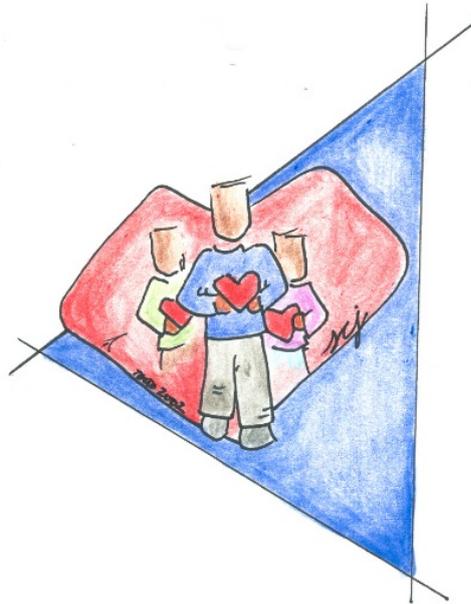


**THE SPIRITUAL PATH
FOR LAY DEHONIANS**

WITH DEHON IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Loved by God, in communion, for the life of the world



YEAR THREE

THE PATH OF FAITH OF FR. DEHON

They will look on the one whom they have pierced (John 19.37)

Rome, 2016

Contributors to the development of the Project of the Spiritual Path are many people, both confreres and lay Dehonians, to whom we express our gratitude:

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Translator: Fr. John van den Hengel scj.

YEAR III – PRESENTATION

Loved by God, in communion, for the life of the world

We are happy to present to you the third year of the Spiritual Path for the formation of Lay Dehonians.

Several groups already use the first and second year, which deal with familiarity with the spirituality of Father Dehon and with the faith experience of Fr. Dehon. Hopefully we will also be able to present to you the fourth year which carries as its title: *For the Life of the World*. With year four we complete the 40 themes of the *Spiritual Path*. The whole venture seeks to give a formation to the spirituality of the Heart of Christ according to the charism of Fr. Dehon. and Dehonian formators.

In order for you to make best use of these aids, here are some pointers useful for the team leaders and to the Dehonian formators:

- The Dehonian Family is present in 40 countries. This means an enormous wealth of values, cultural expressions and distinct levels of religious and Dehonian formation. This diversification is a real challenge to the idea of proposing one Spiritual Path for all. We are aware that it is not possible to satisfy the needs of every cultural reality. We can only suggest that in every country, leaders and trainers will feel free to adapt the texts as well as possible.
- Adaptation should enhance and develop especially different forms of reception, pedagogical resources, involvement of the participants in the reflection, complementary or different readings in each of the languages, the organization of local churches in the planning at national, diocesan or parish level, the choice of songs and ways of celebrating, in accordance with the local culture.
- The texts are extensive and fully developed. They are designed for a whole year of training, with a theme per month. They can also be used for weekly or fortnightly meetings. They can be helpful also for study days, and for spiritual retreats or meetings.
- The citation of Dehon texts uses the method introduced by the Centro Studi of Rome in www.dehondocs.it. To facilitate identification of the texts mentioned in the Spiritual Path, we present the sigla below in the introduction.
- This *Spiritual Path* is not a final manual. It is proposed *ad experimentum* so that it can be improved upon making use of the talents of others. Please, send all observations and proposals for improvement to one of the members in the International Coordinating Group (GCI) of the Dehonian Family.
- The Working Group that developed this project also offers other methodological aids to group animators and formators regarding personal accompaniment and of groups of lay people who want to undertake the path of growth in Dehonian spirituality. There are three texts:
 - Methods for the Christian education of adults. Details for various groups of Dehonian Family are provided for by P. Adérito Barbosa scj and Celina Pires alvd
 - The text to help the person who accompanies the group was composed by P. Rinaldo Paganelli SCJ

- The text to help the accompanying and counselling groups was written by Serafina Ribeiro CM.
- The Group will continue to work on the texts of the Year IV. One of the objectives of the assembly is to form a Coordinating Group, who will carry forward the animation and the development of the Dehonian Family, which was formed provisionally at the meeting of May 2014, namely:
 - Rosalie Grace M. Escobia – rgme1971@yahoo.com – Philipines,
 - Ida Coelho – idajpcoelho@yahoo.com.br – Brazil, representatives of the laity;
 - Silvia Bertozzi – silvia.bertozzi@gmail.com – Italian, missionary in Finland, for consecrated persons;
 - Fr. Bruno Pilati, ITS – bruno.pilati@dehoniani.it – for the religious of the SCJ Congregation
 - Fr. Claudio Weber – cweber@dehon.it – member of the General Council of the Congregation (until the appointment of a new general council in 2015).
- In May 2017, there will be an *International Meeting* of the Dehonian Family. One of the objectives of this meeting will be to form a permanent group of coordination, to carry forward the animation and development of the Dehonian Family, and coordinate the different realities that constitute it.

We hope that the proposed topics will help everyone to grow spiritually in dialogue with the path of faith taken by Dehon. We cordially thank all those who contributed to this Spiritual Path.

Fr. John van den Hengel scj

Fr. Claudio Weber scj

Rome, 10 October 2016.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The third year contains ten meetings. They are numbered from 21 to 30. It concludes with a celebration.

- **Meeting XXI** Fr. Dehon and the Bible
- **Meeting XXII** “They will look on him whom they have pierced” (John 19.34-37)
- **Meeting XXIII** Fr. Dehon and the Eucharist
- **Meeting XXIV** Eucharist: the Risen One transfigures our life
- **Meeting XXV** The meaning of Church in Fr. Dehon
- **Meeting XXVI** Communion of vocations in the Church
- **Meeting XXVII** Eucharistic Adoration
- **Meeting XXVIII** Prophets of love
- **Meeting XXIX** Servants of reconciliation
- **Meeting XXX** Proposals for the life of a Lay Dehonian
- **Ritual:** The handing over of a Bible and the symbol of sandals

General Objectives of Year III

To grow spiritually in dialogue with the faith experience of Fr. Dehon.

Specific Objectives of Year III

- To recognize a common sensitivity, a spirituality, that unites.
- To become aware that the spirituality of Fr. Dehon is a gift for the Church and for the world.
- To be ready for action and common projects.

Strategies and activities

All themes contain the following points:

- A. Welcome
- B. Biblical selection
- C. A Text of Fr. Dehon
- D. Reflection
- E. Testimony
- F. Group discussion and sharing
- G. Prayer moment.

Each session will begin with the presentation of the specific objectives for the theme, followed by a brief description of the way that the meeting is to achieve the objectives.

Particular care has been given to the contents of each theme. Generally they have been prepared by members who have been the main proponents of Dehonian spirituality in Italy since 1990: Fr. Francesco Duci, Fr. André Perroux, Fr. Tullio Benini, Fr. Virginio Bressanelli, Fr. Marcello Mattè, Fr. Ezio Gazzotti...

As for the welcoming gesture, they offer some suggestions, from which the animator of the meeting will be able to choose and adapt according to the situation.

The same applies to the moment of prayer. The theme will present texts to choose from, but deliberately the writers did not set up a celebration; there are some indications that may be used such as the use of choirs, alternating between solo voices and assembly, including male voices and female voices ..., leaving the real organization to the sensitivity of the animator and the context in which the meeting takes place.

The songs listed are taken from the Italian tradition. Each animator of the meeting will find songs from their church tradition.

In 'other' texts' the *Spiritual Path* gives suggestions for the opening of the meeting, according to the proposed methods. There will be other indications that often follow a typically Italian process, making use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and other available texts on the subject. With experience, this part can be enriched.

The redaction of this text was made by Fr. Bruno Pilati and Donatella Martelli, except for the concluding rite. It was prepared by Fr. Fernando Rodrigues da Fonseca.

SIGLA OF THE WRITINGS OF FR. DEHON AND OTHER DEHONIAN PUBLICATIONS

I – Writings of Fr. Dehon

<i>Title</i>	<i>Sigla</i>	<i>Previous publications</i>
<u>Au delà des Pyrenées</u>	ADP	
<u>Cahiers Falleur</u>	CFL	STD 10
<u>Catéchisme Social</u>	CSC	OSC III
<u>Cœur Sacerdotal de Jésus</u>	CSJ	OSP 2
<u>Conférences Diverses</u>	CFD	
<u>Correspondance (voll. 1...)</u>	COR	
<u>Couronnes d'Amour (voll. 1 – 3)</u>	CAM	OSP 2
<u>De La Vie d'Amour envers le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus</u>	VAM	OSP 2
<u>Directions Pontificales, Politiques et Sociales</u>	DPS	OSC II
<u>Directoire Spirituel (1919)</u>	DSP	OSP 6
<u>Études sur le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus (voll. I – II)</u>	ESC	OSP 5
<u>Excerpta</u>	EXC	
<u>L'Année avec le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus (voll. I – II)</u>	ASC	OSP 3 – 4
<u>L'Usure au Temps Présent</u>	UTP	OSC II
<u>La Rénovation Sociale Chrétienne</u>	RSO	OSC III
<u>La Sicile, l'Afrique du Nord et les Calabres</u>	SAC	
<u>Le Plan de la Franc-Maçonnerie...</u>	PFM	OSC III
<u>Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus (Revue)</u>	RCJ	
<u>Lettres Circulaires</u>	LCC	
<u>Manuel Social Chrétien</u>	MSO	OSC II
<u>Manuscrits divers</u>	MND	
<u>Mille lieues dans l'Amérique du Sud</u>	MLA	
<u>Mois de Marie</u>	MMR	OSP 1
<u>Mois du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus</u>	MSC	OSP 1
<u>Nos Congrès</u>	NCG	OSC II
<u>Notes Quotidiennes (voll. I – V)</u>	NQT	
<u>Notes sur l'Histoire de ma Vie (voll. 1 – 8)</u>	NHV	
<u>Œuvres Sociales (Voll. I – VI)</u>	OSC	
<u>Œuvres Spirituelles (Voll. 1 – 7)</u>	OSP	
<u>Pensées</u>	PNS	
<u>Petit Directoire pour les Recteurs</u>	PDR	OSP 7
<u>Rénovation Spirituelle</u>	RSP	
<u>Retraite à Moulins</u>	RML	
<u>Retraite de Braisne</u>	RBR	NQT 1
<u>Retraite du Sacré-Cœur</u>	RSC	OSP 1
<u>Retraite en Mer (1911)</u>	RMR	

<u>Retraite Sacerdotale</u>	RSD	
<u>Retraite sur la Mer (1906)</u>	RME	
<u>Richesse, Médiocrité, Pauvreté</u>	RMP	OSC III
<u>Sœur Marie de Jésus</u>	SMJ	OSP 6
<u>Souvenirs</u>	SVN	OSP 7
<u>Supplements</u>	SPL	
<u>Thesaurus</u>	THE	OSP 7
<u>Thèse pour la Licence</u>	THL	OSC IV
<u>Thèse pour le Doctorat</u>	THD	OSC IV
<u>Un Prêtre du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus</u>	PSC	OSP 6
<u>Vie Intérieure : Exercices Spirituels</u>	VES	OSP 5
<u>Vie Intérieure : Principes</u>	VPR	OSP 5

II – Way to cite NHV and NQT

NHV	NHV IX, 136
NQT	a) <i>testo P. Dehon:</i> NQT III/1887, 106 b) <i>note CGS:</i> NQT 5, 592, n.13 c) <i>rinvio ai volumi:</i> NQT 1 – 5, pp...

III – Way to cite Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus

<u>Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus</u>	RCJ	1-12 (1889) 211
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IV – Way to cite the publications of CGS

<u>Dehoniana</u>	DEH	DEH 3/1999, 89
<u>Studia Dehoniana</u>	STD	STD 25/2, 1994, 209

Meeting XXI

FR. DEHON AND THE BIBLE

Objectives of the meeting

- To get to know the encounter of Fr. Dehon with the Incarnate Word and its language: his familiarity with the Word of God: read, listened to, meditated upon, contemplated and re-worked.
- To open and welcome the gift of the Word of God “from heart to heart” with Jesus the master who speaks to his disciple.
- To enter into the process of the *Lectio Divina*: the privileged way to “dwell” in the Word of God personally and in community.

Context of the meeting

We are at the beginning of the third year of the Spiritual Path: a path which little by little allows one to grow like disciples of the Heart of Jesus in company with the faith experience of Fr. Dehon.

At the center of this encounter of Fr. Dehon with Jesus, the Word Incarnate, we place his familiarity with the Word of God.

Times have changed and we live in the full awareness of the primacy of the Word of God. This awareness came to a head during Vatican II and found its expression in the constitution *Dei Verbum*. It was taken up again by the 2008 Synod of Bishops and presented to the whole Church in the apostolic exhortation after the synod by Pope Benedict XVI in his *Verbum Domini* (2010).

Also the homilies and catechesis of Pope Francis has fed this familiarity with the God who speaks to us.

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

It would be a good gesture to open the meeting with the enthronement of the Word of God (See the prayer texts) or to begin with the story of the calling of Saint Anthony, the abbot, (See texts # 2) to show how the Word of God illumined his life and changed him because of his obedient attention to the Word.

Another way of starting would be to tell the story of the lumberjacks (See text #1) to emphasize the need for a daily pause to let the heart become attuned “heart to heart” to Jesus present in his word.

B. Biblical text (Luke 4.16-21)

¹⁶When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,* ¹⁹ *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*” ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant,

and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, **“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”**

Commentary

In order to dwell in the Word of God one must be aware of certain points:

Christ is present in his words.

It is he who says these words today. One is not reading a book, but one listens to someone who wishes him or her well! Christ makes his voice resonate in his Gospel and through him, the risen one who is in the presence of God the Father, one comes to meet his sons and daughters and speaks with them.

Christ speaks today, by turning to his people and every Christian. Everyone ought to say: he is speaking to me... It is important to feel called by Jesus, called personally. The Scriptures fully interact with us: with each and everyone.

Christ asks a response from us, from me, every day...

At the foot of Mount Sinai, when God, speaking with the people, offered them his friendship, the people replied with *“All that the Lord God has said, we shall do and we shall listen to him.”* (Ex 24)

In his reflections on this passage, St. Jerome wrote: *“When we go to the Eucharistic mystery, if only a crumb falls, we feel lost. And when we are listening to the Word of God, and when the Word of God and the flesh and blood of Christ is directed to our ears, how easily we think of other things. Are we not then in a much greater danger?”* (On Psalm 147, in CCL 78, pp. 337-338).

Jesus is in search of a step familiar to him.

Jesus inserts himself into the footsteps of the prophets. He takes them on and incarnates them within himself. And on their part, the prophets help him to understand himself: It is truly him and they tell him where he is called to go: *The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to the poor, to prisoners, to the deaf, the oppressed.* Immediately Jesus is freed from all doubt about what he has come to do: to take away all that prevent humans from flowering, because it is clear what the kingdom of God is all about: life to the full, something that brings joy, which liberates and gives light, which makes history no longer a desperate place.

God takes sides. God is not impartial. God stands with the last. God is never on the side of the oppressors.

God comes as a source of freedom. So where do we start when there are no prisoners. Jesus did not come to bring a distant God, but to bring God to those who are far off, to men and women without hope, to release in them their immense potential for life, work, creativity, relationships, intelligence, love.

The first regard of Jesus is never on the sin of a person, but on his or her poverty and human hunger. The good news is that God puts people at the center and forgets himself for them and uses his power of liberation to free from all external oppression, all internal closures, because the story becomes a different story from what it has been. Here is a God always there on our behalf, never against us.

C. Text of Fr. Dehon

“Consider our Lord in all his mysteries, and study these mysteries in his Heart, the book par excellence” (see DSP 293, MAS 301). “Listen ... the Incarnate Word, the only Son, your Master ... read his Gospel, take on his commandments and his advice ... Listen to it and put it into practice: follow his example, live from his life, imitate his virtues. Learn of Him who is meek and humble of heart ... Listen to him, that is, put yourself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that he may teach you all things in his name” (ASC 52).

“Let us examine well all the preaching of Our Lord, you will always find there the teaching of this love, a filial love for God, tender, sweet and full of strength for people ...” (CAM 1/207) “We study the Sacred Heart in the Gospel: it is all there!” (CAM 1/213)

D. Reflection

1. Fr. Dehon, assiduous in listening to the Master, familiar with the scriptures

The familiarity of Fr. Dehon with the Word of God is evident to anyone who goes through his many works. One can count at least 24,000 citations. Most of them are explicit, others are allusions to scriptural texts or reminiscences. Knowing that access in Catholic France of the 19th century to the sacred text was limited and controlled and also knowing other spiritual writers in his time, this is quite astounding.

His was a listening beginning with the liturgy of the Church but continued in his personal prayer. In his deep desire to *“hear and keep”* the Word, Fr. Dehon loves to lengthen his prayer with a number of slogans. They all come from the scriptures and they were his daily companions. Let us recall particularly **Ecce venio**, the word the Lord spoke as he entered the world. It is a condensed phrase expressing his total availability, in union with Christ, and Mary’s **Fiat** and **Ecce ancilla**. He loved to connect these words with Psalm 40.7 where we read, *“He opened (dug out) my ears”*, which we also find in Heb 10.7: *He has given me a body*” so that I can present myself to God, *“Here I am, I come”* to *“do your will”* with my whole being.

As Jesus, also we ought to **first listen, listen deeply**. We ought to *“undo the seal of the book”* and allow ourselves to be overcome by the project of Love which we have been given in order to serve. In this way, we learn that God does not wish a worship only of external actions which do not really involve our life (*I want neither sacrifice nor oblation*”). He wishes of us the welcome of the *“law in the depths of our being.”* (see Ps 40).

As Fr. Dehon did, we ought to repeat with the youth Samuel, ***Speak, Lord, your servant is listening***” (1 Sam 3.9). We should pray with Solomon at the beginning of his reign: *Lord, give your servant a listening heart.*” (1 Kings 3.9)

Familiar words

The familiarity of Fr. Dehon with the word of God received in the Church, by way of its sacramental life and the ordinary and festive liturgy, education and formation, the spiritual traditions ... have a few privileged *places* where the Spirit of God led to Fr. Dehon to learn the love of God in his Son who became one of us. These nourished his responses and renewed his courage and his fidelity, despite his fragility.

«I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. This life in the flesh, I live it in the faith of the Son of God, who loves me and has given himself up for me.» (Gal 2.20)

«I thank you, Father, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants... No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son choose to reveal him. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest ... Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart...» (Mt 11.25-30)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3.16-17)

In the Prologue of John’s Gospel we read: *«The word became flesh and dwelled among us, and we have seen his glory ... From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.»* Further on in John we read: *“We looked upon him whom they had pierced.” (John 19.37).*

«I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!” (Luke 12.49-50) And see the confidence with which Fr. Dehon reads another text around the wonders of the Eucharist: *“When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” (Luke 22.14-15)*

Here is another favorite text: *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12.1-2)*

Put so close together here, these scattered texts throughout his works, his books, correspondence, his diary speak clearly. But there are many more found in many places, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit. Together they are like the seal, the imprint of a personality. With all the others, they shape for us a climate of acceptance and assimilation, a “dwelling” in Christ, in his word, glowing over all that exists. They configure a “spirituality”, a “spiritual perspective”, giving meaning to everything: *“To restore all things in Christ” (Eph. 1. 10,* This was the motto of Pope Pius X). With Saint Paul, he confesses: *“For me to live is Christ” or “For to me, living is Christ.” (Phil 1, 21).*

In the same letter, we find the fiery statement of Paul: *“More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal: but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” (Phil 3.8,12)*

Inspired by St. Gertrude, he sees in the parable of the pearl of great price (Mt 13, 45-46) Jesus himself: pearl of so much value that is worth all the sacrifices. And to her young religious she adds: *“Our Congregation must be a Congregation of millionaires!” (Rénovation de retraite spirituelle, 33).*

In these " privileged encounters" with the Word, a place so full of the Spirit to which he invites us, we find the source, and the expression of his spirituality. We cannot ignore or underestimate the contribution of other sources such as Augustine, Bernard, Gertrude, Margaret Mary, the French School of spirituality ... But paying particular attention to these biblical texts, we can see the density of each and, at the same time, their convergence, their complementarity and how they take us to the heart of the Gospel. That is why they are a source of strength for us today. Meditated carefully and

placed in their context, they arouse our amazement and our commitment. These passages are the Good News that Father Dehon continues to delve into for himself and to pass on to us. They were for him the passages that filled and unified his life. All that began for him when he was only 13 years old, during Christmas night, when he found himself before the crib in dialogue with the Little Child, the Savior given to us by God as the “*joy for all the people.*”

He prolonged this dialogue, under a different form, especially with Mary and John at the foot of the cross, contemplating the opened side which for him was the access to the mystery of God. “*I love to meditate on salvation at the foot of the cross.*” “*The Heart of Jesus, the love of Jesus, is the whole Gospel... There is nothing else to look for in the Gospel except the love of Jesus, from his Incarnation up to his death... The life-giving love that [Jesus] has for humanity is the light that illumines the whole mystery. It is a life-giving light. Let us examine well the preaching of our Lord. You will find there always the teaching of this love, a filial love for God, tender, gentle and full of power for humanity... Let us study the Sacred Heart in the Gospel: it is all there!*”

Dehon is not a biblical scholar and nor a commentator of Scripture. There is nothing original here; almost everything is borrowed. There are therefore many question marks. He is a “spiritual man”, passionate for Christ, the Word of God in our flesh. He searches and he finds, fully part of the tradition of his people, fully in line with the confessions of faith of those “*who have seen and touched the Word of Life*”, the community of the Church gathered to witness him. He is hungry and thirsty for this Word; it nourishes and serves as the undisputed starting point for a life in union with the Lord. He likes to create a spiritual anthology at the end of his many meditations so that the words may retain their fresh flavor and strengthen him through his many occupations of the day.

The emphases, of course, were different throughout history, and its more or less happy practices. In this way, however, the Church has never ceased, “above all in the liturgy, to take the bread of life on the table of the Word of God and on the Body of Christ so as to offer it to the faithful” (Second Vatican Council, DV 21).

2. Renewed awareness of the primacy of the Word of God

A century separates us from Father Dehon, and a bit less from the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). In an admirable ecumenical venture, the Spirit impels the Church to assume a renewed awareness of the primacy of the Word. It is possible to speak of a real “*epiphany of the Word of God in the Christian community, a return of the Word to the People of God*”

The tradition has re-introduced the practice of *Lectio divina*, the prayerful reading in the Holy Spirit, which has opened to the faithful the treasure of God's Word, but also has created an encounter with Christ, the living divine Word. (See Meeting XVIII)

- It opens with the reading (*lectio*) of the text that provokes the question of the authentic knowledge of its content: *what does the biblical text say?*
- It is followed by the meditation (*meditatio*) which asks: *what does the biblical text say to us?*
- This is followed by prayer (*oratio*), which leads to another question: *what do we say to the Lord in response to his word?*
- And it ends with contemplation (*contemplatio*) during which we assume, as God's gift, God's own gaze with which he judges reality. Here we ask ourselves: *what sort of conversion of mind, heart and life does the Lord ask of us?*

Before the prayerful reader of the word of God there arises ideally the figure of Mary, the mother of the Lord, who “*treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart*” (Lk 2, 19; cf. 2, 51), that is – according to the Greek original – one must find the hidden knot that binds together the seemingly distinct events, acts and things in the great divine plan.

Today, this placing of our faith life and the life of the Church within the Good News of the love of God in Jesus Christ holds a special meaning. So let our modest contribution in living this vocation today, modelled by Father Dehon and inspired by his dynamism, be especially found in the study of the sacred books, received from the Tradition of the Church. We will be able to bring more light and motivation with our lives, with our forms of presence and service, when we start from the Word “faithfully kept”. This will be realized in the actual fidelity of each one to “remain in the Word.” What we are encouraged to do both personally and as a group, is to undertake the practice of *lectio divina*, especially using the scriptural texts that Father Dehon has prayed so much and passed on to us.

E. Testimony

When I began to visit Casa Padre Dehon at Conegliano (Italy), what I appreciated the most was the fidelity to the practice of *lectio divina* in the community from October to June. It is a valuable spiritual resource for those living in the area.

When I plan to participate in the *lectio* on Thursday, I begin by placing the book marks to the right pages. I do this because I know I always arrive at the last moment, but also because this allows me a first silent and personal reading of the Word. Also, this step is very important because it allows me to be face to face with Revelation. Of course, this does not exhaust the insight of the one who wrote those pages, but it speaks to the open and accepting reader.

When we come together for the *lectio* on Thursday, we give special attention to the first reading and the Gospel of the following Sunday. The first reading is read and given its context. As to the gospel, after reading it aloud, we leave a little 'space' because each says the phrase that touched him or her. This is followed by an introduction or explanation of the text, usually by one of the Dehonians, at times, also by available laymen. I very much like it when this is done by the laity.

The most intimate and perhaps also the more “disruptive” moment arrives when in the sharing one is able to intuit new possibilities. At this time, everyone freely, interprets one or the other word or expression that had struck him or her and tries to understand why this has happened to him or her.

To me, for example, it happens quite often that at the beginning I have only a hunch, a hazy attraction. It is only later, in the silence and in the listening to others, that this thought receives greater clarity.

The image it evokes is of a tray on the table to which everyone brings a part of his life, his experience, his personal feeling and what emerges is a colorful bouquet, every time different and enriched by the contribution of each person.

The meeting ends with the reading of the psalm and the singing of a song. Then we stop a few minutes to greet one another.

This is a very pleasant experience. I must admit that personally I get the same feeling when in the cinema or theater the lights come back on and one returns to normal life. I like it when I can keep alive some of the intimate atmosphere and thoughts alive in the chapel. This is true; you lose it in the evening, but sometimes one finds it back at Mass on Sunday.

The times when I arrive at Mass without having first read and meditated on the readings, they pass me by almost without my noticing, and I find myself at one point listening to the sermon. However, when the previous Thursday I have attended the *lectio*, the readings and the Gospel are already familiar and come alive with comments and sharing of the friends with whom we together. The Word becomes enriched, multifaceted, personalized, living and lived.

The Word became flesh in the experience of many brothers and sisters! What joy then to participate in the communion of Jesus, the Word made flesh! (*Daniela Brotto*)

F. Group discussion and sharing

“In your hands and into your heart it is essential that you take the Bible. Also, discover how to do so in your homes, your small domestic churches. Discover there the angel of the Word: a place of honor where you keep open the Word of God, perhaps with a candle and a flower in front, in the same way as we honor the images of our saints.” (Message to the people of God of the Synod of Bishops 2008).

