

Consecrated life must embody fervour, inspire intense prayer, show the unique radicality of the gospel, and must rekindle commitment to mission. But, in a world where consecrated persons discourage efforts, criticise valid initiatives, show an irritable attitude and tend to reshape the charism according to the models of the world, then, the fire is weakened. It is noteworthy that today, in many countries, vocations to the contemplative life are growing while apostolic life is dying out. How can this be explained?

Despite various proposals for renewal, rallies, vocational campaigns, remodelling of religious parameters (such as changing the habit, removing the veil, embracing the preferential option for the poor, inclusion of the marginalised, shared mission with the laity), very little positive change is discernible. In fact, the situation worsens.

The decline in vocations is a reality. Some communities even risk extinction. Some institutes have had no new vocations for more than 25 years, and fear they will die out completely. Fragility and decline! Many religious orders are faced with an ageing membership of their communities, and a decrease in the number of the faithful around them. The situation is very critical. What can be done?

Very strong is the psychological aspect of human ageing. An ageing religious woman is not the same as an ageing religious brother. Fragility also lies in the struggle to maintain institutions, properties and ministries with fewer members.

To this fragility, called ageing, also goes the loss of institutional memory and charismatic founders. Thus, the tendency is to modify the initial charism, instead of going back to the sources. Unfortunately, even this does not solve the problem; on the contrary, it creates internal conflicts. Resources are sold, material goods increase, and this creates more crises of attachment to finances, the use of goods, institutional and personal alienation. More crises!

Evidently, one can speak of initiatives for the reform of structures. There is no shortage of wonderful ideas about new possibilities. This is not the problem, also because beautiful ideas remain written words and dead. There is a lack of courage to implement them. The initial zeal, once evident in the novitiate, is no longer there. The expression, *duc in altum*, nice to hear, but difficult to implement; who dares to sail the high seas, and venture into the deep waters?

There are proposals for a new paradigm. Consecrated life today requires a new model, a new way of implementing, of thinking, of moving. Everyone agrees. But then? Existing structures are no longer sufficient, and new ones must emerge from a new spirit. How many hours had you spent reflecting on the new spirit, new models?

On the other hand, it is very essential to focus on God's gift, the graciousness and the gratuitous nature of his call, the transforming power of his Word and his Spirit. In today's Gospel, Jesus assures that whoever comes to him will not be rejected. In saying this, Jesus presented the disciples with a new way of thinking, of acting: his Body!

His Body! The Living Body of the People of God, and the Living Eucharistic Body. Communities must be integrated into the living communion of God's faithful people in order to grow fruitfully.

The prophetic dimension thrives when religious life remains deeply rooted in prayer, contemplation and community. In this sense, authenticity, consistency, or I would say, fidelity, is important. Communities that live their charism with joy and authenticity attract new members.

Hope and renewal. In the midst of fragility, there is also hope in God. From the dispersion inflicted by external persecution, new forms of life, new energies emerge; new hopes arrive, often less structured and more adaptable. Here, one finds the courage to make the faithful changes. Lay associates and co-workers play a crucial role. We should know how to