“And how are we to receive the Word of God? In the same way as you receive Jesus Christ! The Church tells us that Jesus is present in Scriptures, in His Word. For this it is essential to read during the day a passage from the Gospel. Why? To learn? No! To find Jesus, because Jesus is right in his Word, in his Gospel. Every time I read the Gospel, I find Jesus. But how do I receive this Word? You must receive it as you receive Jesus, that is, with an open heart, with humble heart, with the spirit of the Beatitudes. Because Jesus came like that, in humility. He came in poverty. He came with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Even we Christians would do well today, asking yourselves during the day: “But how do I, me, receive the Word of God? As an interesting thing? Ah, the priest preached this today ... how interesting! What does this priest know!?” , or I get it simply because it is the living Jesus, his Word? Perhaps, I can buy a small Gospel and carry it around in my pocket, put in your purse and, when I can, during the day, read a passage, to find Jesus there? “ (Homily of Pope Francis at Casa s. Marta - 09/01/2015).

Is this 'my listening to the Word of God'? Share with one another and intersperse it with familiar songs.

E. Prayer moment

Liturgy of the enthronement of the Bible

The participants seat themselves in a semi-circle: in the center on a small stand place the book of the scriptures after having raised it high before the group while singing a song or with an other appropriate gesture.

Song: **All my words**
Just as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
And do not return there without germinating the earth,
So every word of mine does not return to me without doing what I desire,
without having fulfilled what I asked of it,
Every word of mine, every word of mine.

1.L. From the Letter to the Hebrews

*“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors
in many and various ways by the prophets,
but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...”* (Heb 1.1-2a)

2.L. From the Gospel according to Luke 4.16-21

¹⁶ When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,

¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim
release to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind.
To let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

²¹ Then he began to say to them, **“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”**

(after the proclamation of the Word everyone is invited to kiss the scripture while singing an alleluia)

Alleluia!

And today I listen to your word
May it guide me on my pathway of life!

(a choral reading)

In times past God has spoken many times to our ancestors through the prophets.
Today, in our time, he has spoken through his Son.

God, you have called us with your Word.

Not a word of God in a language undecipherable,
But a human word, unforgettable, his Son Jesus.
It has passed through the ages without losing its flavor
Capable of being heard in all our languages.
An efficacious word like the rain that falls on the earth and makes it fruitful.

**It tears us from our loneliness,
It enters into us like the rain on a parched land.
It gives us refreshment, shows us the way and the path.
It awaits us, welcomes us, introduces us into a new space.**

To us Christ entrusts his Word according to the charism of Father Dehon.
Thus we will become for people today a letter from the risen Christ;
a letter written not on precious paper, but written in our lives.
The center of our existence is union with Christ,
so that this word can give witness.

**The Father will grant us the joy of being a word that warms humankind
through the Heart of Jesus.**

**He will put in us His Spirit who transforms our lives
in his message of love.**

To him be honor and glory! Amen

Refrain: *Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it daily!*

(If this prayer is used at the opening of the meeting, one could insert here the witness of St. Anthony (see other texts # 2). At the end one can repeat the refrain.)

Other texts

1. A story

Two lumberjacks were working in the same forest cutting down trees.

The trunks were impressive, solid and tenacious. The two lumberjacks used their axes with the same skill but with a different technique: the first hit his tree with incredible perseverance, one blow after another, without stopping so as not to lose precious seconds. The second woodcutter took a good break every hour.

At sunset, the first woodcutter was in the middle of his tree. He had sweated blood and tears and would not last another five minutes. The second, however, had finished working at the trunk of the tree.

They had started at the same time and the two trees were alike! The first woodcutter could not believe his eyes. *“I don’t get it! How could you do it so quickly even with your many breaks?”* The other one smiled: *“You saw that I took a break every hour. What you did not see was that I took advantage of the break to sharpen my ax.”*

2. From the Life of Saint Anthony, the abbot (written by Saint Athanasius, bishop)

After the death of his parents, left alone with his still very small sister, Anthony, at the age of eighteen or twenty, took care of the house and his sister. Not even six months after the death of his parents, one day on his way, as was his custom, to a Eucharistic celebration, he reflected on the reason why the apostles felt constrained to follow the Savior and abandoned everything. He recalled how, in the Acts of the Apostles, there were people who sold all their possessions, bringing the proceeds to the apostles, who distributed them to the poor. He also remembered the many and great goods that they hoped to gain in heaven.

Meditating on these things, he went into the church, just as they were reading the gospel. He heard how the Lord said to the rich man: “If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and come follow me and you will have treasure in heaven” (Mt 19.21).

Deeply impressed, feeling as if the story of the life of the saints he had been presented by Providence and thinking that the words just read were addressed to him, he left the church immediately and handed out to the inhabitants of the land all the property which he had inherited from his family. He was rich for he possessed three hundred very fertile and rich fields. He no longer wanted to burden himself and his sister with these fields. He also sold all his furniture and distributed all his fortune to the poor. At another time, in the liturgy, he heard the words of the Lord in the Gospel: “Do not you feel distressed about tomorrow” (Mt 6.34). Not being able to resist any longer, he went out once more and gave away what was still left. He entrusted his sister to a group of consecrated virgins and began to devote himself near his home to the ascetic life. He took on the harsh life with fortitude, without conceding anything to himself.

He worked with his hands: for he had heard it said: “Who does not work should not eat” (2 Thess. 3.10). With the money earned, he would buy bread for himself; whatever was left he gave to the poor.

He spent much time in prayer, for he had learned that it was necessary to withdraw and pray constantly (see 1 Thessalonians 5.17). He was so attentive to reading, that nothing written escaped him. He retained everything in his soul to the point that the memory began to replace the books. All the inhabitants of the country, all the just people, who appreciated his goodness, and saw him as a friend of God and some loved him like a son, more like a brother.

Suggestions for further reading

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, numbers 50-141;
- Message of the Synod (2008) to the People of God and the post-synodal exhortation *Verbum Domini* of Pope Benedict XVI;
- Fr. Francesco Duci: *Parola di Dio e fede* (formazione ITS 2013).

Meeting XXII

THEY WILL LOOK ON THE ONE WHOM THEY HAVE PIERCED

Objectives of the meeting

- To read and contemplate the passage of the piercing of Jesus (John 19.34-37), the favorite icon of contemplation of Fr. Dehon.
- To know how the Church looks on the pierced Christ and what it “sees”.
- To understand the centrality of the open heart on the cross in the faith experience of Fr. Dehon.
- To learn from and contemplate the pierced Heart and to let its love guide you.

Context of the meeting

The page of the passion deeply loved by Fr. Dehon and which he visited spiritually every day, was John 19.34-37. In this meeting, we want to be drawn to this much-loved icon of Fr. Dehon and to enter in its contemplative moment. The reflection will focus on the “seeing” of the evangelist, of the Church, of Fr. Dehon and of ourselves. It will lead to the contemplative attachment which can culminate in these texts through prayer.

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

Find an icon of the death on the cross of Jesus: a slide, a painting, a sculpture. The meeting could begin with a veneration of the icon of Calvary. Begin with a proclamation of the Gospel of John 19. 28-37. Listen to the passage, standing in a religious silence.

Then, each one, one after the other in procession, make a bow before the icon, kiss it. In the meantime, the group could sing a hymn to the pierced Savior or to the Heart of Christ or any appropriate song. (See also other texts #1 or #2)

B. Biblical text (John 19.28-37)

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³² Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him.

³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

³⁵ (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶ These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” ³⁷ And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.” **Commentary**

It is a contemplation of faith, which ought to be extended so that we may understand fully the full message of the death-piercing of Jesus. We need to see through the sign and, if possible, beyond the sign. Contemplating the Crucified One is to see the great “sign of God”; here we see the love of God made visible (“God so loved the world that he gave ... Son”: John 3.16); It is to see the extreme, the total love, in solidarity with all, with which Jesus showed how to love and in fact loved (“Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved his own, loved them to the end” John 13.1). In this way, Christ showed himself in solidarity with sinners, to become himself sin (See 2 Cor 5.21) and so to destroy it.

Contemplating the Crucified generates a “vision of faith” and enables the response of love.

Dehon contemplated the scene, consciously placing himself at the side of Mary and John, the two privileged spectators, the first of the long procession of believers who had fixed their gaze on the One who was pierced for us. Rather than becoming interested in the symbols of blood and water that signify the salvation obtained by the passion of Jesus, Father Dehon was strongly affected by the invisible place from where they came. They came from the inner depths of the crucified one, pierced by the lance. That source, secret until then, is now being uncovered and opened. It is the Heart of Christ. It manifests what in the end had been there from the beginning: the source of salvation is God's Love in the Heart of Christ.

C. Text of Fr. Dehon

Fr. Dehon interprets this text rather traditionally, with a mystical and devotional touch: also for him this is the ultimate moment of the revelation of love. Faced with it, Fr. Dehon feels within himself its gushing forth and on his part a deep need to recognize it and to return this love with love.

“This wound opens us and gives us the Heart of Jesus. In faith, we are presented with the love that has given everything, even life itself. In this love, we recognize the reason and the purpose of all of God’s works: the God who created us, redeemed us, sanctified us with love. In the Heart of Jesus, we can grasp the ultimate depth of the divine nature, in this most wonderful event: God is love! St. John has read it in the Heart of Jesus. I need to contemplate the piercing to see there how I am loved and how I have to love on my part. There I will learn how a heart that loves acts, suffers, give itself totally, up to the point of death, for God and for souls” (ASC 3/425).

“The opening of the Heart of Jesus is the mystery of mysteries, the foundation of all others, the mystery of the love as it has been glimpsed in previous ages, but which has been revealed to us” (CAM 2/193). “This act sums up the life of Jesus, the mystery of his incarnation, his passion and also the mysteries of his glory and the Eucharist” (CAM 2/184). It is the mystery which surpasses all others because it contains all of them. What would be the offering of the Savior, his life, his sacrifice on the cross, his own death, if it did not derive its sap from the Heart of Jesus?” (CAM 2/196) “Here is the great mystery of love, the source and channel of all graces, the fullness of immolation” (CAM 2/183). We make an act of faith and love; we believe in the immensity of God's love for us in the Heart of Jesus” (CAM 2/193).

D. Reflection

1. The Church contemplates the pierced side of the Savior

The disciple whom Jesus loved is at the foot of the cross with Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is the Church. Supported by the affection towards the Master and attracted to be with him even in the most tragic moments, he can see the latest events of Christ's mortal life.

The sight with the eyes turns into a 'vision of faith'

The Jews look who do not want to see the crucified ones on the Sabbath. Also, the soldiers look (“*they came to Jesus, and saw that he was already dead.*”) The evangelist writes so that also we may see (“Look at the one whom they have pierced”).

Watch Maria, the women, the disciple. Those who are at the foot of the cross cannot do anything (no intervention or action) for Jesus. By now he has reached the very end! Neither does Jesus ask them to “do something”, only to “look and believe”, accept his death and the full meaning it contains.

Why look and see?

We know the importance of the verb “to see” for the fourth Gospel. It points to the need to *look well, to look with attention, to penetrate its meaning* of that which is about to happen to a person, to facts, to circumstances... to grasp the true content beyond all appearances, the message of God for our life.

It is about seeing *the facts, capture the signs*; it does not mean to imagine or to use one's fantasy, or to desire to have visions... It means to *contemplate* guided by the Word.

The evangelist swears to have seen well and to have seen important things.

What is there to see?

Seeing Jesus who fulfills the Scriptures (v. 28).

At the last moment of his life, Jesus has the awareness of having done the will of the Father to the end. He has lived obedience. And this total obedience is one of the greatest signs attesting to the authenticity of the words and the deeds of Jesus. It attests to the great sign given to the Father: “*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son*” is now joined with the great sign of Jesus: “*There is no greater love than this: to give one's life for one's friends*” (John 3.16); 15.13) The fulfilling of the scriptures points to the gift of Christ upon the cross.

Seeing the man giving Jesus sour wine to drink (v. 29).

The thirst of Jesus is not only of his body (see the opposite for the Samaritan woman in John 4). Expect a reply in faith, hidden in the vinegar is the symbol of the reply of hate, rejection, sin.. “*They hated me without reason*” he said during the last supper, quoting Psalm 69.5 (John 15.25); hate is the opposite of love. We know that one responds to love with love.

The disciple sees that Jesus does not shrink back before the hatred that is about to kill him. Thus “*his heart recoils within him; his compassion grows warm and tender* (See Hosea 11.8) for us. “*Therefore, he does not give in to his anger and he does not destroy*” those who are about to kill him. He continues to offer his life to the Father for our salvation... The love of Christ conquers all hate.

See that Jesus, at his last breath, gives the Spirit to his Church (v. 30).

«*Gave up the Spirit*», the Greek text says. The last breath of Jesus expresses the full gift of the Spirit. The holy Spirit comes forth from him like an abundant torrent, like from an abundant source. Jesus does not die without perspective: it is to save fellow humans. It shows his love without end. If he gives the Spirit, it can only come from God!

The Spirit that he gives recreates humanity, builds the new covenant (God comes reconciled with humanity and humanity with God in a communion of love), the Spirit regenerates humanity as son and daughter of God, and makes him capable to love as Jesus did. Hence, the miracle of the new covenant can only come from God!

Seeing that when they came to Jesus, they did not break his legs (v. 33).

«*When they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs*»: the Christ is presented here as the paschal lamb of whom “no bones are to be broken” (v. 36). This took place at the very moment when in the temple in Jerusalem the paschal lambs were killed.

Jesus is the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and he it is who pours out his blood for the remission of the sins of all people (John 1.29). Jesus of Nazareth is the man, wholly given to the Father and wholly given to us. That is how the love of God triumphs over the human evil.

Seeing Jesus being pierced (v. 34).

The soldier with a lance opens the pierced one. This gesture is the central point of the passage. The piercing opens a work and, with it, a source. Jesus become the new source of salvation, a source ever active, an abundant source to which all can go. The pierced Jesus repeats his invitation: *Come all who are thirsty and drink... All you who are thirsty come to the water, come those who have no money; buy and eat without money, also those without food, wine or milk... Come to me all who are tired and oppressed and I will give you rest*” (John 7.37-38; Is 55.1; Matt 11.28)

With that, his heart is open and remains open. All come to the Father through the pierced Heart of Jesus. From that passage (this open road and this body) come every grace and salvation. The Father comes to us and we can come near and enter into the mystery of God (Heb 7.25; 4.16; 10.19-20). Jesus is the only mediator and high priest.

Seeing the blood and water flow from his pierced side (v. 34).

The wound from which the blood flowed is a sign of death, a death as an expression of a love to the end (“*No one has greater love than this: to give one’s life for ones’ friends*” (John 15).

The blood poured out produces the new covenant for the remission of sins (Heb 9.11-22; Mk 14.24); and a blood, which in the Eucharist, Christ personally offers to the Father for the salvation of the world.

The water is a figure of life, the gift of the Spirit making us sons and daughters, participants in “the divine life of the one who wanted to assume our human life.” In this way, there came about a new creation. This open source fulfills Ezechiel 47: This water which flowed from the right side of the temple bore life and abundance for the whole world. The blood and the water are symbols of the sacraments of the Church. We were born there, born from the pierced Heart.

«Seeing» leads us to welcome

“To believe” means to notice that in his incarnation and death, Christ is brought close to us, becomes someone in solidarity with us (with everyone, says the second Vatican Council); and, welcoming him to become on our part, be in solidarity with him, participants in his reparatory oblation.

“He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.” (v. 35) This testimony, so solemnly sworn, is a testimony of faith. He who sees the sign and grasped its content, comes to the vision of faith.

He has come then below the cross and must now come into our life as Christians in this century.

In John, there is a very close connection between “seeing” and “believing”. He confirms it at the end of his Gospel (20.30-31): *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”*

Mary, his mother, sees and believes (See her welcoming of the offering made at the side of her son on the cross where she welcomed the church through the disciple. It was a persevering prayer grounded in the Spirit. (Acts 1.14)

John, the disciples, representing the church, sees and believes (see 20.5,8: *“Seeing the linen ... Seeing, he believed”*)

Also Thomas, after having seen “the signs” he asked to see, came to believe (see John 20.25) : *“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands... Put your finger here and see my hands...”*

2. The contemplation of Fr. Dehon

What did Fr. Dehon see in the piercing of the side of Christ?

a. He saw a total love, gratuitous, enduring, full of tenderness and mercy for every sinner.

The pierced heart is first of all a sign of love: a great love, love to the end. *“He loved beyond measure”* (Dehon). Looking at the pierced Heart, we see the extent to which Jesus was able to love and loved us.

“This wound opens us and gives us the Heart of Jesus. In faith, we can read there the love that has given everything, even life itself. In this love, we recognize the reason and the purpose of all divine works: God created us, redeemed us, and sanctified us in love. In the Heart of Jesus, we can grasp the ultimate depth of the divine nature, in its most wonderful manifestation: God is love! St. John has read it in the Heart of Jesus. I need to contemplate the piercing to see how I was loved and how I have to love in turn. There I will learn how the heart that loves ought to act, to suffer, give himself totally, even to death, for God and for souls” (ASC 3/425).

b. He saw a love that was refused, insulted, pierced, killed ...

Jesus was brought to slaughter (scourged, beaten, degraded, crucified, pierced, mocked ...). This was the extent to which he was rejected and humiliated! The pierced heart is the sign of hatred; and this at the hands of humans, as our work, “because of our sins.”

While, on the one hand, it expresses the fullness of God's love, which was made flesh in order to love up to the end, on the other hand it also expresses the dramatic nature of his suffering, hatred heaped upon him by human ingratitude. Sin - every kind of sin - strikes at the heart of the Son of God. Looking at the damage done to Jesus, we can understand the devastating effect of sin. Each of

us has participated in this piercing of the Heart of Jesus. There exists a personal and communal responsibility about the death of Christ, which is understandable only in the light of faith.

“Lifted up on the cross, Jesus saw before him only enemies, he only heard curses and blasphemies. The people whom Providence had chosen with such care and who had been patiently educated, rejected and crucified the Savior. Where were the disciples and friends of Jesus? They were afraid and hid. They did not understand the great mystery of the cross” (CAM2 / 145-146 and 148).

c. He saw a love that sought reparation

Contemplation means get involved. It remains true that Christ is the first repairer. But we are also asked to take sides. Sin is an historical reality also today: the real drama of humanity, from which comes every other evil. It remains urgent even today to fight against sin (injustices, wars, corruption, self-interest of all kinds): this becomes obvious by just looking superficially at local and international situations. It remains urgent to work together in the “reconstruction” of humans according to the image. *“We are called to enter into the movement of redemptive love, by giving ourselves, with and as Christ, for our brothers and sisters.* (SCJ Rule of Life, n. 21).

“The Heart of Jesus in the Eucharist is the true and only repairer and, at the same time, the only one capable of loving and giving thanks. We associate ourselves to the Heart of Jesus for this great task of repairing, by presenting, aided by his grace, our personal dispositions; His love will transform them into acts of love, just as at Cana he turned water into wine ...” (CAM 2/194) *A love which is not satisfied with affections or feelings, but which leads to a more generous commitment to the Christian virtues and to patience during temptations. From the Heart of Jesus, we will draw the supplement of love which alone can give adequate reparation”* (CAM 2/207).

d. He saw a love that urged him to become like Christ

All this is to lead us to the conversion of our heart. From there to an affective and effective attachment to the Eucharist (an Eucharistic style of life) and to the installation of a new style of social relations.

«Our only desire will be to become a living Eucharist of the Heart of Jesus as the divine Heart and our Eucharist» (CAM 3/268).

e. He saw a love in return

“At least you love me!”. The no love is repaired with a yes love.

“Behold the Heart that has so loved humans. Yet from the majority of them, often even those most favored, he receives nothing but coldness, ingratitude and outrages.”

“This is how we understand reparation: as a welcome of the Spirit... as a response of Christ’s love for us” (SCJ Rule of Life, n. 23).

“Jesus does not know what to make of our works, if they are not done with our hearts” (NQT 3/148 - 16-17.07.1886).

E. Testimony

From the diary of Fr. Longo, a Dehonian missionary and martyr in Africa (1964)

He writes in the middle of the disaster that he is experiencing, the riots and massacres caused by the rebellion of the “Simba” in the Congo in 1964, which in a few weeks will lead to the killing of numerous missionaries (29 Dehonians among them a bishop) and among them himself and a

number of other innocent people. All this happened because of the lies and tricks of the rebels who called themselves “Simba” – lions. They thought themselves invincible and almost like “gods” with the power of life and death over people. It was a power they exercised indiscriminately.

Here Fr. Longo is in a dialogue with a forest pygmy, a people especially dear to him.

Pygmy: “Father, is that 'Simba' - Lion a God?”.

P. Longo: “Don’t forget, my dear, what I have so often told you and what your catechist Joseph Moke [one of the first catechists) has so well explained to me: God does not have a belly full of hunger as ours; God is good and does not have a head full of anger as ours. God does not dress in palm branches as do those who kill! God is in no hurry to capture his enemies, because no one can capture him! God does not go to war; God has no need to steal other people's trucks, or to take the food and the goats of the poor, for fear of dying of hunger! God ... travels without legs; His Spirit is always fed, his hands are not seen and yet he makes the winds turn, makes rivers rush, stops the lions without even touching them! “

Pygmy: “I understand, Father! Even these killer Simba will stop one day before the actual big Good Simba, who is God! “

P. Longo: “Take hold of your faith with both hands and enfold in your spirit. Do not flee with these sorcerers who only lead you to death!”

F. Group discussion and sharing

For us the contemplation of the pierced side of Christ has two favorite places to go to: the listening to the Word and Eucharistic adoration.

- *How do I live the contemplative stance in my life?*
- *Is my favorite reference the Heart of Jesus, his way of living and giving of himself?*

G. Prayer moment

The prayer can be organized as a dialogue between a leader and the group or by each group taking two lines in turn as in a choir or with a division of male and female voices.

«The open side and the pierced heart of the Savior most wonderfully expressed for Father Dehon a love whose active presence he experienced in his own life. (Rule of Life # 2)

Father Dehon saw the very wellspring of salvation in this love of Christ, who accepts death as the supreme gift of His life for all and as filial obedience to the Father. (Rule of Life #3)

From the Heart of Jesus, opened on the cross, human beings are reborn in heart, enlivened by the Spirit, and united with their brothers and sisters in the community of charity which is the Church. (Rule of life, n. 3).

We turn our eyes to you, Lord of the pierced Heart,

because in the contemplation of this mystery we grasp your infinite love for us.

We turn our eyes to you, Lord of history,

To learn how to look with love and passion humanity with all its joys and contradictions.

We turn our eyes to you, Lord of life,

To attain in the source of your Heart the strength to live a meaningful and courageous life,
capable to give rise to hope.

We turn our eyes to you, heart and fountain of our spirituality

Bring to life in us again our identity in the world and in the Church.

We turn our eyes to you, Lord of *ecce venio*,

Renew in us our 'yes' in full freedom and dedication.

We turn our eyes to you, Jesus of the pierced side

Which in your Spirit you offered to the Father.

From your side flowed forth living water and the blood of our redemption.

Your glorious wound has healed us, your will of love has sanctified us.

Grant that we may participate in your redemption with the offering of our life.

Together with us welcome the sufferings and the expectations of the world.

Following you, good Shepherd, who gave his life for us,

allow us to participate in your love because your salvation gathers all. Amen.

Other texts

1. A hymn to the pierced Savior (Duci-Bach)

Open arms to the world at the hour of the last gift
to us who pierced you reveal the mystery of the heart.

A striking cruel spear into a lifeless side
source inert in a wave of blood and water.

A humble sign yet full of a great mystery hidden
blood as gift of love, dying that brings us life.

Eternal invincible love: fire between Father and Son
A love, welcoming, forgiving, gift of the pierced heart.

O Heart forever open, the passage to Easter
Door of the Father, birthing the returning Son. .

Crucified and Risen, revelation of the Father's plan
Fullness of time, the heart of the world to come.

O Father, the love of the Easter Heart of the Son
Our joyful singing in the Holy Spirit. Amen!

2. Heart of Christ (M. Frisina)

Heart of Christ, burning furnace
of charity and infinite goodness,
formed in the womb of Mary
in the power of the Spirit.

Heart of Christ, temple of God,
gateway to heaven, heavenly dwelling place,
be a tabernacle of justice and love,
of every virtue be its abyss.

Heart of Christ, in whom the Father
finds his godly well being,
be the desire of the eternal hills,
fountain of holiness and life.

Heart of Christ made obedient
until death for us sinners,
free us from every crushing and humiliating sorrow
from humankind's sins.

Heart of Christ, you are salvation
who places hope in you,
be to the dying hope and trust,
the sweetness of all the saints.
Amen.

Suggestions for further reading

- P. Francesco Duci, *Il Cuore del Salvatore* (formazione ITS 1997)
- P. André Perroux, *Volgeranno lo sguardo a Colui che hanno trafitto* (formazione ITS 1998).

Meeting XXIII

FATHER DEHON AND THE EUCHARIST

Objectives of the meeting

- To live the celebration of the Eucharist as a free encounter of Jesus with us in the gift of himself for each one of us.
- To know the Eucharistic experience of Father Dehon: a lived and celebrated Eucharist, a continuous Mass.
- To let grow in us the experience of the Eucharistic celebration as a moment which nourishes us daily and strengthens our “Eucharistic living” every day wherever we are.

Context of the meeting

In the course of this third year, we will reflect more than once (See # 23,24, 27) on Dehon’s ideas on the Eucharist: we want to know how Father Dehon “lived” the Eucharist in his life. Starting with the institution of the Eucharist of Jesus at the Last Supper, as told in the Gospels, we will underline two dimensions: participation in a sacrificed life, and the invitation to the supper, to communion.

In the sharing, we will explore our way of “living” the Eucharist.

The perspective of this meeting will be the daily encounter with the Eucharist. Meanwhile in the next meeting we will accentuate rather the aspect of the everyday in the Eucharist.

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

Prepare a table in the center with a loaf of bread and a decanter with wine. Assign a place to everyone and underline the invitation to the table.

You can also use the architecture of our church as a point of departure. (Image or power point). Point out the place of the altar and the tabernacle. The different architectural choices indicate the different concepts and perceptions of the Eucharist in history.

B. Biblical text (Luke 22.14-20)

¹⁴ When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. **Commentary**

That evening in the Upper Room Jesus was with the disciples at table for the evening meal; the signs used that evening were two nutritious foods (bread and wine), which Jesus blessed, broke and distributed so that they might be consumed. The Eucharistic celebration, despite its legitimately developed rituals and theological interpretations, is basically a supper, which the risen Lord ordered to take place every Sunday to bring together around the table the community of his disciples. The convivial dimension of the Eucharist was re-instated in the theology and the Second Vatican Council, as a fundamental aspect for the understanding of its reality.

The rediscovery of the occasion of the supper has helped in the revamping of the liturgical books of the Vatican Council and has led also to a change in the architecture of Catholic churches. The apse was detached from the altar, separated also from the tabernacle and moved forward into the middle of the choir, if not in the nave itself. Was it to improve the communication with the Assembly? No, it was to adapt the architectural structures to the new understanding of the Mass, emphasizing the altar table, because on it and the action upon it the primary interest of the faithful was to be focused.

To make more clear the convivial aspect of the Eucharist, it is useful to look closely at the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper of Jesus, his words over the bread and chalice, the gestures of his hands and those of his disciples, his blessing of God in the beginning and the end, and the perspective of salvation throughout. All this without neglecting a retrospective look at the convivial and public practices of the day. It is good to be reminded of its ethical and social values.

C. Text of Fr. Dehon

“The Eucharist is the hearth, the foundation, the center of all life, of every work, of every apostolate. All of redemption turns around Calvary: all its gravity turns around the altar. The gospel worker who does not live from the Eucharistic life has only a word that is deprived of life and effective action.” (NQT 25/33 - 1910)

“In the Eucharist, Jesus gives us the model of our inner life. There his life is mostly hidden, silent, loving, sacrificed. So, it must be in our life. The Eucharist is both sacrifice and sacrament. It is also the means by which our Lord dwells with us every day on the altar and before the cross. Jesus gives us the example of sacrifice and immolation. He loves to give Himself to us in Communion. Willingly becomes the nourishment of our souls, he hungers for the moment to give himself. We must yearn to receive him. Jesus finds his delight in living among us. So, he exposes himself to all the omissions and to all the outrages. He invites us to visit him with confidence and love “ (DSP 70-71).

D. Reflection

1. The Eucharistic celebration: highlight and source (LG 11)

Dehon awaited the day of his ordination with fear and trembling. It took place in the Cathedral of St. John Lateran in Rome on December 19, 1868. The celebration of the first Mass was delayed. He celebrated it at the seminary where he had studied, with all his loved ones present. The Eucharist will always be at the center of his life. It was fundamental to his faith, and it was a daily nourishment for his spiritual life. Dehon remained happy all his life to have the privilege to celebrate Mass.

In his diary, he frequently refers to the Mass, especially in the period after his ordination. It was always a moment of intense faith. It often brought to tears. He expresses his fervor in the *Spiritual Directory* (a text that he composed to express the spirit of the Congregation and which he gave to his religious as a guide to help refresh them about the values of the Institute).

The Eucharistic sacrifice is “*the gift par excellence of the Heart of Jesus and of his love*” (DSP 229); “*It is the center of religion, the heart of devotion, the soul of piety, the ineffable mystery that contains the abyss of divine charity, by which God communicates with supreme generosity his graces and his favors*” (as affirmed by St. Francis de Sales; DSP 229).

Jesus himself gave the Eucharist to the Church. Of this, he was fully aware. He always celebrated “in memory” of Christ. He asked Christians to love their participation at Holy Mass and to look to the Eucharistic sacrifice as the source that feeds their belonging to the Lord Jesus. The same advice he gave to his religious. Remember that “*the sacrifice of the Mass is, for all the Priests of the Sacred Heart, the great act of the day, the burnt offering of perfect love, the reparatory sacrifice par excellence*” (DSP 229). He also gave several reasons for the importance of the Mass: to become like Christ.

“*The Priests of the Sacred Heart, celebrating Mass, as well as those who are not priests taking part, will seek to enter with love into the feelings and intentions of the Heart of Jesus. Let us join the offering of our hearts to that of the divine Heart of Jesus for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls*” (DSP 229).

“*The Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of all Christian life*” (LG 11).

The Mass is the gate of departure and the door of return of the daily navigation of life for the Christian.

2. To make of your life a daily Mass

Dehon never saw the Mass as a celebration apart. He saw it as a reality from which to draw and which would feed him throughout the day. That is why he talks of a “continual Mass” (CAM 3/264), which he saw as an interior attitude of giving.

He was so taken by the mystery celebrated each morning, so as not to let it interrupt the occupations of the day. He dreamed that spiritual communion with Christ, the Priest and Paschal lamb, would be reached at the solemn moment of the celebration. It was not to be interrupted by the other pressing occupations; thus, he could offer not only the fragments of time, heart and action, but the totality of his life and person.

Deeply affected by the personal love of Christ for him, Fr. Dehon felt provoked to give in return as fully as possible. He wanted to harvest, in the Mass each morning, the infinite love, all his energies, all the possibilities and opportunities of the day: his thoughts and feelings, his joys and sufferings, his actions and devotion.

3. A life offered

At the time of Father Dehon, the Mass was seen mainly as a sacrifice, offered to God, the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

The French school of spirituality saw sacrifice as the culminating priestly act of worship to God. No wonder that Dehon, formed in this school in the French seminary in Rome, gave such great

importance to the sacrificial, oblation dimension of the Mass. He asked of his spiritual children that they immerse themselves generously in this sacrificial program, so as to make their lives a “continuous Mass” (CAM 3/264).

Sacrifice is the voluntary offering of oneself, the free gift of one’s life out of love for the Father and people, in communion with the risen Christ who said of himself: “*I did not come to be served but to serve, giving my life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).

Mass meets this Jesus in his radical disposition of himself as the Son and priest, and makes real the act of his sacrifice, which from the cross reaches its fruition in the Resurrection: a body given and blood poured out for us and the many.

From beginning to end, Jesus was ready to offer himself to the will of his Father. This disposition is best expressed in his *Ecce venio*. Dehon takes this phrase from the lips of Jesus. It expresses the yearning from the Heart of the Son. He is not making a simple outward act of imitation, but he participates in the *Ecce venio* of Christ. “*Uttering the Ecce venio, the Heart of Jesus has also offered us and continues to offer us; without this union, our sacrifice would be in vain and not accepted*” (CAM 1/66). Knowing ourselves supported by the *Ecce venio* of Christ, which goes far beyond our possibilities, we experience the secret joy of our “continuous Mass.” (CAM 3/264).

He wanted his offering not only to be continuous but also immediate, ready to welcome what life offers, either as pleasant or as painful, ready to be carried up into Christ at the time of mass. Every day, totally, promptly.

4. Communion

Communion is the “natural” goal and the *raison d’être* of the Eucharist, the salvific moment par excellence. But the communion to which it aims, is not just for the individual (each his own communion! But what sort of communion would that be?). The Eucharist exists for the sake of a far greater communion, worthy of the name, worthy of God’s plan: the ecclesial communion of Christ’s Mystical Body, the communion of the Head with the members and of the members among themselves. This is the great grace that the Eucharistic prayer prays for: “*may the Holy Spirit unite us in one body.*”

It is the ecclesial perspective of Paul’s reflection on communion: “*The bread which we break is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body because they partake of the one bread*” (1 Cor 10,16s).

The unity is not given by the fact of the coming together of brothers and sisters: it is created by the one bread that is eaten at that table, the Bread which is Christ.

Community values are very desirable, and to some extent required as a precondition, but the mystery of our unity in Christ is something else. This is at stake at the last Supper: the consciousness of an ecclesial communion, which for centuries seemed to have disappeared from the reflections on the Church.

The motto SCJ “make our life a continuous Mass” still remains valid; only it has greatly expanded its borders, beyond the scope of self-oblation-worship, so intensely suggestive.

E. Testimony

P. Beppe Pierantoni, a Dehonian Italian missionary in the Philippines since 1991, was kidnapped on October 17, 2001 by Islamic guerrillas and lived for six months in the forest in constant movement, along with a group of other kidnapped people. He was freed on 8 April 2002.

From the book *Con Dio e con i guerriglieri islamici*, a Diary of a kidnapping. We tell of the part of the dramatic seizure as an aspect of a “continual Mass”.

There are a million stars over my head in the sky and twinkling phosphorescent water all around me, what a treat ... On any other occasion, I would have greatly appreciated my surroundings. Are they not a sign of the hands who made them? We hope to go unnoticed by the fishermen; they did not want to be among them!

I'm sitting between oil drums, ropes and a plastic tarp ... I have to accommodate as best I can. I try to relax, to pray, to remain detached and lucid to understand what is happening and how best to behave. Lord, help me!

I must pray! I will say a rosary: I need to pray, to trust. The Lord will guide me, give me a sign, tell me what to do ... Lord, if my time has come, let me understand, so that I can prepare ... I am very afraid, stay close to me, Lord!

Hail Mary, full of grace ... *“If someone asks you to go one mile with him, go two.”*

The Madonna will stay close to me; I'm here after all because of her Son! *“... Instead of one mile go two.”* Yes, I already made one, a very difficult one when you are not free ...

In the first sorrowful mystery, we contemplate ... *Lord, into your hands I commend my life, do with me what you will.*

We are travelling along the Zamboanga; according to me we're going to Basilan. No one comes out of that place! Patience, no one will die for my sake. If I die, it won't be a great loss ... But who knows the pain of my people! We hope no one has the charity to inform them. Perhaps, this will be resolved in a short time ... *“If someone forces you to go one mile, go two.”*

Yeah, if they do evil to me, that goes away; if they do it to my family ... If it is true, if they demand a ransom, where will dad and mom find the money? They will be ruined. They would prefer ruin over refusing to give the money! Accursed people, I have to escape; I must. Better that I die than they.

Mary, full of grace, pray for us ... Lord, enlighten me, give me the opportunity and readiness to escape from the plans of this scum ... I must escape!

In the second mystery ... Lord, may the designs of the wicked fail. Give me courage, Father! *“If someone asks for your cloak, you give him your tunic as well.”*

I must stay calm. I have to concentrate on prayer: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you blessed are you ... *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.”* Isn't it as they say in Latin? *“Ecce Ancilla”*, yes!

Abandonment to God: is it not the heart of the Gospel? Let it be done unto me according to the will of God ... If you believe it, Beppe, you have to show it ... Now is the time for deeds, you cursed Pharisee.

“Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?”.

Ave, Maria ... I did not tell you so many times, Lord, that if you want something from me, it is you who must do it all; you have to carry me moment by moment?! I'm afraid, I have little faith, I cannot make it...

But here we are in the open sea, the coast has disappeared. *“Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?”.* You know that I'm not afraid to die! Yet, it's better to be dead than poor in love like me. I am a good-for-nothing, don't expect who knows what from me, Lord. Also in this situation, you will need to do everything yourself.

It seems that we are not going to Basilan ... *“If you believe you will see my glory ... trust me.”* Lord, no matter what happens, stay close to me, take me in your arms, hold me tight, increase my faith, give me courage ... Into your hands I commend my life!

We seem to be slowing down, perhaps they are waiting for another boat, I wonder if I will now loosen these handcuffs ... They do: they free my wrists. I feel better; I lose the fear of drowning. I can swim if I fall into the water. Maybe, I can get away, if something happens. But suddenly we take off again with great speed ...

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you ... Once again we are close to the coast; we fly over the waves of the sea, I have to hang on tightly in order not to be thrown from side to side because of the waves... The axle which is my backrest is becoming a torture and the water is entering by the bucketful. They invite me to take shelter with plastic cloth; they do the same. Flying fish flee from the hull as it cuts the waves time and again. The night is rather bright, sufficient to see ahead a few meters. Exhaustion overcomes me: I settle into a kind of waking slumber. Hours pass, how many? How fast are we travelling?

But where the hell are we going? Lord, I do not know, but I know that you know. That should be enough. Perhaps this is the time, long awaited and dreaded, of the “great and final humiliation of my pride”? What is about to be realized is your promise, which I have often heard resound inside me and which often comes to mind, “I will die outside the walls of Jerusalem”? A deep emotion overcomes me: will I be able to deal with this with dignity? “.

(B. PIERANTONI, *Con Dio e con i guerriglieri islamici. Diario di un rapimento*, EDB 2003, pp. 31-33).

F. Group discussion and sharing

On the table there is bread and wine; It is time to share what we have lived. The bread is broken and each takes a piece (takes communion) – or one shares some of the questions raised by the reflection – then one can eat the bread and drink the wine.

How do I live the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday? What attention do I give to make my life a “continual Mass”? Is my life shaped by the project of *’Ecce venio?*

G. Prayer moment

What is proposed is a prayer to the Trinity. It can be prayed with solo voices by rotation, or by forming a choir, or by alternating male and female voices. It is also possible to repeat altogether, after every verse, the initial line addressed to a single person of the Trinity, or to sing at the end of the invocations of the persons of the Trinity, the song Laudate omnes gentes – or adoramus te Domine – veni sancte Spiritus!

WE GIVE YOU THANKS, FATHER,

For this memorial of our origin with you,
Which is the Last Supper, in which your Spirit, the first gift to believers,
Comes to make present for us the reconciling Pasch of your Son.

We bless you, because the one bread and the one cup
Binds us into the one Body, making of us,
in communion with the one Spirit, giving holy gifts,
the communion of the saints in time and eternity.

We give you thanks, Lord of heaven and earth,
because this banquet anticipates the feast of your kingdom,
and, sustaining us poor people and pilgrims,
makes us vigilant and active in the construction of a history of justice and peace,
filling our hearts with hope and joy.

WE BLESS YOU, LORD JESUS CHRIST,

That you entrusted your Church, the memorial of your Pasch.
Make our lives to be humbly searching for your word of mission:
“Do this in memory of me”.

Allow us, therefore, to celebrate in our lives and in history,
The powerful memory of your passion and resurrection
By the gift of your Spirit, who fulfills in our time your promise.

Allow that listening to you, we may be always transformed,
in such a way that your action of grace becomes ours,
your sacrifice, ours,
and what the Father has said about you may also resonate in our life.

And also that united in the Spirit of the mystery of your body and blood,
we may know how to live in communion and grow in communion,
giving to our actions the breath of the Church
according to the mission that you confided to everyone.

WE BLESS YOU, LORD HOLY SPIRIT,

You, the desire in the heart of the Church,

You, the hearer of our prayer!

We give you thanks because by sanctifying our gifts,

you make Christ present for us,

and make us his living body in history.

Be the primary actor of the evangelization of the kingdom

In the work and in the days of our life.

Enrich us with your gifts,

So that we may put them at the service of the community of brethren

For the growth of the human family.

Help us to bear your cross with love,

up to that day in which arises the dawn of your glory.

In You, through Christ our Lord, we go to the Father,

and the holy banquet of this day,

may it be for us the living security and the taste of the banquet

in which we will eat the bread of your kingdom.

Amen! Alleluia!

(Bishop Bruno Forte)

Suggestions for further reading

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn.1322-1419.
- P. Francesco Duci: *Eucaristia istituita e Eucaristia celebrata* (formazione ITS 1998).

Meeting XXIV

THE EUCHARIST:

THE PRESENCE OF THE RISEN ONE CHANGES OUR LIFE

Objectives of the meeting

- To seek some answers to the question we often feel in us and around us: how to live the presence of the Risen One; how to grow humanly, in faith, and love today; how can the Eucharist inspire us, make us grow, sustain us on our journey?
- By way of a contemplation of the gesture of Jesus to his disciples, to enter into the logic of service, by letting others wash our feet and we in turn wash the feet of others.
- To “read” what role the Eucharist played in the life of the Church and the Christian community and in the life of Father Dehon.

Context of the meeting

In the previous meeting, we entered into the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus at the Last Supper and we deepened the meaning of our participation in the Supper of the Lord in our community. In this meeting, we pay attention to our present everyday life as it is changed by the presence of the Risen One and by the Eucharist.

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

An icon of the washing of the feet (for example, by Sieger Koder) is placed in the center and will guide our reflection. Alongside it place photos of significant moments in the life of the community, such as the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday, the service to our community, either in our area (welcoming others, family pictures) or in other countries.

B. Biblical text (John 13. 1-17)

¹ Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷ Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸ Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?' ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for

that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

B. Text of Fr. Dehon

“Divine Eucharist, by means of holy communion, makes us penetrate the mystery of the Incarnation, and extends it to all the sons of Adam who wish to take advantage of it. What's greater? More beautiful? More tender and more generous! ... For my flesh is real food, my blood is true. To eat God, to drink God, let us become one body with Jesus-Christ, do one thing only with him: oh! What a glorious privilege! And how the full Eucharistic incarnation wonderfully fulfills the first Incarnation! ... The divine Eucharist is nothing but the Incarnation applied to each one of us” (CAM 3 / 25-26).

“Meditation of the august mystery of the Eucharist completes the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Passion; it provides it with a more profound understanding. In Bethlehem, in Nazareth, on Calvary, in the sky, in the tabernacle, we always find the same heart, always the same love ...” (CAM 3 / 5-6).

As In the incarnation, Dehon emphasizes how Jesus becomes accessible in the Eucharist, always offered to be “present”, assimilated, to become in us the source of our active loyalty, ready to give witness to the Gospel in the concrete circumstances of each day. When Jesus gives us all his body as food to take and eat, he sums up what he wanted to be in the love of his heart: food, a reality of our everyday life, our daily bread, a reality of absolute necessity to us and assimilated, to be perishable as we are. The divine life of the Incarnate Word comes to renew and transform the energies of love in us.

“Jesus has given all for me, for us” (Gal 2, 20; Eph 5: 2): his availability and his compassion, his time, his labors, his honor, loyalty in professing the love of the Father, which was his most precious treasure. He gave “himself”, his life. *“Jesus having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end* (John 13: 1). *He loved us with an everlasting love* (John 31,3). *He loved us more than his honor, more than his rest, more than his life, because he sacrificed everything for to give us a witness of his love ... This love drove him to become food for our souls, so that he can become one with us and do – so to say - of his heart and of our one and only thing. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him* (John 6, 56). O the prodigious and excessive love of God!” (MSC 107-108).

“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13: 1). Jesus gives himself as food and drink, freely anticipating his passion in which he “will fulfill everything”: it is always the same total gift, *“it is always the same heart”* (CAM 3/6) that he offers so that we live daily, with the same love, with the same heart, formed at the school of his heart, and with our life, nourished by him.

For Fr. Dehon the Mass is life and life must be “one perpetual Mass” (CAM 3/264).

C. Reflection

The Eucharist and everyday life

The word Eucharist has come to mean for us the Mass, the Sunday assembly, the liturgy. The Gospel speaks of the Last Supper of Jesus, the coming together with his friends for one last meal before he died: an event which is the source, the very institution of the Eucharist. The story of the "Lord's Supper" -which we find in the synoptic gospels - occupies a very small space but it is a solemn moment, accepted as his last testament. A Eucharistic spirit pervades the whole life of Jesus: for him it was a way of life, it was him... The life of Jesus is Eucharistic.

1. The Eucharist in the Christian community according to Paul

a. The Eucharist "colors" life

The Eucharist, as a supper with Jesus, unites us closely, almost physically, to the one and living God in Christ. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10, 16). It calls for a full adherence to God in Christ and unity among us: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread", v.17.

It is of no avail, writes Paul, to be baptized, to have participated in the Eucharistic meal, if on the other hand, we give in to all the vices of the "old" life (vv.1-13). The harmony between the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and life is essential for the life of the Risen community in order to share in his victory over death. To celebrate ("eat the same spiritual food, drink the same spiritual drink," v. 4) is inseparable from a way of life that is genuinely nurtured by the Lord, "the spiritual rock", who accompanies us in our journey

b. The Eucharist creates sharing

In 1 Cor. chapters 11-15, Paul writes about the behavior which should govern the assemblies, the gifts and charisms ... and, almost as a second thought, speaks of the Eucharist, the Lord's supper, which was then celebrated at the end of the meals. He emphasized that these meals, instead of showing the fellowship in the sharing of food among all, rich and poor, actually revealed the division in the community, contradicting the meaning of the Last Supper and its meaning for our lives. From the cross of Jesus, his sign of service to all, "his body for us" (v. 24) arises a sense of our service of love. "*When you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes,*" v. 26. What is proclaimed must be prolonged through a witness, through the transparency of our acts.

c. The Eucharist as the center of faith and of community life

Paul confronts the every day problems of the community and underlines the unbreakable link between the Eucharistic worship and the life of the community. Starting with the communion with Jesus in his Supper there flows the commitments of each one to construct and live a community of life. In the first Christian community, the Eucharist was absolutely central: a treasure which the Lord gave to the community. (see v. 23ss).

2. The testimony of John

a. *The Eucharist is a service, a gift of self in the humble circumstances of life*

«I have given you an example, that as I have done, you also do» (John 13,15). A total service: «On the night of his passion ... the service of the master and lord.»

«The bread of God is that which has come down from heaven and gives life for the world» (John 6, 33). «From the moment of his incarnation, Jesus considered himself the Bread of life» (CSJ 251).

b. *Jesus is the Bread of life which satisfies all hunger*

A presence which we receive in the Church in the Eucharistic banquet, to give light to our daily life, to renew our attachment to the Lord... In everything Jesus is the true Bread of our life, the living Water, the Light, the Way, the Resurrection... just as he is the Heart open to all and in all... When «having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the end» (John 13,1), Jesus gave himself as food and drink, freely anticipating his passion where «having fulfilled all» he remains the total gift, always the same Heart.

3. The Eucharist in the daily life of Jesus

Fr. Dehon gave a special place to John. Let us revisit the interior life of Jesus: in everything he is the Bread of divine life and nourishes us in all aspects of our life. To believe in him and «to eat him» to «come to him» to «follow him» are all equivalents, inseparable.

a. *The bread and wine, fruits of the earth and of our work.*

The rich symbolism of bread and wine is present in our cultures but also in the Bible. Bread and wine are the expression of what allows us to be sustained, to regain our strength, to grow, to celebrate. They express our life together (seen as a value and commitment), the convergence of our human work, the contribution and collaboration of the many trades, the art of working, preparing, and storing ... But at the same time, they are a sign of our frailty and dependence, our vital link with the land from which we come, and of which we need to continue to live-without forgetting the vocation received from God to «subduing, producing, and bearing fruit for all ..., and not forgetting the beauty of our world according to the Creator» (see Genesis 1: 29-30 and 2:15).

b. *Bread wine: our daily life*

By giving value to bread and wine, Jesus also gives value to human work, celebrating the alliance between the earth and humanity as God has willed it for us. He saw Mary and Joseph working to give life to their family. He, too, worked for most of his life (P. Dehon refers often to the «immense mystery of the hidden life»); he became tired working, he gave work a dignity. He was one with his people in the countryside of Nazareth. He knew his people and shared with them the complex political situation of his time. He knew the price of things also of the smallest things, and he knew the simple and poor people of his village; he did not waste anything. Jesus recognizes and celebrates the love of the Father and His providence, as well as the human work that he encountered daily.

c. *«The Word became flesh ... and he took bread and wine...»*

He became flesh (John 1: 1), he shares our condition.

«By his incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every human. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a

human heart” (GS 22, 2) and “on the night that he was betrayed, he took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: “This is my body which is for you” ... he also took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Cor 11, 23ss). Jesus wanted to express what he wanted to be and live through his presence among us. He revealed to us that our world, our land and work, all our days can enter into the Kingdom of God. Jesus gave Himself for me, for us, for the many; He gave his life, and by doing so, is near to us and lived in our humanity.

d. *The “deification of the earth”*

Fr. Dehon speaks of the “transfiguration” or “deification” of our person, society and the earth. He does so by referring to the Eucharist. The Eucharist nourishes us, “*It throws us back constantly to life on earth, and the service of the Gospel*” (Rule of Life, 82). It consecrates all our capacities and energy, renews our commitment to brotherhood, justice and solidarity. Recalling the words of Fr. Dehon, it leads us to “*the Eucharistic kingdom of Jesus*” (ESC 2/15.A.VI) which in his words is also “*the social reign of the Sacred Heart*” in souls, in civil society and in the Church. (ESC 2/15.B).

e. *In the light of Easter*

The Risen One shares his life with us, body broken, blood spilled. It sends us back to our every day life, seen in the light and the power of his paschal victory. (see Luke 24. 31 and 35; John 21. 5; Luke 24. 41; Acts 10. 39ff; Acts 2. 46; Acts 16. 34; Acts 1. 11; Mt 28. 19-20).

f. *“He eats with the publicans and sinners” (Mt 9. 11)*

The sharing of food is part of our social life together, it takes into account and comforts the community of life, that is to say, the interdependence and mutual recognition of one another in everyone’s need and right to live, the joy and the exigencies of being together on a daily basis, the value of hospitality, reconciliation and collaboration.

g. *“Drink of this because this is the blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mt 26. 27)*

The Last Supper was a place of the revelation of hearts, the manifestation of truth. Jesus gave his own life to friends, even to sinners, a gift of friendship, the hope of the victory of fidelity over fear, superficiality and betrayal. So it is for us in every Eucharist.

h. *“I have greatly desired to eat this paschal meal with you before my passion” (Luke 22. 15)*

It would be beneficial to go through the gospel and glean from it the attitudes of Jesus, in so many of his encounters and his words, the presence – in between the lines – about the Eucharist. Here are some examples: the availability to meet, for pardon, for regaining trust, for multiplying bread and food, in the desert (a place of fragility but which becomes a place of meeting God), worship of the Father “in spirit and truth”; the prayer of Jesus (right from the tradition of the people). All these moments consecrated the present moment and opened the future that the Father accomplishes today. Father Dehon was moved by this burning desire: “*Jesus was hungry and thirsty to see this Easter Sunday he wanted to open up the source of life, he wanted to start this intimacy with us.*” The whole daily life of Jesus, his sufferings, the condemnation, the treason, the cross, found its meaning for him in the oblation to the Father. The Eucharist celebrates this gift with the same confidence and the same hope, to nourish us and drag us on the same road: the Easter shift daily from our world to

the Kingdom. The Eucharist celebrates this gift with the same trust, hope nourishment. It walks along the same street. It is the daily passage of Easter in our world.

4. The Eucharist in our daily life

a. The Eucharist gives life to the Church, and immerses our life in the Passover of Jesus

Every Sunday, every day, it feeds us (“Take, eat drink”). It gives new life, fruit of the service of Jesus. It reveals to us that the choice of God in Christ was to give us full life.

b. The Eucharist makes daily life fruitful

The Eucharist is given us in bread and wine which are vital food for our daily sustenance. And is valued as food. It makes our daily life fruitful. This daily gift is what daily life is all about. It can express the full reality of the Eucharist. It fills our daily life in its continuity and unity, in its beauty and its fragility, and its full world.

c. The Eucharist permeates daily life, making it come alive

The Second Vatican Council strongly emphasizes that “*the Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of all Christian life*” (LG 11). Nourished by the Eucharist, in the fellowship of the table and of life, of our fragility but also with our faith, we are permeated with the dynamism of the redemptive incarnation. In the Eucharist - prolonged in adoration - we offer ourselves to the Spirit of Jesus: intensify in us the desire of the Heart of the Lord. Share in your heart the desire of Jesus for this coming together. Let us make our own his desire to realize his commitments to a filial and fraternal life, in solidarity with the most needy and generous toward the poor of the world and saddened by the tragedy of sin. We do this in communion with the Father in the assurance of the ultimate victory read upon the glorious face of the Lord.

5. The “deification of the earth”

1. The universal dimension of the mystery of Christ

“*Everything is yours ... but you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.*” Our universe, our life, is Christ’s and Christ is for the earth: realism and universalism, the cosmic dimension of the mystery of Christ and the Christological dimension of creation. The Eucharist realizes the fundamental communion between Christ and the world. A Christian vision of our earth, an adhesion to Christ which sends us back to our earth and to our daily lives. The earth, the world and we: they are all the result, the fruit, of God-agape. And at the center of it all is Christ, the Incarnate Word.

2. The Eucharist, the “deification of the earth”

The Eucharist, sacrament of the real presence of Love, becomes in us the ever-renewing fountain of the energy of love, in our frailty of forgiven sins. It supports us – in coherence with the gift we have been given – to continue today wherever we are and in whatever we initiate, the choice of Jesus in his incarnation and in his various works during his life, the service of availability, welcome, goodness and mercy, particularly as manifested in his preference for the poor and the little ones.

3. The social reign of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus

The Eucharist nourishes our daily response to the welcome, renewal, thanksgiving and solidarity in the service of the kingdom. “*The Gospel is not enough. Without the Eucharist, the Gospel cannot*

complete God's total plan for us, to be our Emmanuel... A society which does not prostrate itself before the Eucharist cannot be a living society, because it does not acclaim its Sovereign on the throne for whom God has chosen to pour out his life." (ESC 2/15.A.VI).

E. Testimony

A few weeks ago, two young men came to our house. They gave me a lot of money to feed the people. In Calcutta, we prepare meals for 9,000 people a day. They wanted the money to be spent to feed these people.

I asked them: "From where did you get so much money?" They said, "We got married two days ago. Before we got married, we decided not to have wedding dresses, and no party. We give you our money."

For Hindu high society this is normally a scandalous decision. In fact, many were stunned to see such a family of social standing not to dress and celebrate the wedding. Then I asked them, "Why have you done this?" And here's the strange answer they gave me: "We love each other so much that we wanted to give something to someone else so that we might start our life together with a sacrifice."

I was very much impressed to see how these people could be so hungry for God. One way to realize their love for one other was to make this great sacrifice. I'm sure that you do not understand what this means. But in our country, in India, we know what it means not to have clothes and parties for marriage. However, these two young people had the courage to do this. This really is love in action. (*Mother Teresa of Calcutta*)

F. Group discussion and sharing

- In your view, how do you put together Eucharist and daily life?
- During the day, do you think of the Eucharist? When and how?
- Is my life enlightened or sustained by the Eucharist?
- Are there moments or daily aspects (personal or family, work, or relations) that relate me to the Eucharist (preparation, celebration, after the celebration as its prolongation, adoration)?
- Is my daily life a "Eucharistic life?"

G. Prayer moment

A brief prayer said by one person and responded to by the others, or by a group alternating with one another.

Rit. Father, give us today our daily bread...

Give me this day our daily bread

The bread of hope,
to give hope.

The bread of joy,
so that I may share it.

The bread of intelligence,
to do the impossible.

The bread of laughter,
to pass on to others.

The bread of mercy,
so that it can receive and give pardon.

The bread of sorrow,
in order to share.

The bread of thanksgiving,
so that evil will not attack me.

The bread of fraternity,
to become one with my brothers and sisters.

The bread of time,
to get to know you.

The bread of silence,
so that I may love you.

Song: *Bread from heaven*

**Bread from heaven: that is you, Jesus,
way of love: you make us like you.**

No, the earth did not remain cold,
You have remained with us
To nourish us with you, Bread of Life;
and inflame humanity with your love.

Yes, in heaven and on earth:
You have remained with us
But you take us with you into your home
Where we live together with you for eternity.

No, death cannot make me afraid,
You have remained with us.
And whoever live in you, lives forever.
Be God with us, be God with us, God in our midst!

Other texts

(If in the beginning you used the image of Koder)

(John 13). In the painting, we see Jesus and Peter who bow deeply to each other. Jesus is kneeling, almost prostrate before Peter, we do not even see his face. In the painting, Jesus is fully attentive to his service to this man in front of him. We see his face reflected in the water, on Peter's feet. Peter

bows to Jesus. His left hand makes a gesture of refusal: “Lord do you want to wash my feet?” (John 13.6). His right hand and his head, in contrast, lean with all their weight on the shoulders of Jesus. Peter does not look at the Master, we can only see his face reflecting in the basin. In John's Gospel, Jesus responds to Peter's question hesitantly: “*What I do, you do not understand now, but later you will understand*” (John 13.7). And this word is reflected in the image. Now, in this situation, it is not about the encounter but about accepting the experience. Peter's body is a body that is going through a process, a meeting from head to toe with a person discovers his need to be washed, a person who discovers at the same time his dignity. I am in need that the Master washes my feet, I am not worthy to have him wash my feet ... That is why it is not the face of Jesus that is at the center of the image, but the bright face of Peter on which reflects the sign of regained dignity.

Peter's eyes are directed at Jesus' feet. These feet are immense, visible only to the eye of the beholder of the image. We follow Peter's gaze which bring us to look at these feet. In this way, we discover what Peter is experiencing. It is a call to service: “*I have given you an example, that as I have done, you should also do.*” (John 13.15). Peter understands that he is committing himself to repeat the same gestures of Jesus, not only to himself, but also to every brother and sister, the body of Christ, his ecclesial body. Behind the characters, we see on the table a glass with wine and a plate with the broken bread, items not relegated to the background. They bring us closer to the event at the center of the image. The light that emanates from the clothes of Jesus, is reflected on the corner of the tablecloth. There is also the shadow of two people who are embracing the signs of the Eucharist. It is a unique meeting. The same light shines on the bread and wine, the hands and feet of the disciple and the Master. It is the light of God's faithfulness to his covenant, the light of the abandonment of Jesus into the hands of the Father, the light of salvation.

The painter, Sieger Köder, often uses blue as the color of transcendence. The blue carpet contrasts with the brown colors, the colors of the earth, which predominate in the image. The blue carpet indicates that the sky is now on the ground, where is lived the gift of self to the other. The image tells us, if we Christians are seeking the face of Christ, we must go to the feet of the other, get involved in a service recognizing the dignity, accepting the need of the other. But how to live this service without offending the other, not letting one's feet be washed by a friendly hand without recognizing the needy? Where two bodies are intertwined in giving and receiving, they build the body of Christ. There is where one begins to understand the meaning of the Eucharist.

Suggestions for further reading

- P. André Perroux, *L'Eucaristia: la presenza del Risorto trasfigura la nostra vita* (formazione ITS 1998-1999).

Meeting XXV

THE “SENSE OF THE CHURCH” ACCORDING TO FATHER DEHON

Objectives of the meeting

- To know the experience of the Church of Fr. Dehon, the witness of his family and the participation in the life of the Church in his time.
- To recognize and welcome the gift of the domestic church and the local church to the journey of faith.
- To question oneself about one’s response and possible response to one’s domestic church and one’s community in the Church?

Context of the meeting

The intent of this meeting is to understand how Fr. Dehon looked at the Church. He developed in his life not only an intellectual reflection. He participated fully in the life of the church of his time, full of gratitude to be united with his Lord in communion of his “Body”. He always wanted to put all his personal energies at its disposal. He received much but also gave much to the Church. His experience of the Church can also deepen our participation in the Christian community.

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

You might begin this meeting with the suggestion of Pierre Duval on the importance of the hands of his father and the words of his mother. Both were great witnesses to the domestic church. This will open the meeting with the face of God and to the universal Church.

The French singer Pierre Duval tells us:

“At home, religion had no solemn character: it was limited to our daily evening prayer. It was graven in my memory the prayer position of my father. He came back tired from work in the fields always with a large bundle of wood on his shoulders. After dinner he would kneel on the floor, leaning his elbows on a chair and his head in his hands, without looking, without moving, without any sign of impatience.

And I thought: “My father is so strong. He is in charge of the house. He knows how to drive the oxen. He does not bow his head before the union boss... Before God my father becomes like a child. His whole face changes when he talks with God. It must be a pretty big God, if my father so devoutly kneels before him. But he must also be very good, if he talks with him without changing his clothes.”

On the other hand, I never saw my mother kneeling. She was too tired in the evening to do so. She sat in our midst, holding the youngest in her arms. She looked at us, but said nothing. She did not object even when the little one was squirming in her arms, or when a storm raged about the house or when the cat was ill.

And I thought: “God must be very simple, if you can talk to him with a baby in your arms and wearing an apron. He must also be a very important person, if she makes no fuss about the cat and the day to day things.”

And the hands of my father and the lips of my mother taught me God far more than the catechism.”

B. Biblical text (Acts 2.42-47)

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

C. Text of Fr. Dehon

The love of the Heart of Jesus has formed the Church, has given it grace which she hands on through the sacraments:

“As Eve came from Adam's side during his ecstatic sleep ... the Church, daughter and wife of the Savior, came out of the Heart of Jesus during the mystic slumber of the cross. In fact, it is the love of this divine Heart that has shaped the plan of the church, its celestial Bride, to whom he entrusted the task of continuing his mission on earth. It is this divine Heart, this ineffable love that merited the Church with all the graces that are necessary and which she communicates to us through the divine sacraments ... Drawing the Church from his heart..., our Lord shows what he expects from the Church, that is from us: a true and tender affection, an affection of a spouse ... We see the water and the blood depicting the sacraments of the Church ... These different sacraments are the river of life ... that comes from the heart of the Lamb... This river make fruitful souls and makes them bring forth delicious fruits. These divine sacraments are like the Sacred Heart same hiding under sensible signs, to give us his love and his mercy” (CAM 2 / 211-213).

Based on texts by Dehon, p. Andrea Tessarolo commented:

“The Church is life, and life is never a cage that mortifies, or a sect enclosed in itself, but a fruitful source for society. The Church is life, and wants to live, well aware that Christian values necessarily mature in a rightful and fruitful social behavior.”¹

D. Reflection

In the Christian tradition, we often speak about the “sensus Ecclesiae” (the sense of the Church). It is not just a theological reflection on the Church. It is, above all, the appearance, the experience of

¹ «L’Église ne veut pas mourir. Elle veut vivre et répandre la vie. Elle ne veut pas se contenter d’accroître, d’élever et d’améliorer la vie privée de ses disciples fidèles; elle sent qu’elle a aussi des sources de vie féconde pour la société. Elle peut en élever les connaissances, en fortifier la morale, en développer la prospérité. Et ce qu’elle peut faire, elle veut le faire pour le bien des peuples. Elle s’agite sur le lit de mort où l’État a voulu la clouer. Elle veut vivre et propager la vie dans le sein des sociétés comme dans la conscience des fidèles et dans l’intimité des familles.

«Il vous faut, dit-elle à l’État, quelques principes fondamentaux et quelques règles de justice, et la philosophie est impuissante à vous les donner. Il vous faut une sève de solidarité, de charité et d’union qui fortifie la vie sociale et l’Évangile seul en est la source». (“Mort civile”, REV 5709/2).

the Church in life: how each of us, inserted into the Church through baptism, is seen or understood. It is constructed as a person-in-communion. From it one receives and bears witness to the faith; from it one realizes one's vocation.

1. "Domestic Church"

Father Dehon has experienced the Church primarily as a "Church alive in the house". It is the "domestic church" that is offered, received, lived in the community of the family, in the continuity of generations, traditions, culture. A small community situated in the countryside and in a parish. In many of his writings, he remembers his family with gratitude. Especially his mother who "*has indirectly made my vocation and will get my salvation*" (NHV 14/167). "*The beautiful soul of my mother was passed in me ...*" (NHV 1/12). Then his father, who rarely practiced his faith, but who was rich in human values: honesty and loyalty, love of life, hard work, attention to the events of his time, civilly committed, ... "*I thank you, my God, for giving it to me ... His memory is sweet to me, it helps me, strengthens me*" (NHV 1/9). From his mother, aunts, from his family Fr. Dehon acknowledges that he learned to pray. He hardly knew how to talk, when, as a child, he learned to pray following the lips of his mother. Thus, he says he received the sense and taste of liturgy at home. His solidarity with the poor started in his family.

"I owe everything to my mother, my faith, piety, christian education..." (NQT 13/145 – July 1899). "*I thank our Lord because he has blessed my family. My father until the end of his life was a real model of faith; my brother remained a practicing Christian; my niece married a Christian. My mother remained all her life an authentic disciples of the Sacred Heart.*" (NQT 5/37 – 6.7.1890).

2. The Church: the space for communion

From the beginning the Church was linked to human life. It is immersed in the affectionate and demanding and educative environment of the family. A Church that is in step with life, which can be criticized, even neglected, but never seriously put in question. Family-Church-ambiance: in this sort of community one learns to mature as a person and as a Christian. The "sense of the Church", here, is instinctive. A vital environment, where filled with joys and sufferings, tensions and disappointments, but outside of it, it is almost impossible to think to live. In this way, throughout his life, Father Dehon "felt" the Church.

Like life itself, this church is a very mysterious reality: no one can grasp it or define it. It is prior to us, it carries us. With it we are impregnated. It involves us. From it we derive the gratitude and commitment, humility and openness, desire to learn about the Church in its history and in our time. "We feel" the Church in the fiber of its many relationships, as a gift received, served and transmitted. We experience it as a space of communion in which each person has their own "place", where each one discovers and lives his or her vocation. There is a spirit of the Church just as there is a spirit of a family of which we are not always aware ... still it is important.

The Church is in the development of the person: it is grounded in our journey of life, in its various steps, and persists despite our fragility. It is not just "above" or "beside" our life: it is within our everyday life to make present another dimension, a deeper sense, something essential that transcends us.

It is a Church connected to the human life, immersed in the affectuous, exigent and educative of the family right from the beginning. This is a Church that goes hand in hand with life, that can be

criticized, even neglected, but will never be discussed seriously. Family-Church-neighborhood: in this community one learns to be mature as a person and as a Christian.

3. A universal Church

Leo Dehon learned to know early on and during his adolescence how this church was one with his growth. He learned in particular the popular aspect of the church of France with all its traditions, its long and complex history, its saints, its practices, its basilicas and sanctuaries, the pilgrimage places, the appearances... Recall how in Paris, in his student time, he frequented the parish of San Sulpice: *“There reigned an atmosphere there of grace and prayer, the holiness of a sanctuary, the piety of the morning mass at which many simple and intent persons assisted.”* (NHV 1/68). He found a profound grace in participating in the life of the Church: *“I was happy to belong to the great Christian people. It is like a shivering of the faith and love of the Church which goes through the whole community.”* (NHV 1/69).

In his youth, he travelled and studied in the seminary in Rome. In this way, he experienced the richness of the Church and could touch with his hands the diversity and complexity of the various countries and cultures. He was fascinated by the Church of Rome, the Church of St. Peter and St Paul, of the martyrs, the popes and all the saints. He was also much attracted to the Italian Church: *“In Milan I visited again the cathedral and St. Ambrose as if I was revisiting old friends. Here one could in peace feel united with St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and St. Charles Boromeo...”* (NQT 12/44 – 8.5.1997).

4. His attachment to the Pope

With his Christian sensitivity, he was very attentive to the universal Church united around the Pope. He was passionately in love with the history of Church *“the great Christian era”* (NQT 4/272), the holy land in the world of catholicity. With pride and conviction he wanted to put into effect the civilizing work of society which the Gospel had made possible during the centuries.

He participated as a stenographer at the First Vatican Council. With youthful enthusiasm – he was 26 at the time -he greeted the opening of the first session (December 8, 1869): *“A beautiful day! What a moving spectacle! Around the Vicar of Jesus Christ... all the successors of the apostles, all the pastors of dioceses are united to give witness to the doctrine of the Gospel. It is the living Peter ... and around him... the whole church. It is ready to listen to the Holy Spirit and the proclaim his teaching. What a beautiful witness of the unity of the Church and its links of charity and obedience which strengthens and perpetuates this unity.”* (NHV 7/1 e 4).

In his trip around the world he visited the young and fervent Church of Canada, the United States, but also the courageous yet modest Church of the Far East, present like leaven in so many cultures and political and economic situations. Later, when he thinks of his congregation, he thinks of the service it can bring to the universal Church. Catholicity is the integrating part of the mystery of the Church of which Christ wishes to be the Savior. This made the Church a missionary community. Father Dehon expressed this service to the universality of the Church through the commitment to the Reign of Christ, a reign which is the unite all humanity, *“in souls and societies”*, cultures, races, situations, populations, especially the poorest and the unprotected.

5. The Church: gift and task

The Church, in the experience of Fr. Dehon and ours, is a reality full of contrasts: on one hand it comes from God the Trinity, and precedes us. In this community, which precedes us and to which we have been introduced is like being introduced to life itself. On the other hand, the Church has made a contribution to humanity through its members. It is a community to be built through the free personal and generous commitments of so many. It is a church full of fragility, filled with faults and human errors. One Church to be built, to serve and to grow!

Father Dehon was a practical man. He gave a clear testimony of the task and of his awareness of his own poverty. Already in early adolescence, he wanted to serve the Church. He was always aware of his vocation to the priesthood. Later this desire expanded in a search for a deeper union with Christ in the vocation to religious life. This desire motivated him in his most committed moments. It became the unifying point of his personhood and his actions. With all his energy he wanted to serve *“The feign of the Sacred Heart in souls and in societies.”*

After he had received this Christian life in the Church and through it, Fr. Dehon to pass it on to others. In innumerable ways he dedicated himself to the ministry of education and the human and Christian formation. It became a trait of his experience of the Church. The education of youth sustained and continued what he had received in his family. The education of adults, parents, men and women, business men and workers, priests... The promotion of maturity of persons according to their personal talents and callings. He was a passionate educator who found different ways of putting it into practice: books, periodicals, congresses, conferences, initiatives, personal relations...

6. The Church: the family of Jesus

We cannot deny that Father Dehon belonged to a “clerical” Church. Nevertheless, he felt called *“to go to the people”* and to overcome what divided the Church from people in his time. To give new energy to this Church, he committed himself to form mature, competent and motivated persons, who could make the Gospel present in all sectors of society. He spoke these words to those who were engaged in Christian witness: *“First of all, whether you are a priest or a lay person you ought to strengthen in you the thought that ... you are to be the salt of society and the light of social life ... Don't close yourself up in your timidity ... the mistake is to hide behind prudence, confidentiality, moderation, impossibility ... Go to the living, to men and women, to the people ... Do not lose sight of Christ and the Apostles' (MSO 393-395).*

But do not forget that the Church is first of all the Family of Jesus, gathered by the love of the Lord, founded to be in communion with him. *“The friends of the Sacred Heart work in the service of his Kingdom ... They do everything to allow the kingship of Jesus Christ to win on earth through his love ... the first means is ... our love of compassion. The second is the daily prayer for the clergy ... Everyone on their part must fully respond in accordance with his or her vocation “CAM 2 / 71-72).*

In his consciousness of the Church, Father Dehon felt very strongly the contrast between the Church's vulnerability and her being a never decreasing mystery. On the one hand it suffers from the divisions among believers, the sin of Christian countries, the apathy and indifference of the clergy, the abandonment in which people live ... On the other hand it is becoming more aware of the life that comes from God the Father, the gift of Christ, the strength of the Spirit of communion. He is attentive to the mystical dimension of the Christian experience and the Church. He celebrates the

love of the Father, his victory in Jesus' Passover, the presence of the Risen Lord in his "body" which is the Church.

It also gave a special attention to the "communion of saints", to the bond that unites men and women of all conditions and of all time in the salvation of Jesus. His prayer is nourished by this communion: "*God has designed the church as a family. As a large family it came from his heart, and so it must return there. The communion of saints is the ebb and flow of the divine goods in the city of God, that is, between God and us, between the earth and heaven ...*" (NQT 39 / 32-33 - October 1915).

E. Testimony

We have explored the testimony of Fr. Dehon. It is good to find some passionate witnesses of the local church.

We present the testimony of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini (1927-2012), the archbishop of Milan in a talk he gave in 1981 after a year of his episcopate.

How I see the Church of tomorrow

I have been asked several times how I see and what I desire about the Church of tomorrow.

What images of the Church does the Spirit place in our hearts?

I can try to give a few traits:

1. It is a Church fully under the Word of God, nourished and liberated by that Word.
2. A Church which places the Eucharist at the center of its life; a church which contemplates its Lord, which does everything "in memory of him" and models itself by his gift.
3. A Church which has not fear to use the structures and the human resources, but uses it and does not become a servant. A Church that wants to speak to today's world, to culture, to different civilizations, with the simple word of the Gospel.
4. A Church that speaks more with deeds than with words; saying nothing but words that are supported by facts and whose facts are real. People are so tired of words! For that reason, there should be a certain reserve in speaking the word and to give them more dignity and effectiveness. Of the Messiah it was said, "He did not cry out nor raise his voice; he did not make his voice heard in the street' (Isaiah 42.2). The truth has its own power which does not depend on the tone of voice, but from the harmony between words and deeds.
5. A Church attentive to the signs of the Spirit's presence in our times, wherever they occur.
6. A Church conscious of the arduous and difficult journey of many people today, the almost unbearable suffering of much of the world, sincerely sharing in the pains of all and eager to be there to console.
7. A Church that brings the liberating and encouraging word of the Gospel to those who are heavily laden, remembering the words of Jesus: "woe to you, teachers of the law, you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them." (Luke 11.46)
8. A Church, able to discover the new poor, and not too worried about making mistakes in an effort to help them creatively.
9. A Church that does not favor any category, neither old, nor new, A church which equally welcomes the young and the old, which educates and trains all its children in faith and charity and wants to validate all the different charisms, services and ministries in the unity of Communion.

10. A Church that is humble of heart, united and compact in its discipline, a church where God has primacy.
11. A church that gives a patient discernment, objectively and realistically evaluating its relationship with the world, with today's society; a Church which pushes one to the active participation and responsible presence, with respect and deference to the institutions, but remembers well the words of Peter: 'It is better to obey God than people' (Acts 4.19).
12. A church that ... but this discussion is endless. It is the discourse of the construction of a Church firmly founded on tradition and open to the Spirit of God, docile to the Magisterium and attentive to the signs of the times...

G. Prayer moment

It can be recited like a profession of faith by a single person or in turns (by number or by line) or by all.

- 1. I believe in God the Creator and Father of all,**
Source of all paternity and maternity,
Rich in mercy and tenderness to all his sons and daughters.

- 2. I believe in Jesus Christ, brother to all.**
He shared in his family in Nazareth all the joys and sorrows of every family.
I believe in his love with which he inclines to all our suffering,
Which welcomes the sinner and changes the heart of people.

- 3. I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord**
Because his love was faithful to the end,
and wondrous into his resurrection.
Like a family he gathered his own around a table ready to give us
His body as bread, as an example of his service,
With a lifestyle of welcome, hospitality and communion.

- 4. I believe in the Holy Spirit**
Who the human family toward unity and peace,
Who speaks to the heart of every creature to solicit
A response of faith and love.

- 5. I believe that the Trinity is the family of God,**
I believe that in his breath of love, every family lives and hopes.
Toward his divine embrace, as the horizon of limitless goodness,
Everyone and every family is set on its path of life.

- 6. I believe that the Church is the family of the disciples of Jesus**
And I thank the Lord because in it I have found the light of the Gospel
And the grace of the sacraments.
In this Church I want to live and participate
Because it can present us one day to the Lord
As a beautiful spouse, holy and spotless.

All. Thank you, Father, that you came to meet us through a community of believers.

- You had faith in us with the proclamation of the Good News
- You revealed to us the death and resurrection of the Lord.
- We have believed in love, your love, which overcomes all limitations.
- You have nourished us with daily bread.
- You have opened our eyes with the light of your Christ.
- We meet you and recognize you in your actions, in other humans, in things.

T. Make that we may know you intimately beyond the days of time
when faith and hope vanish in love.
Together with Mary, the angels and saints,
we may have our fill in your presence,
that already now we may perceive the signs and symbols with our weak sight.
You extend to us your embrace of the Father
until we see you face to face. Amen.

Song *The Church's one foundation!*

*is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is the new creation
By water and word:
From he came and sought her
To be his holy bride:
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.*

*Elect from every nation
Yet one o'er all the earth
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued.*

(Samuel John Stone, 1839-1900)

Tune: AURELIA, no 527)

Suggestions for further reading

- André Perroux, *Il senso di Chiesa secondo Padre Dehon* (formazione ITS 2004).
- Pope Francis and the guidelines for the Church of the future, “indirizzo del percorso della Chiesa odierna”, a homily given at the closing of the ecclesial congress of Florence, November 2015.

Meeting XXVI

COMMUNION OF VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH

Objectives of the meeting

- To welcome the symphony of the plurality of charisms, vocations, presences to which all contribute to give a rich and harmonious face to the Church
- To understand oneself bound by this interdependence, which gives value to every vocation and enriches the experience of the other
- To sense oneself as men and women of communion in the Church making it a living body.

Context of the meeting

In this meeting, we want to reflect on the links of interdependence and the possible communion in the Church, recognizing the gift of the other. We allow ourselves to be claimed by the gift and the task to make of the diversity “one heart and one mind” and to make a contribution to the welcome and the edification of the “Body of Christ.”

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

A puzzle of the face and body of Christ: everyone upon arrival is given a piece of the puzzle. At the moment of sharing, or at another time assigned by the group leader, inserts his own piece, to form a whole. It is a form of a rite of communion of the various pieces.

Another possible beginning would be to give out two texts: ‘If a note says...’ and ‘No man is an island’ (See texts 1 and 2 below). They can stimulate a first conversation.

B. Biblical text (1Cor 12.12ff)

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot were to say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear were to say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the

members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

C. Text of Fr. Dehon

“The Church is the bride of the Spirit. The Spirit, the author of the life of the Savior in the womb of Mary, is also the author of his mystical life in the Church. The Church was in Christ. It has “expanded” when Christ chose his apostles, and these became ministers of the Church when they received the Holy Spirit. It is by the Spirit that the apostles were converted people to faith, and no one could enter the Church unless they were regenerated by water and the Spirit. When the bishops become successors of the apostles, they are enabled by the Spirit to govern the Church ...

Let us listen to St. Augustine. In the human body the soul gives life to all its parts: it sees through the eyes, it hears through the ears, it speaks with his mouth; in a word, it gives life to all the members. The functions are different, however, life is one: so in the Church. The Holy Spirit animates all members: it gives to some the science of truth, to others the gift of miracles, to others the virginal purity, to others marital purity; He is the life of the Church as the soul is the life of the body. “ (ASC 9 / 239-241 and 243).

“The Church is the bride and the mystical body of Jesus Christ. Souls devoted to the love of the Heart of Jesus are like the heart of the bride, the organ of the Church to love and to console Jesus. The reparatory souls are like the heart of the mystical body of Jesus Christ, the organ of the Church to be immolated to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Active orders are the hands of the mystical spouse of Jesus Christ. Missionaries are his feet: “How beautiful – on the mountains - are the feet of the messenger who announces peace” (Is 52: 7). Orders dedicated to preaching are his mouth. The orders dedicated to knowledge are his head. Those dedicated to love are like his heart. It is the “part” of Mary, Saint John, the Magdalene ... it's a good “part” (VPR IV.32.II).

D. Reflection

1. No one is an island

The *Church* does not exist, if there are not any longer persons gathered by the love of Christ Jesus. Every person has his or her dignity, but he or she is profoundly linked in communion with others.

There is no *symphony* (consonance, harmony) if there are not a number of voices, melodies which come together in a unique measure. The symphony is the result of many voices who come together in a harmonious score.

There are no *vocations*, if there is no one with a function, task, differences, operationally present in a community.

Necessary presence together

Every person to be him or herself, needs another, that is “other” persons beside him or her, persons different from them, but yet in some way connected with them. It is like saying:

You must be there, you have to be yourself with your own identity and character traits ...

You need to be there because you're needed in the world, for the project of God in history today ... Others need you ... I need you!

To be myself, I have need of others

Above all I must be able to welcome others in my life. I depend on others not only at the beginning of my life, but also to grow in my identity. The others are a necessary mirror and a help in my life. The dependence on others starts early in life, but, in different ways, accompanies all growth into maturity and perseverance. This is true for the family, for society and for the church. It is equally true for the Christian vocation. There can be no Christian maturation of a vocation if there is no contact and collaboration of others. A “voice without harmony” can only take place with a contemporaneous expression of another voice.

To become myself, I need to give myself to others

“To live life” is to make oneself available, to enter into relations, to take one’s part. Hence, to become conscious that I do not enter into the play of life, if I do not give of myself, if I do not accept the team play of which life consists, I will not ever be myself, never live true love, never realize myself. A vocation means to become available for God, for the other, in a concrete and precise way. From this availability and reciprocal dedication comes the communion of vocations.

The less one actualizes this inter-dependence, the more one will develop a style of egoism, abuse of power, the exploitation of the other. This is all about living true relations with one another.

2. The Church is a living Body

In order to speak of the church, the apostle Paul used the image of the body: the living body of the living Christ (1Cor 12). Jesus is the head, that is, the source of its vitality. Christians are the members. This image reveals that the different gifts are relational to one another. That which lives, grows and works is the total Christ. The roles, the functions are complementary.

Every one gives, everyone receives.

If one gift is lacking the organism does not function.

There may be many instruments but the unity and symphony are lacking. The awareness of the inter-dependence generates the necessity, the will, to live a “life of relationship” in the double movement of giving and receiving, of giving oneself and welcoming the other.

By being the Church, the Christian understands him or herself as a person of communion. In the mystical body of Christ there is in force “a spirit of the body”, according to which each one is for all and all for each one. A person of solidarity with others takes responsibility for the other. Keep in mind that this does no harm to having a vigorous personal individuality. It is like in the world of love. My salvation comes about in the context of a community. This will make it much more secure.

The more I am aware that I am “part of a whole”, the more alive will be my affective and effective relationships. The more I am aware that we are “part of a whole”, the more alive and

affective is our relationship. “There is one body” formed by the plurality of believers: “all of us in one Spirit were baptized into one body.”

“Now you are the body of Christ and each one individually are members of it”: this is the big announcement and the great reality at the basis of our Christian life. Baptism inserted us in Christ as His members. It is in him that we are now, that we exist and move. Fr. Dehon says: “Each of us is a fiber of the Heart of Jesus” (CAM 1/163).

Everyone needs to *“be in communion with himself, with others and even with things and creation. This needs unfolds more often as the desire for power and appropriation, only to be wounded when one cannot build authentic bonds and must be content with the virtual ones, limited impersonal exchanges or 'terminal contracts' of friendship and love. No sane person will remain so for long, if the relations around her break down, betrayed, humiliated and abandoned”*².

3. The Church is like a spouse

“He who saw this has testified, and his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth” (John 19.35).

The evangelist emphasizes three times that event about which he speaks requires a kind of oath. About what is he speaking? He saw the birth of the Church out of the side of Christ. The community is like a bride, coming out of heart of the man who is Jesus (John 19:34; Gen 2.21-22). In his Passover, it finds its origin, meaning, and purpose. As such, the Church is the bride (Eph 5.23-32). Every situation in life (marriage, celibacy, widowhood) highlights an aspect of the bridal relationship between Christ and the Church.

Here we have a first image in which the harmony between the many gifts appears (see 1Cor 7): every charism is an expression of the relation between Christ and the Bridegroom. For all believers in Jesus, the cross is the source of radical gift of Jesus. There are none more Christian signs. They are closer or further away to the extent that they give their lives for the Father and for people. Love is the root of every choice: we get married for love. It is for the same reason that one decides to become a priest, a nun, a monk. Love is the aim of every gift. The ideal, the model can only be lived in the fullness of Christ himself. No one can consider his charism as exhaustive in oneself; no one can propose it as normative for all. In each there is same Spirit, who constantly creates and yet repeats its models.

Called to love according to a specific vocation

The essential core of human nature is to be found in love. Every vocation brings alive in us the dynamic presence in the Trinity, that is, the dynamics of relationships: *“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love.”* *“I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as I have loved me”* (John 15. 9, 17, 23). Father – Son – Spirit are constantly at work and are characterized by a total reciprocal gift: each of them empties Self to give this self the other. From there come their total unity in love and their total fruitfulness.

In Christ, we are all alive. In him, married or single, religious or lay, we become a body given for the life of the world. No charism exists for itself. There is a balance between the

² G. ZEVIANI, *La persona cuore della pastorale*”, in *La rivista del clero italiano*, 2009/5, pp. 336ff.

various parts. The essential thing is the welfare, the full development, of the living organism. Everyone is stimulated by others to mirror one aspect of Christ, and each one offers something of the Gospel. The Risen Christ is one, but many are his witnesses. His face is like a living painting (Gal 3,1) in the Scriptures: the married or celibate, each in their own way, mirror some dimension of the Lord Jesus without every exhausting it. Each one also grows in the measure in which gives a new dimension to the charism of others.

4. The vitality of the Church: a never-ending exchange of gifts

a. Jesus: a universal and specific love

By choosing celibacy, some Christians give witness before the world that Jesus is more than a teacher or a great man: he is the Lord. “*Because of his name they have left houses, fields, wife and children* (Luke 18.29; Mt 19.29). “*In this way it shows that Christ did not have a family, a fiancé or wife, except for the Church*” (K. Barth). Jesus remained unmarried not because he saw something negative in marriage, but because in virginity he garnered by his total adherence to the Father and showed an identification between his life and the cause of the Kingdom. Some have strongly emphasized this aspect of the Lord Jesus. It gives a glimpse of that day in which we no longer marry (Mt 22.30). In its limitations, sexuality will disappear. The high emphasis on genitality will end. God will transfigure our bodies: we will love like him and in him.

Celibates will give to think to those who are engaged, to spouses, parents, infants to go beyond the small circle of their spouse, their loved ones and so open up to universalism that is typical of the heart of the Father, and the Heart of Jesus. Religious, through their life in community, show the true family dreamed by Christ, which one enters and in which one grows because each one searches there for the will of God (Mk 3.34 to 35). The ties of blood and kinship are recalibrated and superseded. The celibate, however, have need of trustworthy friends, people who are married, parents. They are all, in fact, witnesses of the love of Jesus which reaches every individual person. That is how he showed his care of Matthew, Zacchaeus, the demoniac of Gerassa, and Lazarus ... His universal love has always been specific, addressed to names. He expressed individualized care and tenderness.

b. Communion of vocations

For this reason it is important in the Church to have the encounters between the gift of marriage and the gift of virginity. Without this the celibate would become overbearing, cold and impersonal. Without the help of the gift of virginity, marriage could easily become a happiness of two.

It is, however, another gift that comes from widows and widowers. They show in an eloquent way the traumatic dimension of the cross: at the Church the spouse has been “taken away” (Mt 9.15). They did not choose this condition in the same way the Jesus did not seek his death. They assume it, confront it as disciples who bear their cross behind him. God has made them the poorest of his religious. So it pleased Him (Mt 11.26). Thus they now live towards their reunification, the encounter with one's spouse. They show the Church that in the future finds the motivation to continue every day.

c. *God is first*

“*You follow me!*» (Mt 8.21-22). Jesus says to the man who asked him to be permitted to first bury his father. The consecrated person put the accent on the peremptory character of every call. God has the primacy. Nothing is more valuable. When we hear his voice, we drop every mine and thine. It is dangerous to hesitate, worse still, to turn around. The relations with one’s family, house, society, undergo a radical overturning. When the Lord come, there is an exodus.

In this context one gets a clear sense when we look at the choices of monks and cloistered people. With a powerful voice these persons announce that only God is enough for them, only he is their goal. God is their food, clothing, their dwelling, their friend, the one they will eat at table with. Their apostolate consists in saying all this to others. More than ever these persons stand within the Church, within the world. To the community and to all creation they indicate the direction of “the new heaven and the new earth.” They help all to contemplate the means to be enlightened in the splendor. But the world would be a sad place, if there were only monks and celibates!

d. *God is for us*

Those who are married, Christians who are committed to the world, show Jesus, the human face of God. Without them, the Lord would risk being painted as an adversary of the world and of life. By using things and good, by living the joy of genitality, they give praise to the Creator God. In particular, the testimony of parents show the God of Jesus who in loving generates. A possible meeting between these gives can be realized and reaffirmed by an old tradition. Monasteries, cenobites, hermits can become the place where the married Christian or politician can meet a man or woman of God, a spiritual person to understand something of this entangled and complex reality.

E. Testimony

It is good to get to know a significant experience of the communion of vocation in the local church.

The parish: a place of communion, mission and brother- and sisterhood.

This is the witness of a parish which put its major emphasis on a “missionary fraternity”, that is, an experience of communal life and pastoral responsibility between the parish priest and a family of the parish (Rossella de Logu).

My story starts about 14 years ago, when, one evening, our parish priest, Father Alberto, confided to some families who worked most closely with him, that he had a project: “I have in my head that I wanted to do something. I want our community to become a different community.” He told us that he had been, in agreement with the diocese, to propose that a family come and live with us. I must admit that even people close to the pastor looked into his eyes and said: “A family? and to do what? Are we not enough for you?” That was only the first response.

We are a community of Quarto Oggiaro, a neighbourhood of Milan very poor (peripheral some would say) and often in the news. The community does not have a real building for the celebrations and activities, and is housed already for 25 years in a former kindergarten. This precarious existence made it easy to accept a change in the organization of the community. It

also facilitated the fact that this community already 30 years earlier had a priest, as “co-founder”, who taught us right from the beginning how people might relate to one another. It became a trait that has remained with our community: “better less activity, but done well; better less activity, but meet the people; better less activity, but proclaim the Gospel to everyone, without asking for returns. “

Fourteen years ago, Mark and Martha came to live in the parish with their children and have began this journey with Fr. Alberto and us. When that experience ended, Nicola and Emanuela arrived. While for the first experience there had been hesitation, the second experience was strongly supported, desired, sought. We cannot see ourselves as a community, except in this way. Our community had always been a communion of different vocations. I could not grow without the missionary fraternity between the priest and the family. The brother/sisterhood has helped us to give a certain stamp to this neighbourhood. It wanted to have the face of a friendly Church, which proclaims the Gospel for what it is.

After a very long time of waiting, we finally built a new parish building and a new church. In this new phase with a structure so different from the current one, we thought that the presence of a family in the parish might help to create a link with our past and help in building our future. It might help to maintain our identity, our “the face of our parish” because for us, the parish is either missionary or there is no parish. We were deeply convinced.

The parish is really a communion of vocations. The Church is that of Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul: different vocations, equal dignity. I can tell you that the comparison between these different vocations is very important. And, objectively, in as much as a priest might have close collaborators, the change will be different depending on the first-hand experience of fraternity: to have a family with which to compare, from whom one can learn familiar rhythms. This benefits the whole community and even those whom we might call the “unexpected”, who find it difficult to accept a new face of the Church. To which I might add that there is a risk that a couple residing in the parish is seen as a sort of “elite sacristan” -while it is clear that is not their role. The risk is there, and it remains a risk that some of the people in the community do not understand what this experience is about. But, in my opinion, and in our opinion, it's a risk worth taking. I believe that our time requires it. The soil is fertile to make this a fraternal and missionary church. Now it is time to take responsibility, to try to express this new face of the Church: that of St. Paul, Aquila and Priscilla. I believe that the Spirit is really acting and dancing in us, but we have to give him a hand in creating opportunities.

I really liked the call: “to be a sign, not a tool”. We are called to proclaim the Gospel out of communion. What Gospel announcement can there be without communion? It is almost forty years that I do catechesis and I am increasingly aware that the message does not heard if the people do not meet this friendly and fraternal face, if they do not see a fraternity lived and witnessed. Because the family who lives in the parish, does this: they are a witness of the communion among the brothers and sisters. The fraternity has helped us to understand what is sometimes difficult, also the loneliness of priests. The difficulty of having to deal with sometimes pressing requests, to be considered by some as “service providers”. The fact of living an experience of fraternity between a priest and a family allows one to imagine in some way that these difficulties vanish.

[See Rossella de Logu, “[Parrocchia: un luogo di comunione, missione e vita fraterna](#)”]

F. Group discussion and sharing

As they group still has the pieces of the puzzle, let each share about his or hers awareness of being part of the body and speak about the gifts and difficulties of being part of a group. After each person has had the opportunity to speak, put together the puzzle.

1. How aware are you of being part of the one body of Christ: “one body” with many members? This consciousness is the joy of faith and belonging which leads to welcoming, care for the other, and working together. Where has it called me as a person? A tree need good soil to grow and bear fruit.
2. To live the life as a relation in love: this is the christian vocation, which has different ways of being realized.

Let us make an examen of conscience by letting ourselves be asked:

- How do I live the relation with myself? Do I feel called to be part of the body of Christ and be called to reproduce in me the Trinitarian dynamic?
- How do I live my relation with persons to whom I am connected at work, in the parish, in society? I am part of a relation of help which commits me to look after needs? Or does my relation respond differently?
- How do I live my relations with persons who are close to me (husband, wife, sons, daughters, confreres and sisters ...)? Do I tend to them enough or am I inclined to create a distance between us? Do I give in to the temptation, perhaps, to take care of things, to arrange help, to respond by myself? How do I play the family or community dynamics?

G. Prayer moment

**All: To know you, Lord Jesus,
is a joy to my heart, a light to my eyes, strength in my life.**

(single voices)

- Not only have you been made a Savior, powerful and intimate friend of all, but you wanted also a body to be bound in solidarity with ours in one church.
- You excluded no one; those far off and sinners you searched for with great passion.
- Make us participants of your passion for the church, happy because you are in us and we are in you in one Spirit.

**All: “Make your church one in your charity,
Holy in its participation in your holiness,
May it be also in our time a vessel of salvation for people,
A center of unity for all hearts,
An inspiration for sacred proposals for a general and enthusiastic renewal.
You who loved the church and for which you gave yourself,
Make her splendid in your love
And faithful in being and living the Gospel.”**

(Paul VI)

Lord Jesus, we entrust to you the faith of the Church
And the faith of those who feel weak and fragile.

**All: May your Holy Spirit strengthen all in unity
For which you prayer and offered your life in a paschal offering.**

At every invocation, either singly or in turn, say:

Increase our faith, Lord!

- May your Church be firm in faith and joyfu in hope ...
- May all baptized by proud to be your disciple ...
- May bishops, priests and deacons not become tired living and announcing the Gospel
- May there be new proclaimers of the Word: missionaries, catechists, religious ...
- May you draw to yourself our hearts so that we may be converted to your love...
- May our youth be attracted generously to their vocations ...
- May the understanding of the Gospel be increased in the relationships of priests-laity,
married – celibate, young – old...
- ... (*other intentions*)

God our Father, only source of unity and grace for your Church,

Listen to our prayer:

help and sustain our family to places of the passing on of faith and of the joy of faith;
may parents be attentive to the life journey of their children,
be discerning with them of the plan of God,
be supportive in their efforts, trials and failures.

Christ Jesus, who filled the house of Nazareth with your presence,
Give to our families the gift of recognizing the presence and work of God there,
of keeping the will of God and of recognizing in the everydayness of existence
the work of your redemption.

Holy Spirit, come down with your gifts upon the members of our family:

to parents give your counsel,
to children your wisdom,
to grandparents perseverance.

We confide all to you, because you make us

Happy in hope,
firm in faith in times of tribulation,
and persevering in prayer. Amen.

Other texts

1. *If the note says*

If the note says, it is not a note that makes the music

... There would be no symphonies!

If the word says, it is not a word that can make a page

... There would be no books!

If the stone would say: it is not a stone that can raise a wall

... There would be no homes!

If the drop of water says, it is not a drop of water can make a river

... There would be the ocean!

If the grain of wheat should say, it is not a grain of wheat that can sow a field

... There would be no harvest!

If a person says, it is not an act of love that can save mankind

... There would never be justice or peace,
or dignity or happiness on earth!

As the symphony needs each note ..

As the book needs each word ..

As the house needs each stone ..

Like the ocean needs every drop of water ...

As the harvest needs every grain ...

all of humanity needs you, wherever you are, unique, and therefore irreplaceable!

(Michel Quoist, "Speak to me of love")

2. *No one is an island*

«No one is an island, complete in his or herself, each one is a part of a continent, part of a whole (John Donne). Only when we see ourselves in our true human context, as belonging to a race understood as one organism, one body, can we begin to understand the importance of our lives, not only its successes, but also our failures and the unforeseen parts.

Every person is a part of me, because I am part and member of the human race.

Every Christian is part of this same body, because all are members of Christ. What I do appears therefore as done by others, with them and by them: whatever is done to me and done in me, through me and by me. But the responsibility for the parts remains with each one of us because they have life only in the body.”

(Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*)

Suggestions for further reading

- Fr. Francesco Duci, *La Chiesa comunione: dono e testimonianza* (formation ITS Province 2003).
- The Church, a symphony of vocations. “Ho bisogno di te” di Fr. Benini (Meeting of ITS Province 2010).

Meeting XXVII

LIFE OF PRAYER: EUCHARISTIC ADORATION

Objectives of the meeting

- To introduce to the prayer of adoration.
- To become aware that adoration is primarily a contemplation of the action of God, a response to the gift and the call to “be in the presence of God.”
- To welcome and live the service of Eucharistic adoration which Fr. Dehon has entrusted to those who live his charism.

The context of the meeting

In this meeting, we take into consideration a moment of prayer, dear to Fr. Dehon: Eucharistic Adoration which Fr. Dehon has given us as a service to the church.

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

If possible be in the presence of a fire and contemplate the flame, seeing its light and letting yourself be warmed by the flame. If no fireplace or fire is available, one can also use a large wax candle. Begin the meeting with the story “faces of light” (See other texts #1) or more directly through a song which tells how “the Lord is here and is calling you!”

B. Biblical text (Ex 3.1-12)

¹ Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, ‘I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.’ ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ ⁵ Then he said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ ⁶ He said further, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, ‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’ ¹¹ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ ¹² He said, ‘I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.’

B. Text of Fr. Dehon

Fr. Dehon invites us above all to fix our eyes on the Eucharist. Everything receives its meaning from this rite.

“Look at Jesus during the Last Supper: he is in an ecstasy of love, because in this moment he realizes the ideal of his whole life, receiving a torrent of grace from which even we can receive blessings and joy. “With great desire I want to eat the Passover with you” (Luke 22.15). All during his life, he hungered and thirsted for this Passover. The Eucharist became the well spring of all the gifts of his heart. And even that was not enough. In the Eucharist he wanted to express his love of friendship and intimacy. He wanted to stay with us, to converse with us and permit us too to abandon ourselves to him in a gentle and confident familiarity, in the same way that he permitted this to his disciples and especially to St. John. Here we find the heart of our brother and friend which was always ready to receive us, console us, fill us with graces, to enlighten us, to forgive us.” (CAM 3/13-14, 17 and 24).

This text is very meaningful. On the one hand, it re-affirms that the Eucharist refers to the Passover and not only to the Last Supper. From it, everything flows forth. Elsewhere, he speaks of the “heart of faith”. In this text, Fr. Dehon links the Eucharist with the other acts of worship. He makes a particular reference to adoration. He wishes to establish a continuity within the celebration. It is the same Jesus of the Mass who is here ready to “receive us.” Adoration is a service which be either individual and community-oriented. Dehon says that adoration is part of the very purpose why the Congregation was founded. He wanted his followers to live in the “name of the Church.” The text cited above is surprising: usually Jesus is thought of as the “divine prisoner”; but here he presents him as a friend ready to console us.

Does Jesus exhaust his action in the Mass? Here is how Dehon responds:

“One might believe that the Heart of Jesus remains inactive in the tabernacle. It is not like that. He lives there the greatest and most precious part of his life. Despite the silence, he speaks all the time: “always alive to intercede for us.” (Heb 7.25) In the Eucharist all exterior activity has stopped. It means that the life of the heart continues uninterrupted, without distraction. The Heart of Jesus is totally absorbed in one act, that of seeking us, interceding for us, praying for us.” (CAM 3/78 and 80)

“Now he suffers no more, but the reality of the immolation through remains. By means of this state of immolation, he offers to the Father the merits, the suffering of his death for us. He renews every moment the spirit of the passion, even though repeating the external reality. This constant oblation, the loving and unchanging joy of having suffered and died for us, is maintain in the Heart of Jesus, full of joy and glory, in the permanent state of being the Eucharistic victim, also outside of the sacrifice of the Mass.” (CAM 3/32-33).

“The Eucharist is an all-embracing statement of the love our Lord for us. Jesus is present in the Eucharist as a victim, as a friend, as a benefactor, as a consoler. He is present also as our king. He invites us to come to him... The Eucharist is the mystery of love ... We go to the Eucharist with faith, confidence and love. Jesus in the tabernacle is truly our God: we adore him.” (DSP 353-354).

“In adoration one is placed before Jesus in the sacrament of his love, of his self-gift ... It shows him there working with tireless zeal to instruct, to convert and save soles, to spread the reign every

time his own estate “that there no greater love than to give one’s life for those who love one another... And this love is his ... In the face of such heroism, how is it that we are not put under pressure by the yearnings of love? How can one not fly from the altars to help the brother, to turn to Jesus, in their place, and to make the devotion that gives primary witness for us? (VPR 30.I.1).

D. Reflection

1. Welcomed into the presence of the Lord

The dehonian relationship with the Eucharist has one particular outlet: Eucharistic adoration. Practiced with loving fidelity by Fr. Dehon all his life, he left it as a legacy to his religious family, like a solemn duty and a mission. His long spiritual testament ends: “*My last word will be to recommend daily adoration.*”

Catholic faith of the second millennium insisted strongly that the Eucharistic body and blood involved a personal presence, the very presence of the Risen Lord in his Church, constantly in the act of giving himself to her as the bread of life. The current exegesis of the Eucharistic words has confirmed the correctness of this equivalence. The Church felt, professed and defended against heresy the Eucharistic presence of Christ, especially its real continuation beyond the Mass. Once transformed by his word, the bread remains transformed forever, as long as its physical consistency remains.

The ancient habit of keeping the consecrated bread for the communion of the sick came to fill the time of the Church and all holy sites it is kept from one Mass to the next, and thus transforms the Church into a permanent dwelling place of the risen Lord. Thus the tabernacle became the beating heart of Christian communities; within it there developed the “Eucharistic worship” with its many public and private manifestations among which through intensive and enduring suggestions, Eucharistic adoration. Today it has made a remarkable comeback, and especially thanks to the movements of spiritual renewal. Eucharistic Adoration differs from other devotional exercises because it takes place in the presence of the Lord, which the celebration of the Mass has placed and left on the altar, under the form of bread, as a concrete sign of the superabundant fullness of this sacrament and the unfailing love of Christ for her.

2. In the savory memory of the Eucharistic action

Because of its privileged intermediate position, Eucharistic adoration has an important task to fulfill in relation to its celebration. It can become a kind of spiritual laboratory for each day to ripen the dispositions required for the celebration: Adoration of God, faith in the action and love of the Trinity, availability for the Word, openness to offer oneself with Jesus to the Father, grateful praise. The rapid unfolding of the rite and the inexhaustible density of the mystery demand an awareness and capacity to let oneself be affected by the action that is celebrated. This requires a steady patience for spiritual sustenance. It is here that adoration can reveal its great value in relation to the Mass.

The Eucharistic presence comes not from the tabernacle, or from who knows where, but only from the liturgical action, to which it remains essentially connected. It is a fruit that can exist detached from the tree. It does not exist independently. That is equally true of Eucharistic adoration; it must be seen only as an extension of the Mass, as a spiritual refresher of its most significant moments, as a spiritual recovery of some of its most significant parts, as a retaking of the

celebration that follows the consecration and which is the native core of the real presence. That is where Jesus offers himself to the Father together with the Church in the power of the Spirit, intercedes for the redemption of the world and effects our communion in his body and blood.

Eucharistic adoration takes this highly concentrated part of the Mass; it retraces it slowly in order to penetrate its mystery at its own pace and to let oneself be involved in the *Ecce venio* of the Lord. In this way, adoration become in its own way, a savory memory of the action of the Mass. In this manner Eucharistic adoration is lived as a spiritual communion, which prolongs the sacramental action and anticipated the eschatological.

3. What is the meaning of adoration for us?

Some points.

- a. The **union with Christ** cannot be exhausted by the Eucharistic celebration. After the Council we have increasingly isolated the Mass, and decapitated it from the other acts of worship and devotions. With adoration it is possible to lengthen the intimate union with Christ in communion and renew the covenant with him. There is still much to listen to.
- b. One must **be watchful** in every moment **for and with the world**. Even if we few before Christ exposed in the sacrament, we fulfill the public function of sentinel. There we become interpreters of the cries of the world. We listen and we interpret the sufferings of our fellow humans and present them to the Father.
- c. We enter into the sacrifice of Christ by living it existentially. In silence, we learn the gratuity of love to our brothers and sisters. It is guided by the Spirit who produces in us our unconditional commitment. It is essential to pause, stop, and look.
- d. Adoration is **one of the typical acts of christian contemplation**. Here one is not drawn toward thousands of objects and panoramas. One fixes one's eyes on the One whom they have crucified (John 19.37) One finds oneself in the presence of the one who with all the signs of his passion lives immortally.
- e. Daily adoration represents **an important moment and gives quality to our life together**: to stand together before our Lord, in silence, in contemplation and in praise. Our communion needs moment in which we look at each other, share, discuss and plan our life and our service of evangelization of the world. But we also need moments in which we look together in the direction of our Lord, and, in silence, sit, with joy and attention, before the Master and allow him to speak to each and everyone, in the intimacy of the heart.
Our relations and our unity acquire in this way a quality and new consistency. They rely not only on the importance of the word which are said and the gestures we make, but on the solidity of our individual and communal relations with the one Lord to whom we listen and whom we seek to follow and from whose body we are nourished. “ *Any work that is not rooted in the solitude of the tabernacle, in spite of its most brilliant success, looks like the shrub of Jonah, it is born dead and does not produce any supernatural fruit*” (CAM 3/73).

E. Testimony

Fr. Aldo Marchesini, an Italian missionary, a surgeon in Mozambique, shares his thirst for Eucharistic adoration as a regenerative moment.

When the order of the Minister of Health which transferred me from Mocuba to Songo, in the far-off Province of Tete, arrived, it felt like an edict of exile. The four years I spent there were, however, among the most beautiful of my life. I left from Mocuba, where the pressure of the sick was beyond imagination and where, little by little, I had begun to feel alienated from my work and where my personality was being squeezed.

In Songo I got a nice house, with large windows, a nice garden and a portion of free time enough to make forays with the spirit. The hospital in Songo had 120 beds and I was the only doctor, as it had been in Mocuba. However, the population was much smaller, and the position was much less demanding. After the first two weeks I realized that the context of my life had changed profoundly and I could look without fear at the sails to the winds that blew inside me. When I was in Mocuba, crushed by the burden of work, I let my imagination take refuge in a Trappist monastery, where I dreamed of being able to devote myself to contemplation. Now, in Songo, I sensed that my imaginary flight could be realized. Here, with some frequency, I could easily sit down and remain undisturbed for two or three hours at a time.

On the garden side, my beautiful house had a veranda fully enclosed by a mesh fence against mosquitoes. I covered half with light green cloth curtains, which allowed light to enter, while protecting me very well from being seen from outside. There I placed a tree trunk cut in half, to make a pedestal for a tabernacle in the form of hut. The altar was a low table and chairs were stools, which allowed one to sit at the same height. In this way, I had a small chapel, which soon received the name of “green tent.”

That became my Trappist monastery, where I could withdraw by just pushing aside the curtain and enter. The dim light, the limited space, the silence and the sense of tranquility and peace, created in me the feeling of having arrived at the farthest bounds of the world, while the presence of the tabernacle and something calling me to prayer, yes, they made me think that I was at the center of the world. In the green tent there was a notebook, where, more and more often, I felt the desire to write thoughts, poems and reflections. This new way of praying with the pen was one of the greatest gifts that the Lord made me discover in Songo. Writing, that is, thinking with the pen in hand: the ideas took shape, the inspiration found form, everything dressed in words. As you write, what was uncertain acquires character and reveals, not so much a creation, but rather, a discovery: a unique way to feel simultaneously the farthest bounds and the center of all.

Songo had developed as a camp of technicians and workmen who were constructing the dam and the Cahora Bassa power station. There lived a community which was quite international and it was quite common to receive an invitation for a dinner or an evening in someone's home. It that I was always ending up going to bed around midnight. The next morning, however, I would have to get up at the same time, to be at the hospital at seven. I saw that I was not very tired and that I could work as other days. Well, well, I thought to myself. If I can stay up until midnight I can pray that long at least once a week.

So it was that I began to hold prayer vigils before the Blessed Sacrament on Friday nights until midnight. Often there were guests to visit me, priests and sisters from the diocese of Quelimane. They came to take a few days off in Songo, to visit the dam and the power station and enjoy the view of the mountains. On Friday evening, they were happy to stay for the vigil. In general, it remained silent until the recitation of Compline, with which I closed the prayer.

I cannot hide the fact that at one point it was easy to feel sleepy, which scandalized no one when at times the head began to sag. Somewhere in the middle of the evening, I began to form the habit of getting up and take a break for fifteen minutes to take a good steaming coffee. In the warm

months, I prayed in the chapel, and in the cold months I came into the house, in the living room. I put a white cloth, a corporal, a candle and a vase of flowers on the table, between the chairs and the sofa, then I took the little monstrance and put it in the middle. In this way, I began a few hours of silence and adoration, which gave peace to the heart.

For four years the Friday evening was the center of my life in Songo, the most beautiful gift that the Lord gave me, the gift that transformed the exile into four of the best years of my life.

F. Group discussion and sharing

The following is a quote from the encyclical about the Eucharist of Pope John Paul II: *“The worship that comes from the Eucharist ... is strictly linked to the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The presence of Christ under the sacred species conserved after the Mass ... is derived from the celebration and tends towards the sacramental and spiritual communion.”* (EdE, 25).

- How is my Eucharistic adoration? How do I live it?
- Cut off from the Mass, Communion and the sacramental condition of Christ?
- What sort of attention, because it is and becomes an ecclesial service, did Fr. Dehon want?

Many in Italy belong to prayer groups called Sint Unum. If similar groups in your countries, you might consider joining them.

G. Prayer moment

1. In the Eucharist, we celebrate the Heart of Christ,

sign of the love of the Father for us.

In the Son, nailed on the cross and pierced by a lance

he has regenerated us,

by reconstructing the covenant destroyed by the disobedience of sin.

All: Recreated and overcome by this love,
animated by the Spirit,
we wish to work together with God, so that each day his salvation may be realized,
confiding to us the service of reconciliation and the prophecy of saving love.

2. In the Eucharist, we celebrate the Heart of Christ,

the one source of love among people.

Christ who fulfills salvation by raising in our hearts the love for the Father and among us.

All: We are called in the Church to become the ferment of brother/sisterhood,
of communion and sharing with all of humanity.
We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love one another.
Whoever does not love, remains in death.

3. In the Eucharist, we celebrate our union in Christ

In his love and in his oblation to the Father.

If we remain and Christ and he in us, we will bear much fruit.

All: Contemplating the Heart of Christ
we come strengthened in our vocation.
We are called to be inserted into the movement of redemptive love,
given to our brothers and sisters with Christ and as Christ.

Other texts

Faces of Light

A man, who came from far away to visit a big city, noted with pain that the faces of its inhabitants were gray and their eyes without light. Some men approached him, attracted by the brightness of his gaze.

- Where have you been, stranger? they asked.
- I come from the desert of God, the man replied. - And what is that? they asked him.
- It is a place in which we pray, we thank and worship God. The men became suddenly even more gray in their faces and their eyes.
- God, we have abandoned, said one of them. – He became too heavy, demanding, an encumbrance.
- Maybe that's why your faces have lost all light, said the man. Then he ventured: Do you want to call him back?
- That is very difficult! they shouted in unison. What if he remembered us...
- On the contrary, answered the man from God's desert. – Don't think like this.

On the walls of the city walls the man said a prayer, and the others joined him. Suddenly a ray of sunshine swept away a bit of the dullness from their faces and the mist from their eyes.

- Wonderful! they exclaimed, looking at one another.
- Let's get the whole city to pray!

However, the man of the desert stopped them: "It is not as easy as you think. You came to me because you saw me and remembered the look that I had before. But will the others? **It is necessary that from your faces there will emanate such light** that it will strike the most indifferent. For this you need to come **with me in the desert** of God."

The men followed him, and, for several years, living in simplicity in the hand of God, they prayed to him and worshiped. When they returned to the city, **their eyes were shining like gems, and their eyes bright as embers**. They did not need to speak, they did not need to explain, they did not need to discuss, because people could see it. It was sufficient that showed their face.

Suggestions for further reading

- The Letter of the Superior General on Eucharistic Adoration (1981).
- See the prayer group 'Sint Unum' on the website www.dehoniani.it

Meeting XXVIII

PROPHETS OF LOVE

Objectives of the meeting

- To recognize the primacy of love: in all and behind all is the love of God, manifested in Jesus; it is there for us, for everyone. The final word will be his!
- To feel part of one human family, whose members belong to the same Heart, bursting with life.
- To see reality and humanity with the eyes of faith, “with the eyes of God”
- To become “prophets of love” at one with God.

Context of the meeting

“To be prophets of love and servants of reconciliation” does not go back to Fr. Dehon. It is part of the Rule of Life (# 7) of the Dehonians. It is a way of translating his spirituality in contemporary words. It translates the traditional expression of “love and reparation”. Jesus is the prophet of God’s love for humanity and in this way is associated with the narrative mission in our loved and loving flesh.

We have believed in the Love that God has for us and this commits us to recognize and proclaim the presence of the Reign of his Heart.

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

Open the meeting with the story of “The coloured city” (See text # 2) and giving the participants an opportunity to respond.

B. Biblical text (John 3.16-17; 1John 4.16)

John 3: ¹⁶ God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. .

1 John 4: ¹⁶ We have believed the love that God has for us. God is love.

C. Text of Fr. Dehon

“We have believed in love: we believe in the love of God for us. We contemplate it in the eternal symbol of the divine Heart of Jesus.” (CAM 2/200).

“Only the Heart of Jesus can bring to the earth the love that it has lost.” (REV 8031001/11).

“It is through the heart that men give of themselves, it is with the heart that men act. And with his heart that our Lord is the inspiration of our sacrifices for his brothers. It is with the heart that we recognize what his Heart has done for men. What is done without the heart cannot touch the Heart of Jesus. We need to address all the feelings of the heart to our Lord and to make that their main objectives are a loving gratitude for his works, a boundless confidence in his tenderness, a sweet affection for his person and his humanity. “ (ASC 6/160).

D. Reflection

In the beginning of his spiritual testament, Fr. Dehon said that he wanted to leave a legacy to his religious family about the incomparable riches of the Heart of Jesus. In French he said, “Je vous laisse le plus merveilleux des trésors, c’est le Cœur de Jésus» (“Testament spirituel”, DSP 474).

He is well aware of the boldness of his language. He knows that God cannot be the object of purchase or at the disposal of wills. God of course is sovereignly free. He gives of himself personally constantly whenever anyone opens up to him. No one can deal with him impersonally. Dehon intended to leave behind a particular understanding of the mystery of Christ, summarized for him in the expression “Heart of Jesus.” It refers to a deep experience of intense communion and friendship that irradiated from his faith and shaped his life. This transmissible treasure, the charisma of his journey, Fr. Founder wanted to see continued and shared by his followers.

A few lines later he testified again his inner happiness to have met him on his way. He expressed it in the words of the psalm: “How beautiful is the legacy which has touched me: the Heart of Jesus!” [cf. Ps 16.5] “Spiritual Testament”, DSP 475). For him he had lived, for him he will die. And where he had found his treasure is, there too would be his heart (see Mt 6,21).

1. The Heart of Jesus

A family treasure, certainly, but not private property, as Fr. Dehon affirms. But, then, he adds, “The Heart of Jesus belongs to everyone” (“Spiritual Testament”, DSP 474). It belongs to the Church, the only repository of the mystery of Christ and holder of every experience which one can possibly have of him. The Church he had received his mother, who was fervently consecrated to the Heart of Jesus. From this mother, he had inherited her son, founder of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. This devotion, which began in the silence of medieval mysticism, exploded in the past centuries. It conquered the entire Catholic Church (religious orders, dioceses and parishes, saints and popes, Catholic nations and the people of the city and countryside). It reached its highest recognition in the Church with the establishment of the liturgical Solemnity of the Sacred Heart.

A set of favourable circumstances has made it so successful: the striking beauty of the language of the heart, the attractive force of the image of the wounded heart, a popular and viable set of exercises of piety, and certainly the grace of the Spirit that animates each conversion to the love of Christ. After all, all that the devotion to the Sacred Heart wanted was to make known the love of God among Christian people and, at the same time, to educate them to return that love in a concrete way.

The human heart

The human heart became capable of expressing the love of God, when God became man and became a human heart. Since then the ineffable, infinite love has begun to beat in the physical and psychic heart of Jesus of Nazareth, a real man of the land. He loves in the way of humans, intensely and spontaneously. He shares its impetus and its endurance, its happiness and its bitterness of betrayal.

Wonderfully and shockingly, this is the incarnation of God! Beyond all human imagination, God revealed himself capable of becoming other than his self, a creature, without ceasing to be God. Human history has been showered with hope and beauty in this unheard-of event! How can Christians allow it to vanish into the world of the obvious things? They have taken it for granted

that God decided to become human: truly, genuinely human, unchanged, except for sin? The picture of Jesus showing his heart reminds us of the great Christian mystery.

Heart of a son

A careful reading of the Gospels will make one realize that the main character in the story does not live centered on himself, does not dispose of his own activity, life, or his future, but receives it totally from the Other, from the invisible You. He counts on the extraordinarily familiar word “Abba-Father.” He knows that he is loved and that he was sent for that mission. His whole life is just one continuous reference to that calling in a spirit of filial devotion. His consciousness of being the only Son is perceived in the beatifying presence: “*I am not alone because the Father is with me*” (John 16,32).

According to the synoptic gospels, Jesus never says who he was. Instead he became eloquent in speaking to the people about God the Father, announcing the happiness of the Kingdom that was near, praising its provident proximity, repeatedly assuring everyone that the Father hears their every request. The burning fire of his identity as Son is the Father to whom he refers frequently, even in the moment of agony: – “*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*» (Luke 23.46). As interested in the Heart of Jesus, can we be disinterested in the marvelous secret of the Father? The Father is the root of the truth of the Son, and the fiery passion of his heart; the Father is the splendor that radiates from his humanity. Also, it is the reason why he taught his disciples to join him to pray like him, “*Father who art in heaven ...*”

Heart of universal brotherhood

Do you want to know how wonderful the heart of Jesus is toward those who are like him? Read again the story of his public life, look at the choices he makes from the beginning, his deeds that he maintained until the end, the needy he attended to. Listen again to his words and look at his steps. Wherever he goes, they come out of their hiding places, as if by magic, a crowd without dignity, unhappy people who come looking for him. Observe how confronts the most diverse human situations, how respectful he is and full of compassion. Forgetful of himself and his immeasurable greatness as the Son. He is aware that he is only there for the Father and available for the service to others, “*I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for the many*” (Mk 10:45).

A Heart open and in solidarity

Passion is the most dramatic chapter of the love story of Christ. It is written by the touching alphabet of suffering. The final chapter is predominated by unabated suffering, culminating in his death. It does not insist on the punitive justice for us. He suffered and died just to be like us. It is the initial choice of the incarnation that he carries through to the end. The Son, that he could have refused, suffered and died in order to be in solidarity with us, to be close to each one who suffers and prepare the more splendid life beyond his death.

If it was really so, then we have another marvel of the heart of Jesus, even more unexpected and amazing! Upon him in his passion was imposed an unjust sentence, a passion of physical and moral suffering, which was accepted with dignified fortitude. But there was another secret passion, unimaginable for us: the passion of the heart, the pain of one who loves passionately, but is rejected and ridiculed.

The familiar image of Jesus showing his pierced heart wants to invoke, with discretion, the unspeakable passion of the heart and teach us to perceive there his crucified love. For us, death is the insignificant death, for Jesus is the greatest opportunity for the greatest self-gift to his Father and to us. This love is such that we cannot understand. However, we can welcome it as a gift of faith: “*We have believed the love that God has for us. God is love*” (1 John 4:16).

2. Prophet

The prophet has a broader mission; it is well delineated in the Bible and Tradition. A prophet enters to bring God's judgment in a situation in which our relationship with God (impiety) and people (injustice) deteriorated. Those who exercise the call as prophet are essential to the life of society and people. The prophet sees the situation of sin and injustice in which we find ourselves and opens, creates, draws in that situation a horizon of hope. He does not predict the future, but makes the conversion of people possible. A prophet proclaims in moments of darkness that there is a hopeful future. He does so in the name of God! His job is to activate hope, to give voice to the Easter announcement: Christ has already conquered death and evil!

We are prophets because we proclaim -with a word and with our life- that this future is already being realized in Christ. There must be people who say this! The prophet is an interpreter: he does not invent things; he does not receive special revelations or words fallen from another world. He reads the situation we are living (and, maybe, it is hopeless) with the eyes of the God of Life and of the Exodus. This God knows that there is already a future of salvation, peace, goodness. He reads our situation from within, and finds there seeds of hope. He can see, in this situation, the good that God has put into the world since the beginning. He knows how to look at reality not with desperate, but with trusting eyes.

He knows that the triumph of evil is apparent, and that life has the last word. This prophet is the interpreter close to others: *See God is making all things new, do you not perceive it?* (Isaiah 43.19). It goes behind reality and captures there the divine seed which is there. The prophet captures the action of God in history and in people. Since he sees things as God sees them, since he sees the seeds of hope to which to point, the prophet begins to live this novelty, and he commits himself to make it possible. The authority of the prophet comes from the word of novelty which is accomplished in his life and around him.

3. Prophets of love

As “prophets of love” we do not mourn him, we do not point a finger, we do not regret the past, we do not invite people to be resigned. As appearances often seem to prove us wrong, we believe that inside / behind all there is Love, and the last word will be God's. We look at reality and humanity with eyes of faith; we have within us the eyes of God! We see Love even in situations where it is terribly compromised. We feel the importance that someone in this world says the words of love, of charity, of God! We are the first to believe and live in a new way. Let us make the gestures in the direction of love. Let them be different from the usual gestures: let them be gestures of gift, forgiveness, communion ... We rely on the mercy, patience, meekness even if, in our context, they are often losers.

“To be prophets of love” it means to live a new relationship with God. It means to stand in front of him, bringing our weakness and inability. In this regard the beatitudes announce a meaningful style (Mat 5). Matthew wrote for Jews who had converted to the Christian faith. For them the

important thing was to be righteous before God, doing his will, giving back to God what he had given them. To the one who focuses on being right before God, Jesus proclaims: *Blessed are the poor in spirit!* Blessed, that is, those who know they are lacking, who are not just before God. The beatitudes open up to these who do not feel themselves “equal” to God and to others; they are those who fail to observe the law of God but wanted to keep it.

“To be prophets of love” it is to help myself and others to see that there is this thirst for love within us, even when in life you cannot live it. Listen to this voice even when one feels incapable. Believe it! Give support, encouragement. Make yourself a spokesperson of this weakness, believing that God saves us not “despite,” but “precisely” because. He is committed to finding the words and ways to support us in this mutual esteem!

E. Testimony

Testament of Father Christian De Chergé, prior of the Abbey of Tibihrine, who was killed with six other Trappist monks in Algeria in May 1996, probably by Islamic fundamentalists (but maybe by the regular army who wanted to cast the responsibility on the latter).. On the community of father Christian and his brothers, deeply embedded in the village where they were inserted with the villages and with whom they shared with passion and self-denial all their lives, was dedicated the film Des hommes et des dieux.

If it should happen one day - and it could be today – that we become the victim of terrorism that seems to engulf all the foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church, my family, to remember that my life was “donated” to God and to this country. You need to accept that the only Lord of all life was not a stranger to this sort of brutal departure. What to pray for me: that we may be found worthy of such an offering? That you may know to associate this death with so many other equally violent, but forgotten deaths through indifference or anonymity. My life has no more value than any other. Nor any less. In any case, it does not the innocence of childhood. I have lived long enough to know that I share in the evil which seems, alas, to prevail in the world, and even from that which could strike me blindly. When the time comes, I wish I could have that moment of clarity which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of my fellow human beings, and, at the same time, to forgive with all my heart the one who struck me down.

I cannot wish myself such a death. It seems important to me to state this. I do not see, in fact, how I could rejoice that this people whom I love, are indiscriminately accused of my murder. It would be paying too high a price for what would be called, perhaps, the “grace of martyrdom” and owe it to an Algerian, whoever he is, especially if he says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes to be Islam. I know with what contempt the world has surrounded the Algerians, indiscriminately. And I also know what caricatures of Islam a certain Islamism encourages. It is too easy to give oneself a good conscience by identifying this religious way with the integralism of its extremism. Algeria and Islam, for me, are something else; they are a body and a soul.

I have proclaimed this often enough, it seems to me. It is based on what I saw and learned from experience, finding so often a strand of the Gospel learned at my mother's knee, my very first Church, precisely here in Algeria, and, even quite often from believing Muslims. My death, clearly, will appear to justify those who hastily judged me naïve, or idealistic: “Tell me, what do you think now!”

But these people must know that finally my most excruciating curiosity will be freed. There I will, please God, immerse my gaze in that of the Father, to contemplate with him his children of Islam just as He sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, fruit of His Passion, and gifted with the Gift of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to establish communion, playing with the differences.

For this life lost, totally mine and totally theirs, I thank God who seems to have willed all this joy, through all this and despite all this. In this “thank you” in which I have said everything, I certainly include you, friends of yesterday and today, and you, my friends, with my father and my mother, my sisters and my brothers, and to them, a hundredfold as was!

And also, you, my friend of the last minute who never knew what you did. Yes, also for you I want this “thank you”, and I want you to receive an “adieu” in whose face I contemplate you. May we meet as happy thieves in paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both. Amen! Inch’Allah.

*Algeria, December 1, 1993 * Tibihrine, January 1, 1994*

F. Group discussion and sharing

How do we translate into the language of today the vocation to “be prophets of love?”

I am a prophet and prophetess of Love when... ?

Write you answer on a coloured post-it: summarize your answer in one phrase.

G. Prayer moment

Below find three texts. The group leader can decide the way the texts are prayed (single persons, choir, or dialogue)

I was told that by a small flame you can produce a big fire

And I believe it.

They told me that in the darkest pit you can hide a lily.

And I believe it

They told me just a smile can erase the loneliness.

And I believe it

They told me that just a tiny voice can awaken faith in people.

And I believe it

They told me that just a few drops can make a flower grow in the desert.

And I believe it

They have said that a snowflake can cover the mud.

And I believe it

They told me that the world is dying for lack of love.

But I will not believe it!

We commit ourselves and not the others,
only us and not the others,
neither those above nor those below,
neither those who believe, nor those who do not believe.

we are committed
without demanding that others commit,
with us or for themselves,
like us or in another way.

we are committed
without judging those who are not committed,
without blaming those who are not committed,
without condemning those who do not commit themselves,
without disengaging because others do not commit themselves.

we are committed
because we cannot not involve ourselves.
There is someone or something in us,
an instinct, a reason, a vocation, a grace,
stronger than ourselves.

We are committed to find a meaning to life,
to this life, to our life,
a reason that is not just one among many reasons
that we know well and that we do not take to heart.
You only live once
and we do not want to be “played”
in the name of any small interest.

We are not interested in careers,
we are not interested in money,
we are not interested in woman or man
if presented only as sex,
we are not interested in success for ourselves or our ideas,
we are not interested in making history.

We are interested in losing
for something or someone
that will remain even after we will be gone
and who is the reason for our gathering.

we are committed
to give eternal destiny to time,
to feel responsible for everything and everyone,
to find our way, albeit through a long wandering,
to love.

we are committed
not to reorder the world,
not to remake it according our measure, but through loving him;
to love
even what we cannot accept,
even that what is not lovable,
even what seems to refuse to love,
because behind every face and in every heart
there along with a great thirst for love,
there is the face and the heart of love.

we are committed
because we believe in love,
the only certainty that is second to none,
the only enough to engage us forever.

(Don Primo Mazzolari)

I will endeavor to repeat to myself at every opportunity:

I must seek to let overflow the measure of charity.

If self-love says to me: you need to defend your rights, I will reply:

I must seek to let overflow the measure of charity.

If sloth says to me, you need a rest, I will reply:

I must seek to let overflow the measure of charity.

If the prudence of the flesh pretends that it is not necessary to escape prestige, I will reply:

I must seek to let overflow the measure of charity.

If I am inconvenienced, tired, I should still say to myself:

have courage, I must seek to let overflow the measure of charity.

In turn then, when I need help, some advice, a correction,
a consolation, perhaps pardon or relief for the soul and body,
I will go to Jesus: “Good Teacher. You promised to reciprocate with the same
measure; now I need you to let overflow the measure of charity”

(Fr. André Prévot)

Other texts

Story: The colourful town

There was once a small town, dominated by the smokestacks of a large factory. The city sky was gray with smoke, the color of the houses was gray, the faces of the people were gray. The children were pale and had no desire to play.

One day, a stranger arrived in the small town. He was a young man with a big smile and shining eyes. He carried a bulky blue yellow backpack and, under his arm, a big yellow umbrella. The stranger opened the umbrella in the city square and under it arranged very precisely glass figurines. The passers-by stopped, looked at the figurines. Many stopped to buy. Interestingly enough, the stranger made little effort to sell the figurines. He was more interested in the people. He talked with them, listened to them with a smile and he encouraged them!

Until one morning the stranger pulled from the pockets of his backpack a number of colouring chalk. On the gray sidewalk, he began to draw a wonderful city of beautiful colors, full of greenery, smiling people, and playing children. From all over the city people flocked to see the magnificent design. It filled their eyes and warmed their hearts.

When the design was finished, the stranger handed out his coloured chalk to all present. Then he left. No one ever saw him again.

The people of the small city decided to remove the pavement and to exhibit it in the city museum so that all could see the wonderful city painted by the strange seller. But not many went to the museum and the colors of the drawing began to fade. Soon they also forgot about him.

But one day some children found the colored chalk that the stranger had distributed and, with all the colors and the wonderful designs, they began to fill the gray walls of the gray city. Today they call it '*the little colorful town where people smile*'.

Suggestions for further reading

- Fr. Francesco Duci, *Laici in missione: sacerdoti dell'amore* (Convegno *Laici in missione*, Albino 2010).

Meeting XXIX

SERVANTS OF RECONCILIATION

Objectives of the meeting

- To recognize the need of reconciliation which is in the human heart, and the difficulty to overcome the internal and external divisions, provoked or suffered.
- To meditate the reconciliation freely given to us by God through Jesus and to welcome the call to be reconciled.
- To know the experience of Fr. Dehon as “servant of reconciliation” and to make us available to walk the paths of reconciliation with a listening, fraternal, compassionate heart, that is generously sensible to the cry of the weakest, and to the world’s necessity to be reconciled.

Context of the meeting

Imagine a negative reality concerning relations between the people or with nature which are a clear manifestation of human withdrawal from God and his plan. The fundamental dimension of reconciliation is that it reconnects the person with God and transform it, making it possible the renewal of all other relationships.

Fr. Dehon has contemplated the reconciliation in Christ Crucified and Risen, and engaged himself in the paths of reconciliation with a listening, fraternal and compassionate heart.

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

You can open the meeting with the story of the old amphora. In its inner division but also in its reconciliation, we can recognize that it is God who gives us the place from where we can better serve his plan of life.

The old amphora

Every day, a farmer brought from the well of the village water in two large amphorae, which tied to the donkey's rump while he trotted alongside. One of amphorae always leaked water during the trip because it was old and full of holes. The other one was newer and kept all the content without so much as losing a drop. The old and cracked amphora felt humiliated and useless, especially since the new pitcher never missed an opportunity to point out its perfection: “Look at me, I never waste even a drop of water!”

One morning, the old amphora confided in his master: “You know, I am aware of my limitations. I waste your time, effort and money all through my fault. When we come from the village, I'm half empty. Forgive me my weakness and my holes.”

The next day, during the trip, the master turned to the amphora and told her: “Look at the roadside.” “It is very beautiful! It is full of flowers!”, said the amphora.

“You know what? That is all because of you,” said the farmer. “You are the one who water the roadside every day. I bought a packet of seeds of flowers and, without being aware of it, I planted them along the way. And you, you watered them every day.”

The old amphora never told anyone, but that day he could have died for joy.

Father Dehon speaks often about “abandonment” in God and “reparation” to the Heart of Jesus. Give back to God the necessary act of love which is often denied him, and work hard to restore the proper functioning of compromised situations. In Christian life, these two attitudes go together. Father Dehon gives a social interpretation of this: in a context marked by class struggle, he wanted to overcome this struggle. His methods, typical of the nineteenth century, were probably paternalistic. For him, reconciliation was the only way to struggle for social emancipation of the working class. He lived his service of reconciliation by practicing and preaching the “Catholic social doctrine”.

It is important to look in social and political spheres for reconciliation as a direct underlying way to overcome the logic of conflict. Our society is no longer marked by conflicts between classes. Our conflicts, rather, are conflicts between cultures and, especially, between individuals: competitiveness, competition ... Our culture idolizes finishing first: the emergence of the individual! It is a vast field for dehonians!

B. Biblical text (2Cor 5.14-20)

¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

C. Text of Fr. Dehon

“Go to the people! It is necessary! You need to go to the people, because they are unhappy, because they suffer, because they find themselves in a state of undeserved misery, because they are without protection... You need to go to their homes and to their offices. You need to invite them to meetings and to create associations with them so that you may instruct them and comfort them, assisting them in their sufferings and to uplift them when they are down, to listen to their laments and their desires, to direct them in their demands, and to guide them to Christ, their defender and Saviour...” (MSO 346-347).

D. Reflection

The apostle Paul begins by saying: *“The love of Christ impels us.”* (2 Cor 5:14). It is in the light of God revealed in Christ and his plan of salvation that you can sense the size and the nature of sin, as well as the path of reconciliation. This reality is very present in the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus that Father Dehon has left us as a charismatic heritage. He makes us contemplate the loving plan of God, which allows you to realize the reality of evil and the possibility of reparation and reconciliation. This is what Fr. Dehon proposed in his desire to *establish the Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus in souls and in society.*

1. God loves a world wounded by sin and death

To speak of reconciliation, as does Paul, means to be aware of the good and evil present in human reality. We must confront ideas, processes, systems and attitudes that contribute to the life and happiness of people and society; but we must not forget the realities that damage and destroy the harmony, understanding and life both at the individual and societal level. Contrary to other visions of the world, the Judeo-Christian tradition does not look at these two dimensions as a cosmic struggle between two opposing forces, two comparative powers in the universe and in history. God is the only Lord of the universe and all comes from his power, and by the providence of the Creator. **God's view of the world declares it "good."** There is no creature or a world which God hates or which are outside his power, even when someone thinks so or declares himself his enemy. The biblical vision of the world is fundamentally positive: God loves and takes care of his creatures, particularly humans.

Despite this loving look, the Judeo-Christian tradition never perceives cosmic reality as an absolute good and a perfection next to God. **For it the world is unfinished, mortal, prone to corruption and diversion.** The experience of imperfection and evil finds its most dramatic expression in wisdom Bible which speak of creation. They refer to the always-present situation of sin in humanity. In the words of the Psalmist: every human being is born already in this state of being wounded: *In sin my mother conceived me* (Ps 51.7).

To turn away from God and his project has **disastrous consequences for humanity and the world.** In rejecting God, humans offer themselves as the center of the universe, without any superior reference to defend him from his own limitations and fragility. His projects and accomplishments, despite the beauty, skill and ingenuity of humans, suffer because of a reduced capacity of judging and acting. The same ideal of brotherhood becomes orphaned because of the disfigured image of father / mother which is supposed to give consistency to the human family. The limits of these projects are dramatically present in the abuse of nature, in the selfish appropriation of property, in the injustice and oppression that put at risk the very survival of humanity and the environment of the planet.

More dangerous than the absence of God is **the manipulation of his Name**, the putting of it at the service of limited projects and human megalomania. It is the overturning of the Creator's relationship with creation. It generates fear, authoritarianism, injustice, rivalries and wars. They are much more difficult to denounce and overcome, because they are made in God's name and by his authority, by people with responsibilities in the religious sphere. The human degeneration process begins with the absence and disfigurement of the figure of God.

The positive and negative images of humanity complement the vision of a cosmic reality that is incomplete and imperfect. It must be placed within **a project with a view of completion.** The earthly paradise is not behind us, in a lost past, but in front of us, as an image and creative utopia which orients the path of humanity. In fact, its images come from the last page of the Book of Revelation with its images of the New Jerusalem and the new Creation. Then, will evil and corruption be overcome, along with suffering, violence and death. Here history will reach its fulfillment and humanity will come to its fullness. Between these two images - creation and the New Jerusalem – we can find **the whole of human history, as a history of salvation.** God will not turn his back on the imperfections of creation. He will accompany it with mercy and providence, so

that it may reach the happy destination planned and willed for it. It is this complex and dramatic story, which is part of **the path of reconciliation**. It is not simply to recover a lost innocence in the past, or only to “repair” the damage inflicted to God, to people and to humanity, but to create, in relationships and attitudes, the dynamics that allow us to overcome evil and division and so to develop a new people. Reconciliation goes beyond simple reparation of a lost integrity or of damages caused. It is to create a new and reconciled reality.

2. Christ reconciles us with the gift of the Spirit

This process of reconciliation and fullness cannot be merely the work of human effort; it is based on the initiative of God. The desire for peace and the efforts of reconciliation and cooperation between peoples are signs of the presence of the Spirit of God acting in the heart of every person and entire humanity. But **it is in Christ that we find the revelation of the reconciling love of God**, the offer of communion in His life and the possibility of building a new humanity.

With the coming of Christ into the world **two fundamental aspects** allow us to see the radical commitment to God in our reconciliation:

- **the assumption of the human condition, with all its joys, sorrows and limits;**
- **the gift of the Spirit that transforms the human being and makes him and her capable of communion with God and participation in a renewed humanity.**

The *first* aspect is characterized by the coming of God into the world as Emmanuel, God with us. In Christ, God is present in the depths of sinful humanity, sharing their weakness, although not their sin, to the most ignominious death on the cross (see Phil 2.5-11). This “**disproportionate solidarity**” reveals the timeless love of God toward us. No other reason can explain his attitude: “*God gives us proof of his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us ... We even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation*” (Rom 5,8.11).

In the attitude of Jesus toward the weak and sinners, we see that God is not watching us from a distance, but **he has taken upon himself the pains and faults of humanity**, opening a path of hope and life. In Jesus, God is not in the temple waiting for the arrival of those who are purified, but you see him in the streets and people's homes. He is not afraid to touch lepers, to sit at table with sinners, to share the fate of the excluded, and the suffering of the condemned. This is the beginning of the gift of reconciliation: the nearness, solidarity and sharing with people, especially with those who suffer. This is the gift of reconciliation we have received freely and the model of service that is entrusted to us.

The *second* element is **the gift of the Holy Spirit**. All the solidarity of Jesus, all his miracles and teachings and even his death on the cross would not be enough to heal / reconcile humanity. One can come nearer to God, source of life, only when he gives the path and the strength. This is the role of the Spirit. Jesus became incarnate from the Virgin Mary by the power of the Spirit (Luke 1.14). He is presented by John as the one on whom he saw falling the Spirit of the Son, and who will baptize in the Holy Spirit (Luke 3.16). All his actions are seen as the work of the Spirit resting upon Him. And when he returned to the Father, he sent down upon the disciples this same Spirit, to transform them and enable them to continue his mission (Acts 1.8).

The sign of the pierced side combines the two dimensions: the revelation of the totality of the love of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit who creates the new humanity (John 19.31 to 38). This is the beginning of the true reconciliation of the human creature with his Creator, of the lost Son

reconciled with the Father who came looking for him, of the brother reconciled with the whole family of those who have been born again by the Spirit.

Therefore, **the reconciliation of Christ begins with the acceptance of the gift of the Spirit.** It is the Spirit who transforms all existence beginning in their heart, enabling them to follow the personal project initiated by Jesus, in dialogue with the Father and Creator: *“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. In that Spirit we cry, ‘Abba, Father’”* (Rom 8:15). For this reason, we are dealing here not only with an attempt to recover an past innocence: this is a new gift brought by Christ. The Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit is a new force to renew humanity. The program of Jesus, presented in the synagogue of Nazareth, resounds as a path for all who are born of the one Spirit: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* (Luke 4.18-19).

3. Let yourself be reconciled

In this way, we can understand the urgency of Paul: *“Be reconciled to God!”* (2 Cor 5.20). The passive (be reconciled!) emphasizes God's initiative, but it also sounds like an exhortation, asking our adhesion. It is, simultaneously, gift and invitation to a fundamental experience of our faith: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength”* (Dt 6.5). This is **the fundamental experience of the believer**, called to conversion or reconciliation.

Feeling loved by God **changes the way of looking at ourselves, at others and the world.** It changes the way people look at their own limitations and shortcomings, discover their own dignity and value, and accept to be small, even weak, in the hands of a Father who is powerful, good and merciful. It is the source of new energy and hope, which does not isolate selfishly a person, but places him or her inside a large family, for the construction of a new world. In this way, the acknowledgement of limit and evil can become an experience a journey of hope and mercy. God makes this new life possible, but does not want (cannot) live it in our place.

This is **the path of the Heart** that characterizes the contemplative and active trait of our charism. To open, heal, purify, educate and shape our heart according to the Heart of Jesus is possible through the action of his Spirit in us. It begins by our opening to God who leads us to reconciliation with ourselves and our history. But it also opens up a friendly relationship with others and participation in the building of a reconciled humanity. This journey is based on three pillars:

- a listening heart, open to God and to the whispering of the Spirit in us;
- a fraternal heart, capable of building communion and collaboration with others;
- a sympathetic heart, generously sensitive to the cry of the weak and to the need for reconciliation in the world.

In the progressive healing of the heart, **the sacrament of reconciliation** plays an important role. These encounters are not simple rites to be performed regularly, to undo the wrongs of the past or to pay one’s debts to God. The sacramental encounter with the mercy of God is a turn-around with regard to past sins and the wrong steps, but it cannot destroy this past, and often it is not even able to remedy all the negative consequences of such errors. What I can do is free ourselves from the evil itself that led to the fall; it can make us see things with new eyes, because I can try to repair, as far as possible, the harm done and build a new future. This perspective may allow us to understand

the sacrament of reconciliation, not as a restrictive act for the person, but as an important core of a process towards reconciliation involving the whole community, repairing the evil, restoring sinners and renewing life.

4. The Spirit gives rise to a reconciled and reconciling community

Reconciliation is always a relational journey with God, with others, and with the universe. An icon of this harmony is the human family. In it we see that the love of the father and the mother creates an environment of understanding and communion in which the imperfections and failures and shortcomings of the individual are overcome by the love of others. It is not by accident that Jesus uses this model to talk about the relationship between those around him and listen to his word: “Here are my mother and my brothers” (Mark 3.34).

Christian communities and religious communities are not based on blood, the same education or cultural identity, but on listening to the word of Jesus. And He wants them to be inspired by the gift of the human family open to be regenerated by his Spirit of reconciliation. This is **the experience of Pentecost** that gave rise to the first Christian communities and continues to generate life in the Church. The reconciliation between the members of the community is presented by Jesus as a sign and badge confirmed by the membership of his disciples: “*They will recognize that you are my disciples if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35).

In the Gospel, all reconciliation with God must go through the reconciliation in the community. God did not send his Son into the world just to take us to heaven. This is absolutely true. However, in light of this final goal, he wants to transform the reality of human beings on this earth. Indeed, this transformation is part of the signs of the Kingdom of God which has its beginning in human history. Although always imperfect, our communities are **prophetic signs of the new humanity** making their pilgrim way towards reconciliation and fullness. The commitment towards the construction of the community is, therefore, a fundamental task of those who have been reconciled in Christ. That is the reason for the scandal of bitterness and hatred among those who, having been freely reconciled by God in Christ, are unable to forgive and to work and live as brothers and sisters. On the other hand, the acceptance and integration of our differences, the overcoming of our weaknesses and tensions and intercultural and the international and intercultural composition of the Dehonian family are concrete expressions of the reconciling action of the Spirit, according to the model of Pentecost.

Do not confuse reconciliation with unanimity and or consensus of opinion. Many times, the latter conceal processes of accommodation, immobility, lack of truth, or imposition upon people or groups. The story of the first Christian community reminds us that the voice of the Spirit is often uncomfortable, but also creative. The difference should not make one afraid, as long as in the listening to the Spirit, there is respect and love for the truth. **In a community, which is never perfect**, but which agrees to be continually renewed by the Spirit, forgiveness and interpersonal reconciliation will be a constant. The experience of one’s own falls and of the mercy of God for each of us must open our hearts to the forgiveness of others. The prophetic witness of our communities does not consist in perfection - you can always find shortcomings - but in a constant commitment to mutual forgiveness and friendliness in our relationships. The availability to communion, respect and openness to diversity must be **key elements of our formation**.

5. The reconciled in the service of reconciliation

Consciousness of the love of Christ, who loved him and reconciled him to himself, when he was still a persecutor and an enemy, radically changed Paul's life. It gave him a new direction. From that moment, his life was united to that of Christ: *“The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me”* (Gal 2:20). No other motivation is enough to move someone to become a servant of reconciliation. Everyone who wants to enter into this service is given the same question of the Risen Lord to Peter, before entrusting the care of brothers, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” (John 21). Without this encounter with the love of reconciling Christ, there can be no true reconciliation service.

In the encounter with the love of Christ, Peter and Paul were **reconciled in order to reconcile**. They too had to purify their motives before their Master and especially before the mystery of his death and resurrection. The experience of his weakness and love has cured them. It became their model for becoming credible ambassadors of God's reconciliation. Only love is the fundamental motivation for a reconciler. It asks for **sensitivity and a face able to listen to suffering, injustice and evil**. The commitment to reconciliation begins with feeling their pains and difficulties, regardless of their identity. An **image of the reconciler can be found in the character of the Good Samaritan** who does not look away, do not walk on the other side of what they encounter in the way. They are capable of changing their own agenda for others.

Following the example of Christ, we are called **to reach out to the world that needs the solidarity and tenderness** of the journey of renewal of the Church. Sharing situations of pain, injustice and misery is the real face of the mercy of the heart on the path of reconciliation. The proximity to the little and the needy is one of the more visible signs of the Gospel.

From Dehon we have learned that proximity to the suffering and the exploited cannot be reduced to the direct assistance we can offer them. We have **to go to the sources of the evils and injustice** that cause the misery and the loss of dignity of persons and social groups that destroy the planet. What is needed is a merciful look but also competence. We must identify the mechanisms of poverty and exploitation, and make us of the ways that can lead to healing of the evils that corrupt society.

As people engaged in the Gospel, we must **be at the center of reconciliation**. The consistent affirmation of one's faith and the commitment towards its proclamation are not incompatible with the respect, dialogue and collaboration in the transformation of the world. Many times, the defense of justice and the path of reconciliation passes through **the denunciations of injustice, oppression and corruption**. There cannot be reconciliation without justice and truth, and the voice of the Spirit is often awkward and unsettling to corrupt and totalitarian systems. The victims of these processes are manipulated in their lives, but often are opposed to their own liberation and transformation. In such situations, the service of reconciliation requires a discernment and a very special commitment, that can lead to the gift of one's own life. The history of the Church and of the world is marked by the blood of people of all nations and faiths who have testified, giving their personal contribution to the building of a more just world. These witnesses leave us a memory of a **rejection of violence and war** with which they sought to overcome the differences, disagreements and conflicts. Reconciliation pretends to realize a revolution and, not infrequently, on this path there is also the blood. It is not, however, the blood of the enemy, but of themselves as the servants of reconciliation. The gift of life is the last and most radical witness to the love of God who reconciles a wounded and violent humanity to himself.

This is the history of the process of reconciliation. Its definitive fulfillment cannot be achieved as long as human life remains a prisoner of the limitation and death. The wiping away of the last tear, and the final victory over injustice, corruption, and death does not belong to human history, but is only possible in the last city – a gift of God. Towards it and inspired by it, there converge all the efforts of building the reconciled human city. Hence, there are citizens who, like their Lord, are “*meek of heart*” and “*peacemakers*” (Mt 5.9; 11.29). They “*shall inherit the earth*” as new: “*they will be called sons of God*” for ever (cf. Mt 5.5.9).

E. Testimony

I think that my work as an educator, often in contact with troubled children, is the result not only of the educational passion that has always accompanied my life (since 1990 I have been scout leader AGESCI), but also because of the Dehonian charism, at the core of which is reparation. The Dehonian Rule of Life defines reparation, “*as a welcome of the Spirit, as a response to Christ’s love for us, as a communion in His love for the Father and as a collaboration in His work of redemption in the midst of the world. For here, in our time,, He frees people from sin and restores humanity in unity. Here, too, he calls us to live out our reparative vocation, as the incentive for our apostolate*”.

In this perspective, I recognize as a basic element for my life the acceptance of the gift of God the Father, who always has blessed my life (family, friends, intelligence, health ...), and the subsequent call to become his son, that is, the possibility, absolutely freely, of being confident and happy in the journey of life. This spiritual awareness has grown in me gradually. It helped me to get in tune with God who looked after the orphan, the widow, the sick, the oppressed. Here I found a God who cared about their situations and who acts to lift them up. For this reason, after my initial formation, I committed myself to serve those who suffer the greatest distress and poverty in their relationships. I wanted to show there the benevolence and compassion of a God who is Father and who he cares for all his children. I wanted to be his instrument to provide dignified living conditions for all these people.

After an initial training in a drug rehabilitation community, I began after June 2003, to work as an educator at a residential socio-educational community that welcomes Italian and foreign minors. The presence of these two types of youths confronted me with at times very uncomfortable human situations. It force me to a personalization of the educational project, according to the different needs expressed.

Foreign children living in Italy find themselves without any identifiable reference. They are in our country, encouraged or hindered by their parents, looking for a well-being that they could not find in their homeland. Generally, they are young people without mental disorders. Their biggest problems consist in keeping in check their aggression in relation to one another and with adults. They tend to be a lot more aggressive than their other adolescents. With their aggression, they try to mask the insecurity which are linked to the situation of emotional abandonment. Although almost never explicitly, they ask that we take care of their basic needs and help them find the way to being able to work legally.

The Italian children usually come from dysfunctional family situations, because of which the court has taken them away from their family and has placed them in new more favorable educational settings. Seeing their family situation, it is easy to see that these youths have not just behavior problems, but also a good amount of psychological issues. For this reason, their

educational projects are based, not so much on making them independent, but to lead to the recovery, when possible, of the missing social skills. The ultimate goal is family reunification, where the appropriate conditions permit.

In general, the education in the community is rather like an experiment to give the youths new possibilities of relationship, by providing consistency and clarity. The main issue for the young people is the lack of adults who are able to give them unambiguous points or reference. Usually, because they are accustomed to a certain style and the emotional bond which are hard to change, Italian children feel that living in such a community is a coercion. They cannot see the difference between their home situation and the institutional one. So they do everything to boycott the new reality. Foreign minors tend to accept the community just because it suits them to have a place to eat and sleep, but they pretend that they are doing what they want.

In both cases, with some firmness, we seek to have the youths recognize their freedom to choose whether to accept the community's proposal, and, with it, the possibility to leave, and so we continue to offer them a different style, made up of honest feelings, clarity and consistency in decisions. We want to continue to have confidence in the possibility of change in the boys, recognizing, beyond the negative obvious behavior, the 5% of good that's inside of them (according to Baden Powell) and to keep open the relationships also when our trust is worn down to a flicker.

I remember particularly a 17-year old Italian with a history of pain, death, violence. It had led him to heavy drug use (especially new synthetic drugs). They had affected his cognitive abilities. In the time that he stayed in the community, he committed the most absurd transgressions: here is not the place to recount them. I had to deal with a great amount of disappointment and anger because of him. More than once I wondered whether it would not be better if we found a more suitable solution for him. The most frequently shared answer had always been to continue to give him confidence, while making him feel our disapproval over his behavior. We wanted him to face the choice of whether to stay in the community following the rules or to go. Over time we were able to build a fragile relationship with him, but as is always the case in such situations, he was able to bring some change, in favor of a more dignified life.

As it is clear from this episode, in the relationships with the boys there are different emotions that arise in the heart. First of all compassion when one knows the situations of abandonment, relational poverty, and the violence that most of them have lived prior to coming to the community. Compassion becomes anger for those who let all this happen or permitted it to happen. Also there is the anger I feel when the boys refuse to cooperate, or when they stretch our patience beyond endurance. In these situations, while not yielding to physical or verbal violence into which the youth wants to drag you, you end up feeling powerless because it is hard to see any glimmer of hope for change. Then comes back to me the words of Peter: "*Master, we toiled all night and caught nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets*" (cfr. Lk 5,5), and you just have to surrender to Him! Which does not mean doing nothing, but it means making decisions in the certainty that He sustains you with his presence.

I also remember an episode of conflict with a boy who refused to do what he was asked and who thought that he was owed to demand all the conditions. It led to a constant "tug of war" which could last for hours. Despite the different punishments given him, he continued to do his own thing. So I took myself out of the exchange and ignore him. At lunch, I asked for silence, and I explained the situation to the others. I said, that for that day I would pretend that he did not exist. I invited the

others of the group to do the same. The next day he came to look for me! I repeated my disapproval of the previous day's behavior. I insisted that he fulfill the same punishment I had imposed the previous day. In the days following the incident, I noticed that his attitude towards me was not one of hatred but of respect. It showed that these kids do not keep a grudge for a long time. They know how to adjust their lives according to the attitudes of other people.

Another emotion that I live with is the uncertainty about what might be the most suitable and most effective interventions with the boys. Uncertainty can easily become fear for being responsible to the possible consequences. In these situations, it is liberating to be able to share with others the educational line to be followed. It is important to recognize that you can make mistakes, and that no educational mistake, when recognized, will lead to catastrophic consequences. Finally, I feel joy and happiness when I note the small, but nonetheless important, changes in the boys' commitment and in way of relating, especially by comparing their current situation with that of their coming into the community.

On these occasions, when I do not let pride win, I express to the Father my thanksgiving and praise for what, was accomplished through me. I feel I am only a poor instrument of his love for the children.

In this cauldron of emotions, what is important is to have the honesty to "call things by name", and not to let yourself be invaded by the emotions. Keep clear for yourself the spiritual motivations which made you take on this service to the poor, even when discouragement, fear, anger could easily lead in another direction. When we speak professionally about empathy, that is, the ability to accompany people, letting our hearts resonate with the same person's feelings, it is necessary to keep the respective roles clear of those who help and those who are helped.

Spiritually I like to interpret my work experience through the parable of the unprofitable servant (see Luke 17.7 - 10). On the one hand it tells me to live the relation with the young people in relationship with the social services, to which they are referred as minors and to the professional instruments which are part of my baggage of experience. There one acts as if all depended on it, on my capacity and on my efforts. On the other side I need to live in the knowledge that I am only a humble instrument in the hands of the Father and that I must rely only on his fidelity and his grace for the results of my work, often repeating, especially in critical situations the words of the Psalm "The Lord will complete through me his work" (see Ps 138.8) (*Giovanni Mengoli, SCJ*)

D. Group discussion and sharing

What role do the poor, the suffering and the abandoned play in my preoccupations and priorities? From the attention I give them I can measure the truth of my commitment towards the reconciliation of humanity.

What do I do to overcome the conflicts between individuals? Do I encourage cooperation, associations, solidarity?

Do I have the courage to try to overcome the dialectic-competitive mentality of this time?

Do I give signs of gratuity, where good is done even behind the scenes or when it may compromise me?

E. Prayer moment

O Father, you have created us with a body,
with feet so that we may meet you,
with a head to think,
with a heart to learn to love.

O Father, You have given us hands to shake other hands.
hands that are open as in an offering,
as a prayer of petition and thanksgiving.
Hands that bless, hands that greet, hands receiving the Bread of Life.

O Jesus, with Your hands have lifted up the poor and the excluded,
you did not throw the stone, but shared the bread,
you carried the cross ...

O Jesus, with your hands, you brought Thomas from doubt to faith.
The hands of the Risen One invite us to hope, to join hands,
so that we may not drop arms when faced by death and isolation.

O God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, teach us to share more,
because our hands are the extension of the heart
and become Your hands, the ones that give life.

(Jean-Luc Lefrancois)

Blessed are you, Father,

God of mercies and source of all consolation;
who from the beginning of the world have chosen us, freely,
to be holy and immaculate in love
and because of which we penetrate more, every day, into the unfathomable secrets of Love,
in the Heart of your Son Jesus,
in the footsteps of Father Dehon.

We want to thank you, Father.
because the humble seed, planted in your Church,
has been growing and growing,
as a messenger of love and reconciliation,
among many nations and peoples around the world.

To you be praise and glory
because you have inspired your children to abandon themselves into your hands,
the oblation with Jesus every day,
in the generosity and self-gift for the salvation of our brothers and sisters.

You, who direct the courses of time,
enlighten our steps,
because our presence in the Church and in the world
may be a sign of reconciliation, solidarity
and proclamation of your Kingdom to the poor, the marginalized,
and those who seek the bread of every day.

Enlighten the Dehonian Family with the gifts of your Holy Spirit:
May a new Pentecost arise to proclaim to you
By the life and the homes of our people,
so that your reign in souls and societies may come.

And may Mary, the mother of Jesus, accompany us and teach us,
in an availability like hers, to welcome his words of life. .
Amen.

Suggestions for further reading

Meeting XXX

PROPOSALS FOR THE LIFE OF A LAY DEHONIAN

Objectives of the meeting

- To grow in awareness of who is a lay dehonian and what is his or her baptismal trait.
- To get to know the “Proposal for Life” : an international document for lay dehonians.
- To share aspects of the “Proposal for Life” for your situation and reality.

Context of the meeting

The intent of this meeting which ends this year’s journey with Fr. Dehon, is to allow the lay person to capture the tonality of his baptism and to recognize the call of the Lord to live the consecration and mission in the Church and in the world, gained through the group and the faith experience of Fr. Dehon.

Development of the meeting

A. Welcome

Each member of the group is given a coloured ribbon or garland characterizing him or her so that the group is like the color of the rainbow or like branches on the vine. At the time of prayer, which can also be at the beginning, the ribbon in each participant’s hand is connected to a crucifix, an icon, or the altar, at the center (see prayer).

B. Biblical text (John 15.1-5)

¹ ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.’”

Commentary

In the passage, everything revolves around a concrete image and a verb: the vine and the branches, and the verb “to remain.” Christ the vine, I the branches: he and I as the same thing! The same plant, the same vine, one root, one sap. He in me and I in him as a child in the mother, the mother in the child. God is in me, not as a master but as a lifeline. God is in me, like a root that sends its energy to all the branches. God is in me to take care of me to my core.

In Christ, the winemaker has become the vine, the sower has become seed, the potter the clay, the Creator the creature. God is not only with us, but God is in us. If we look around, we all know people who seem like buds: we see them sprout and flourish. And you know that they are planted in something alive!

“Abide in me.” Just one condition; not conditional, but rooted in my existence: feed on the sap of my life. These are not abstract words, they are the words that also human love uses. Stay with

me, despite all distances and long winters, despite all the forces that drag us apart. The first step to remember is that you are already in him, he is already in you. You do not have to invent anything, you do not have to build anything. Only maintain what you have been given. Become aware: there is an energy flowing through you. It comes from God. It never fail; you will always be able to draw on it. All you need to do is to open the way, open the channels, you can always draw on, just open roads, open channels for the sap.

And then the gift of pruning ... it does not mean amputation, it means giving life, any farmer can tell you that. Give up the redundant, let it flourish. Because the glory of God is not the suffering but the abundance of fruit. It is as if Jesus said: I do not need sacrifices but good grapes; no penance, but that you flourish. The new name of Gospel morality is “good fruit”, with, inside the fruit, the taste of God. (Ermes Ronchi)

C. Text of Fr. Dehon

In the new actions in social works the action of the priest is not enough. It requires the collaboration of the laity. This was another prophetic intuition of Leo Dehon. *“The social works give to the actions of the priest a more apostolic character and permit the laity to make a very useful and at times indispensable contribution... The priests and the laity must initiate and, with holy emulation, be excited with this new form of apostolic ministry; they must dedicate themselves to the study of practical means, and to create and direct these works that respond directly to the current needs of souls and society. In this way, the pastors will not waste their lives in fruitless ministry, because he is not enlightened and no longer works in ineffective conditions. Lay Christians will learn not to be discouraged, enclosing themselves in the selfish circle of domestic duties; they will become the powerful helpers of their pastors for the greater good of the nation and of the Church”* (MSO 355368).

“Be courageous, young people! Study, act, and organize yourselves ... There needs to be a study group in every parish; that is the starting point. The study prepares for action. Learn how to speak so that you may refute the sophism of the street. Have your own program of economic reforms and now how to justify them. Poor are those catholics who limit their faith and action to private life. They do not deserve to be called men.” (“Aux jeunes gens”, REV 8031052/5).

D. Reflection

Cardinal Ballestrero, archbishop of Turin, has this to say:

“There are certain spiritual harmonies, where souls find a spiritual home and where their Christianity and their spiritual life lose their vagueness and anonymity. In this harmony they give shape to interior preferences and intimate choices... The members of God's people, especially the most committed, the most consistent, the most serious, do not look for a refuge, but a “homeland of the Spirit.” And how do they seek this? Instinctively they turn to the saints ... Through the mediation of saints they light upon their spiritual kin, that is, they gravitate to vocations to religious communities where they find inspiration, nourishment and life ... “.

Who are the laity?

They are Christian believers, that is, they have faith in Christ. They are incorporated in Christ in baptism. They have become the people of God, incorporated in the Church (People of God). They participate in the priestly, royal and prophetic functions of Christ with their own unique mission in

Church and society. They are disciples of the Lord Jesus with their eyes and hearts fixed on him. Living stones, they live their own vocation, a secular one, in the world. That is their social space where they live and put in action their humanity.

The mission of laity

Fully belonging to the Church, they participate in the mission of the Church, in all their interiority and their work in society, making good use of all the conditions of life. Every Christian shares in the whole mission of the church in accordance with the gifts they have received, with their personal qualities, in line with the sacraments that they have received, and in view of the needs of the Church and society.

Lay Dehonians

Because the charisms of the Founder are a gift of the Spirit to the whole Church (they are not owned by the Congregation) and because by their nature they open up to many forms of participation in the same project of evangelical life (Charism), also the vocations of laity find in Fr. Dehon and his charism a point of reference for their spiritual and human life and want to respond in a communion of love.

Immersed in the perfume of Christ they live in and for the world alongside others in the way of Christ and strengthened by the faith experience of Fr. Dehon. There they are witnesses of the Lord Jesus of the proclamation of the Love of God for everyone, of his Word (evangelization) and the commitment to the ordinary conditions of life (secular). Immersed in the everyday situation and in their secular world, they are open to the signs of the times and give witness to the values of dehonian spirituality. Under the guidance of the Spirit they become co-responsible to the fruitfulness of the charism and can give to it a new interpretation and incarnation.

The lay person in the Dehonian charism as the colors of the rainbow

The icon of the rainbow, sign of the beauty and variety of light, expresses the richness and complementarity of the laity in the charism of Fr. Dehon. The rainbow is a light that explodes in a plurality of colours. The charism is a grace which can give rise in the Church to multiple experiences of faith and of callings. The rainbow is a gift from on high, a harmony of colours, a bridge between heaven and earth. Laity participating in Dehon's charism are bridges of fraternity and covenants. Every lay person of every colour, can with his or her tonality create a harmony of communion and become a sign of the Trinitarian harmony.

Proposal for a Dehonian Way of Life (2001)

The proposal for a Dehonian Way of Life is a proposal for a way of interpreting and living the Gospel. It is a help to read and find a personal way with which I, called to follow Jesus in the light of this charism, can live. It does not propose something to do but a style of life. I can view it as a light, a sense, which God can give to my life today. Spirituality is a light which comes upon me in this moment. It tells me who I am, who I am with God, which values I have within me, what values are within me, how precious is my life today. It can also tell me what is lacking! It gives light to a way that I may take. It gives light but it also challenges me. It asks for a response.

If the values and the tonalities of the charism of Fr. Dehon speak to my heart, if I feel called to a spiritual path, to a formation so that I may deepen the experience of faith, to making it real in my

daily life, to enter into a communion with other laity... and with the brothers and sisters of the Dehonian Family, in what follows you may find a spiritual path for you.

The complete text of the Proposal for a Dehonian Way of Life

This text was proposed and accepted in 2001. The Proposal for a Dehonian Way of Life spells out the spiritual path for Lay Dehonians. It consists of 12 points.

I. Identity of the Lay Dehonian

1. A Lay Dehonian, man or woman, is primarily:

- a member of the Church who, faithful to Christ, is committed to the building of the Kingdom of God in the temporal sphere;
- conscious of his or her baptismal vocation and lay mission, lives it, strengthened by the experience of faith of Fr. Dehon, as a response to a personal vocation;
- one who recognizes in Fr. Dehon and his charism, approved by the Church, the point of reference for a personal spiritual life.

2. A Lay Dehonian is Inserted into a specific socio-ecclesial context:

- at a personal or group level (Dehonian Family and Church) he/she lives this as his/her personal vocation.
- immersed in the every-day life and in one's country, he or she is open to the signs of the times, and lives the values of Dehonian spirituality;
- fully inserted in the secular reality of the world, he or she realizes the mission through his/her apostolic activity in the local Church and society (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 15).
-

II. The Lay Dimension of the Dehonian Charism

3. The lay Dehonian has as his/her specific task to interpret and incarnate as a lay person the Dehonian charism (CL, nn. 24, 56).

He or she interprets the charism by his/her participation in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ (CL n. 14); he/she incarnates it within the confines of his/her mission in the world: the service to people, family, society, and Church (CL n.23).

Such a lay task “often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate” (*Vita Consecrata* n. 55).

4. The Lay Dehonian, animated by the spirit:

- lives “fully in the world” with duties in the context of family, profession, work, politics, and Church, consecrating the world to God as a priestly oblation and spiritual sacrifice (CL n. 14);
- “feels with the Church” and shares its passion for the Gospel and the world like a prophet of love and Christian hope (CL n. 14);
- promotes human and humanizing life, works for reconciliation and solidarity, is attentive to the human situation, especially of poverty and turmoil, by making Christ present among people;
- in this manner, he or she responds to the *call to holiness* of every baptized person (CL n. 16) and to a life of union with Christ in his love and reparatory oblation to the Father for us.

III. Formation

5. The Lay Dehonian is committed to a serious, progressive and on-going formation, in which he or she is introduced to the charism and assumes it in an on-going way by translating it into a spirituality and mission culture and society. (cf. CfL n. 60).

The religious Dehonians sustain and accompany the lay person in the discernment of his/her vocation, in his or her formation, to allow them to become “agents of formation”. In as much as they are consecrated people, they are called to be “expert guides of spiritual life” and to cultivate the spirit (cf. VC. 55).

6. Formation must allow the person to grow harmoniously in the contemplative and active dimension of the Christian life and Dehonian spirituality, keeping in mind the identity of the group, age, sensitivity, and culture (CL n. 59)

7. The *contents of formation* must respect the different cultural and socio-ecclesial contexts, keeping in mind especially the following:

- basic Christian formation, the ecclesiology of communion, the problems of evangelization, the current social thinking of the Church,
- the values of Dehonian spirituality, the sought communion of “We, the Dehonian Family.”

8. A possible path for achieving this consists of three phases. Groups are encouraged to be inspired by:

- a moment of *welcome*: the need for space and time for a first approach or a first proposal of a lay Dehonian vocation;
- a period of *deepening*, dedicated to the formation of lay people into the content of the vocation;
- a time for *action*: during this time the lay Dehonian takes on some responsibility, commits himself/herself to a lifestyle that is consistent with the Dehonian charism in a particular socio-ecclesial context.

This commitment can be assumed by making a public declaration to be renewed annually.

Moments of Celebration will mark the more significant stages of the spiritual path: they permit a more conscious passage through the stages, more time to give witness and to grow as a group in the Dehonian Family.

9. The *means of formation*, such as prayer, personal reflection, ongoing formation occasions, initiatives undertaken together, regular group meetings, celebrations, handout sheets, periodicals... will vary according to the makeup of the group and the route chosen.

It is important to emphasize points of reference (persons, communities, experiences) and assure personal accompaniment which, in the process of discernment, allows each one to come to know his/her vocation, to permit gifts and abilities to grow, and to check out the consistency of his/her life.

IV. Organizational Autonomy

10. The Dehonian Lay State:

- is open to communion;
- enjoys an organizational autonomy (CL n. 29); for this reason, “reference points” and “structures” of coordination (such as commissions...) are necessary at the regional and national levels of geographical and international areas;
- will pay particular attention to the formation of group leaders;
- will work at providing helpful materials.

V. Communion within the Dehonian Family

11. The relationships among the parts of the Dehonian Family, which are founded on baptismal dignity and on participation in a common spiritual heritage, are lived in the spirit of communion, support, and collaboration, ever mindful to respect and welcome the gift of diversity (cf. CL n. 55).

12. Times of dialogue and meeting lend themselves to promote understanding and relationships among parts of the Dehonian Family in a particular area; these contacts must be promoted by the respective commissions at the different levels.

E. Testimony

A time for research and for meeting

Take time, especially in time free from teaching, to offer your services to the diocese, to arrange a meeting with a dehonian community in your area. Get to know their activities, some of which may periodically be published in the diocesan newspaper. A meeting, which may at first glance seem random, may prove to be quite providential

An experience of spirituality and life

The meeting with a religious community, free from parochial duties, available for a conversation and sharing, with a spirituality that immediately attracted me, opened my heart and freed my spirit. Finally, a place where I could go, without sensing the continual call services, the urgency to which one must respond, free from the “obligations” of commitments. That is how I got started to go to community prayer which was open to all and to the weekly lectio divina... I was invited to also participate in sessions of instruction.

What attracted me was a style of proclamation and reading of the gospel, the way persons were welcomed, the different people, young and old, the style of prayer and communion. Along the way I picked up more and more that certain messages of the word of God spoke to my life and helped me to read my newspaper more serenely, more hopefully, closer to my deeper feelings, especially they allowed me to give attention to certain important issues particularly in my profession. And I began to share those accents which were “normal” for the priests, but for me were full of novelty and expansive. My biggest surprise came when I spoke about my experience with other participants in the Dehonian experience. I found that they had a similar experience, the same joy of sharing in the gifts which the Dehonian priests had given us individually and in our group.

With it began the desire to know... the charism

Where does a proclamation of the Word of this type come from? From where does such a beautiful vision of God come from? In what is such a spirituality rooted? What are its traits? And the questions kept coming... and the community found itself questioned about its way of being Dehonian. Some first steps were made by reading a few biographies of Father Dehon and some other information ... and then through some formation sessions with the *Sint Unum* Group ...

The community helped lay people by having a religious assigned to them by the Provincial Superior of the Dehonians and by connecting them with other lay people in other parts of the country (Modena, Bologna, Bolzano, Padua, Monza, Milan) who had already received an initiation into SCJ spirituality. Other groups (Bergamo, Conegliano) were more like us; they too were making their first steps. From the meetings came the idea of a two-year basic formation, which all would receive from Dehonians with theological and ecclesiological reflections on the spirituality and charism of Father Dehon. The two-year sessions saw the participation of laity, some religious, some members of the Compagnia Missionaria and others. Altogether it was a superabundant grace that put flesh and bones to an initial intuition that had attracted us.

Not all interested lay people of our area were able to participate because of family or work commitments, but they all could stay in touch with those who registered and with the booklets that were distributed, thanks to the commitment of some lay people and the availability of the priests who moderated the meetings and who gave them their notes. The growing bond and friendship between the lay people and the priests and the lay people that grew in the two years allowed for an exchange of personal experiences about our lives, our attachment to the Church, our professions and our community. They have given us the opportunity to listen, to listen deeply, to identify and receive spiritual resonances. Through this growing bond among us there also grew a spiritual bond with the spirituality and charism of Fr. Dehon.

From formation to mission

In the meantime, each one of us continued to live where family and professional life called him or her, but now with a new awareness, and a different spirit. The first formation was followed by a type of on-going formation which consisted of a few meetings each year, and by an accompaniment at the regional level. These allowed us to specify, embody, re-translate the content that we had received to our own particular context. Through the sharing we realized how the charism spoke to us personally. All remarked how their vision of God had changed, as well as their approach to the Word of God, the image of the Church. We all mentioned how we had begun to see it as a communion of vocations. For each one the incarnation of the charism took on different facets: spiritually, socially or even just humanly and how it had changed their everyday relationships.

In our area for some time, we started a religious-lay research in which we tried to read the appeals of humans and give a response to them (encounters with the other), to provide moments of sharing and discussion about the experiences lived by laity and religious. It was a sort of declension by lay people of the contents of the Dehonian spirituality (the rainbow and its colors).

But the biggest surprise happened on the personal level: the desire to be in the family, to be part of ecclesial and civil communities, our new way of living our profession with a style and a freedom never experienced before. Our existence as men or women, Christians today, began to take on a style that responded to the deep desire to give a tonality, colour to our life. This was the effect of the spirituality and charism which the Spirit gave to the Church by Father Dehon.

We did perhaps the same things as before, now we did them with a new awareness. We became ready to say no in order to promote co-responsibility, to encourage the growth of others, to live to be rather than to do. Each one lived with his own specific gift for oneself as well as for the community. When something beautiful happens to us and speaks to our hearts, to our lives, a spontaneous desire arises in us and leads us to want to share it with others. That's what happened to me. What grew in me was a way of sharing as a lay person in my area, and I took up the task of coordinating as a lay person in my area. And, thanks to the experience of the General Chapter and the meeting in Rome of 2000, my horizons broadened.

A proposal of life that gives vibrancy to baptismal life

Even more that feeling at one with the religious, I have felt at one with the life project of Fr. Dehon and with the proclamation of Incarnate Love, the opened Heart of Christ, which the Dehonians passed on. And it is for this reason that we recognize the action of the Spirit who is implicated in this adventure and who sustains our journey also when the Dehonian situation in our area changes.

In the Church and in the world

The centrality of love in our everyday life leads us in the Church, and particularly our local Church, to “feel with the Church”, to become involved with this Church, with living the baptismal ministry as lay people, in discipleship, in the sacraments, in communion. It sends us into the various spheres of social life of the world with an authentic human presence, with empathy for humanity (respect for the dignity of the person, especially the little ones, the poor, the family, school as a place of human and cultural formation; quality of education; dignity and responsibility in the work place and justice and charity; the proper use of public and private money; social and political commitment, the thirst for knowledge, knowledge for the sake of discernment; search for truth through education, culture, research and study ...). All this requires courage and intelligence of the heart, action and a positive gospel outlook³, where everyone feels called, as he or she is and how he or she can at that particular moment, with discretion and kindness, as instruments entrusted to the hands and the heart of an Other. We do all this, giving thanks to the One from whom comes all Love and who sends us to share with others in communion. An overturned secularity, inspired by the Dehonian spirituality. (*Donatella Martelli*)

F. Group discussion and sharing

Being a lay person according to the charism of Fr. Dehon means to assume a style of heart, a style of life, a style of mission.

Which parts of the Proposal for Life is already alive in me and which part requires a decision on my part?

G. Prayer moment

Everyone holds a colored ribbon. When in the prayer verse the group says: “If you look for a person” one person from the group takes his or her ribbon and attaches it to the crucifix, an icon, or the altar at the center, thus forming a radial arrangement: branches of the vine and colours of the rainbow.

³ André Perroux, *Uomini e donne secondo il pensiero di P. Dehon*, 1996

If you look for a person

If you look for a person
without fear of tomorrow
without fear of today
without a complex about the past.

If you look for a person
who has no fear of change
who does not change for the sake of changing
who does not talk for the sake of talking.

If you look for a person
who is able to live with others
to work with others
to laugh with others
to love others
to take care of others.

If you look for a person
who is able to lose without feeling destroyed
who is able to doubt without losing faith
who is able to bring peace where there is restlessness
who is able to bring restlessness where there is peace.

If you look for a person
who knows how to use his or her hands
to indicate what street to follow.

If you look for a person
without a lot of means
but a great desire to do things
who in a time of crisis does not look for other work
but only how to work better.

If you look for a person
who loves his freedom
to live and to serve
and not just to do what he or she wants.

If you look for a person
who has a nostalgia for God,
for people, for poverty, for obedience.

If you look for a person
who does not confuse prayer
with words laden with habit
spirituality with sentimentalism,
a calling with interest
service with the urge for order.

If you look for a person
able to die for a flag,
able to suffer for an ideal
able to speak with his life.

(Don Primo Mazzolari)

Suggestions for further reading

FINAL CELEBRATION

THE HANDING OVER OF THE BIBLE AND THE SANDALS

Things to prepare:

- Bible
- sandals
- songs
- a banner with the words: “We are a community of missionary disciples.”

Introduction

Pope Francis reminds everyone: “The intimacy of the Church with Jesus is an intimacy of wanderers” (EG 23). It must be “outward bound” or “going forth” (EG 24). On the other hand, the living out of the Dehonian charism means also mission: “Our prophetic charism places us at the service of the saving mission of the people of God in today’s world. (Rule of Life n. 27; cf. LG 12). For this reason, our spirituality does not close in on itself but continuously throws us into the life of the world, at the service of the Gospel.

The handing over of the Bible and the sandals with which we conclude the journey of this year, seeks to make us understand this missionary dynamism of our Christian and Dehonian vocation: also we are “a community of missionary disciples.” (EG 24)

Initial greeting

We sing (*choose an appropriate hymn*)

Pr. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

Pr. The Lord, who sent into the world his Son, grant you the abundance of his Spirit, so that we may become ever more missionary disciples of Jesus.

All May the Lord be blessed forever.

Pr. *Let us pray:*

O God, who have established your Church
As a universal sacrament of salvation
To continue the work of Christ to the end of time,
Awaken the hearts of the faithful,
So that we may give answer to the urgency of the missionary call
And may all people on earth form one family
And raise up a new humanity in Christ our Lord,
Who is God, living and reigning with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
For ever and ever.

All Amen.

From the Gospel according to Luke (4. 16-21)

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

Brief reflection

In Nazareth, Jesus gives a type of programmatic discourse: He is among us to take away from humans all that prevents their flourishing. He also he wants to make it clear to everyone what is the kingdom of God: life to the full, something that brings joy, something that gives freedom and light, which makes history a place a little less desperate. And he places himself among the last ... He came to bring God to the distant, to men and women without hope, to open them to their immense potential in life, work, creativity, respect, understanding, love. He became human so that the sons of man would become children of God. He came with the power of the Spirit of the Lord.

Jesus invites us to help in spreading this Good News. As the Father has sent him into the world, so he sends us. We welcome the Lord's command, and, with him and like him, we pronounce the Ecce venio.

Oblation

After a moment of silence, all say the act of oblation.

O Jesus, missionary of the Father,
who, when entering the world said:
Here I am, I come to do your will;
strengthen in us the same disposition
that lived in the heart of your Son.

May your Spirit transform
And make a gift also of our hearts
To do the will of the Father
And to proclaim to men and women of our time
Your mercy.

May our feet never be weary
To go out and meet the weak and the poor
And to be near to the many who are nearly frozen and half dead
On the streets of the world.

In union with you,
and under the maternal gaze of your and our Mother Mary,
we wish to journey to our brothers and sisters
who do not yet know you and love you
to proclaim your Word and to serve them in charity.
May this be our spiritual worship to the joy and glory of the Father.
Amen.

Rite of handing over the Bible

After the act of oblation, the presider turns to the group with these words:

Dear brothers and sisters,
The story of the discourse of Jesus in Nazareth reminds us of our vocation as missionary disciples. Like Jesus, we too are called to go throughout the world to proclaim the Good News. Often we are skeptical and discouraged. However, with the power of his Spirit, he challenges, converts us, brings joy, arouses ardour, and encourages us to be messengers of his resurrection to our brothers and sisters. On this journey he assists us and we are sustained by the motherly presence of the Virgin Mary. In her, listening becomes a celebration of the Word, a gesture of charity and caring presence, courageous fidelity in the moments of trial, communion in prayer and hope with the missionary Church. Mary, mother and disciple of the Lord, is for all a model of hospitality, love and faithfulness to the Word of God, and example of how to proclaim the message to our brothers and sisters today.

Pr. *Let us pray.*

O Christ, eternal word of the Father,
Open our minds to listen
And understand the scriptures;
give us a docile hear
and make us worthy to be proclaimers
and witnesses of the word that saves.
You who live and reign forever and ever.

All Amen.

Before handing over the Bible and the sandals, the presider pronounces the following formula.

Pr. Receive the Holy Bible and the sandals of the missionaries of the kingdom.
May the Word of God resound in your homes,
warm your hearts, and be the light on your paths, the proclamation of joy for all.
May the power of the Spirit accompany you, and sustain you in your efforts,
and make fruitful your apostolate and guide you on the path to holiness.

All Amen.

This is followed by a greeting and embrace.

If a priest or deacon presides, he says:

Pr. The Lord be with you

All And with your spirit

Pr. May almighty God bless you,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

Pr. Bear to all the Word and the joy of the Lord. Go in Peace.

All Thanks be to God

If a lay person presides:

Pr. The Lord send us to listen to and to proclaim his Word;
May he bless our steps,
Keep us from all evil
And lead us to eternal life.

All Amen.

Final Song

Index

YEAR III – PRESENTATION	3
INTRODUCTORY NOTE	5
SIGLA OF THE WRITINGS OF FR. DEHON AND OTHER DEHONIAN PUBLICATIONS	7
<i>Meeting XXI</i>	
FR. DEHON AND THE BIBLE	9
Objectives of the meeting	9
Context of the meeting	9
Development of the meeting	9
A. Welcome	9
B. Biblical text (Luke 4.16-21).....	9
C. Text of Fr. Dehon	11
D. Reflection.....	11
E. Testimony.....	14
F. Group discussion and sharing.....	15
E. Prayer moment	15
Suggestions for further reading	18
<i>Meeting XXII</i>	
THEY WILL LOOK ON THE ONE WHOM THEY HAVE PIERCED	19
Objectives of the meeting	19
Context of the meeting.....	19
Development of the meeting	19
A. Welcome	19
B. Biblical text (John 19.28-37).....	19
C. Text of Fr. Dehon	20
D. Reflection.....	21
E. Testimony.....	24
F. Group discussion and sharing.....	25
G. Prayer moment	25
Suggestions for further reading	27
<i>Meeting XXIII</i>	
FATHER DEHON AND THE EUCHARIST	29
Objectives of the meeting	29
Context of the meeting.....	29
Development of the meeting	29
A. Welcome	29
B. Biblical text (Luke 22.14-20)	29
C. Text of Fr. Dehon	30
D. Reflection.....	30
E. Testimony.....	33
F. Group discussion and sharing.....	34
G. Prayer moment	35
Suggestions for further reading	36

Meeting XXIV

THE EUCHARIST: THE PRESENCE OF THE RISEN ONE CHANGES OUR LIFE.....37
Objectives of the meeting37
Context of the meeting.....37
Development of the meeting37
A. Welcome37
B. Biblical text (John 13. 1-17).....37
B. Text of Fr. Dehon38
C. Reflection39
E. Testimony.....43
F. Group discussion and sharing.....43
G. Prayer moment43
Suggestions for further reading45

Meeting XXV

THE “SENSE OF THE CHURCH” ACCORDING TO FATHER DEHON47
Objectives of the meeting47
Context of the meeting.....47
Development of the meeting47
A. Welcome47
B. Biblical text (Acts 2.42-47)48
C. Text of Fr. Dehon48
D. Reflection.....48
E. Testimony.....52
G. Prayer moment53
Suggestions for further reading54

Meeting XXVI

COMMUNION OF VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH55
Objectives of the meeting55
Context of the meeting.....55
Development of the meeting55
A. Welcome55
B. Biblical text (1Cor 12.12ff)55
C. Text of Fr. Dehon56
D. Reflection.....56
E. Testimony.....60
F. Group discussion and sharing.....62
G. Prayer moment62
Suggestions for further reading64

Meeting XXVII

LIFE OF PRAYER: EUCHARISTIC ADORATION65
Objectives of the meeting65
The context of the meeting.....65
Development of the meeting65
A. Welcome65
B. Biblical text (Ex 3.1-12).....65
B. Text of Fr. Dehon66
D. Reflection.....67

E. Testimony.....	68
F. Group discussion and sharing.....	70
G. Prayer moment	70
Suggestions for further reading	71
 <i>Meeting XXVIII</i>	
PROPHETS OF LOVE.....	73
Objectives of the meeting	73
Context of the meeting.....	73
Development of the meeting	73
A. Welcome	73
B. Biblical text (John 3.16-17; 1John 4.16).....	73
C. Text of Fr. Dehon	73
D. Reflection.....	74
E. Testimony.....	77
F. Group discussion and sharing.....	78
G. Prayer moment	78
Suggestions for further reading	81
 <i>Meeting XXIX</i>	
SERVANTS OF RECONCILIATION	83
Objectives of the meeting	83
Context of the meeting.....	83
Development of the meeting	83
A. Welcome	83
B. Biblical text (2Cor 5.14-20)	84
C. Text of Fr. Dehon	84
D. Reflection.....	84
E. Testimony.....	90
D. Group discussion and sharing.....	92
E. Prayer moment	93
Suggestions for further reading	94
 <i>Meeting XXX PROPOSALS FOR THE LIFE OF A LAY DEHONIAN.....</i>	
Objectives of the meeting	95
Context of the meeting.....	95
Development of the meeting	95
A. Welcome	95
B. Biblical text (John 15.1-5)	95
C. Text of Fr. Dehon	96
D. Reflection.....	96
E. Testimony.....	100
F. Group discussion and sharing.....	102
G. Prayer moment.....	102
Suggestions for further reading.....	104
 FINAL CELEBRATION	
THE HANDING OVER OF THE BIBLE AND THE SANDALS	105