

Sisters and brothers,

Europe and the world are going through a very difficult time. Climate change, pandemics of diseases and Russia's military attack against the fundamental pillars of our civilization will have long-term global economic, political, social and moral consequences. No wonder there is growing worry and anxiety. Political populists, extremists, nationalists and religious fundamentalists are exploiting this fear. More than ever, humanity needs the social capital of trust and solidarity to survive.

Religion and religious communities have been a source of hope for centuries.

Today, at a time when this role is sorely needed, many religious communities in Europe are in difficulties and crises, especially crises of credibility.

I was recently asked by an Austrian journalist to what extent the state of the Church today resembles the changes in the natural environment: the icebergs are melting. My answer had two parts. On the one hand, there is indeed an analogy: the form of the Church, resembling a massive, immobile, cold colossus, is indeed melting due to the change in the cultural and social climate, and this process is irreversible.

Churches, monasteries, and seminaries are being emptied and even closed, and tens of thousands are leaving the church. The dark shadows of the recent past are depriving the churches of credibility.

The situation of our Church today, on the threshold of postmodernity, strongly resembles the situation at the beginning of modernity, just before the Reformation. The scandals of psychological, spiritual and sexual abuse have played a similar role today as the scandals of the sale of indulgences in Martin Luther's time. As then, so today, these scandals, which at first seemed like marginal phenomena, have turned out to be an alarming symptom of a serious illness in the whole system of the Church, requiring a profound reform.

Pope Francis diagnosed the disease of the system as clericalism, the abuse of power and authority. Jesus called this disease "the leaven of the Pharisees".

According to Pope Francis the way out of this dead end of the Church is **synodality**: the transformation of the church from a bureaucratic-hierarchical system into a *dynamic network of communication*, a shared journey, common way (syn-hodos).

The Pope emphasizes, that this path must remain *open*, like the path of the father of faith, Abraham, who set out on a journey, although he did not know where he was going.

During the process of preparation for the Synod on Synodality, new horizons on this path have emerged. According the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, the goal of this journey is "universal fraternity", not only greater efficiency and transparency in the functioning of the Church's apparatus. It means, that synodality cannot be just an internal matter of the Catholic Church. It must become a credible invitation to a common journey in a broadly **ecumenical sense**.

The universal fraternity, the unity of mankind in Christ, is certainly an eschatological goal, but on the way to it fundamental steps must be taken to overcome the barriers of relations between churches, religions and cultures. It is at this time, when we hear words from Moscow that have not been heard since Hitler and Goebbels, including threats of nuclear war, that we need to protect the great dream of peace and justice.

The great dreams that God sends to our hearts in the dark nights of history are meant to awaken, inspire and strengthen us in our mission in the world.

Pope Francis is referring to the ideal of a Church that does not remain behind the walls of its certainties in splendid isolation from the outside world, but rather goes out sacrificially and courageously to places where people are physically, socially, psychologically and spiritually wounded, trying to dress and heal the wounds. The Church should be – according to Pope Francis – **a field hospital**. This metaphor needs to be more developed.

The field hospital needs the facilities of a proper hospital, which has its own research facilities, provides quality diagnostics, and is dedicated to prevention, therapy and rehabilitation. As a hospital, the Church should keep before its eyes not only the suffering of individuals but also the *collective ills* of today's societies and civilizations. For too long, the Church has chiefly adopted a moralistic approach to society's ills; its task now is to discover and exercise the *therapeutic potential of faith*.

The diagnostic function should be performed by the discipline which I call *kairology* – the art of reading and interpreting the signs of the times, the theological hermeneutics of events in society and culture. Kairology should pay special attention to times of crisis and changes in cultural paradigms. Kairology develops the method of *spiritual discernment* that is an important part of the spirituality of St. Ignatius: contemplation and evaluation of the present state of the world and our tasks in it.

The role of prevention is akin to what is sometimes called “pre-evangelization”: nurturing the cultural and moral soil in which the seed of faith can be planted in order to take root. Respect for human rights, the struggle for social justice or the concern for the stability of family life are also part of “pre-evangelization”, constituting an intrinsic “earthly side of faith”. If the Church did not accept its co-responsibility for the world and strive for the cultivation of society, but merely devoted itself to “explicitly religious activities,” it would render these activities inauthentic and sterile. The *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* belong together; to separate one from the other is to damage both.

In a time of hate ideologies and fake news, it is necessary to build an “immunity system” and create a favourable climate for the healthy development of the human person and society, to develop an *integral ecology*. In this field, Christians must work in solidarity with many secular institutions and initiatives; we cannot claim a monopoly on healing the world.

What we might term *rehabilitative* care is primarily needed in societies that have long been wounded by social and political conflicts, or by wars or repressive regimes, where the social capital of trust and solidarity has been depleted. Where traumas, unrelieved guilt, and broken relationships between people and human groups persist for a long time, it is up to Christians to apply their experience to the practice of repentance, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

Here I would like to return to the metaphor of the iceberg. C.G. Jung once compared the human psyche to an iceberg - the visible, conscious, rational part of the human soul is very thin; the most massive and important part lies in the depths of the personal and collective unconscious.

I am convinced that the most important structures of Christianity are not the external institutional forms that are now in crisis, but the **deeper dimension of faith** for which we usually use the ambiguous term **spirituality**.

Spirituality is “the lifestyle of faith”; it fills virtually the entire space of the *fides qua*, act of faith. It is the sap of the tree of faith, it nourishes and animates both dimensions of faith: the spiritual life, the inner religious experience, the way in which faith is lived and reflected upon, but also the outward practice of faith, the embodiment of faith in culture and society. I consider this dimension of faith to be crucial, especially in the time ahead.

Many people today find church institutions untrustworthy and the preaching of doctrine incomprehensible and implausible, yet Christian spirituality speaks to their hearts.

Perhaps it is precisely the crisis, the shaking and dissolution of external institutional structures that can help us rediscover those deep structures of Christianity, and through their revival there can be renewal - and not only the renewal of the Church.

The life of faith needs its institutional aspect, but the renewal of the Church cannot consist only in the reform of institutions, certain parts of the Catechism and the Code of Canon Law, but must begin and be constantly accompanied by a revival of spirituality.

What we need most today are **vibrant, radiant centres of living, healthy spirituality**.

I believe that here lies the main task for religious communities. I do not expect the renewal of the Church primarily from traditional parish communities. With the current crisis of priestly vocations, it is impossible to maintain a network of local parishes. Trying to supplement the thinning ranks of priests by "importing" priests from Poland, Africa and Asia cannot be a lasting solution.

Many voices are being heard in the national synodal processes that the hour for the ordination of "viri probati" has come. If the charisma of celibacy were to return to its original natural setting, to the religious orders, it would certainly make a great contribution to the culture of celibacy.

But even the "viri probati" will probably not bring a sufficient influx of priestly vocations. The crisis of the priesthood goes deeper, it is a crisis of identity due to the changes in the role of clergy in the Church and society.

The question of the ordination of women is beyond the scope of this lecture. It seems to me only that the main argument against the ordination of women - Jesus chose only men - is not sustainable.

Jesus also chose only circumcised Jews among his Twelve; so, do we have the right to ordain Italians, Germans and Japanese?

It will have to be asked honestly whether the arguments against the ordination of women are really **theological** in nature, or rather *psychological*, and to which extent they are marked by cultural stereotypes of patriarchal and masculine societies.

Especially at a time when many local parishes are disappearing, it is necessary to build **centres of spiritual life** that offer not only the usual liturgy, but courses of contemplative prayer, spiritual accompaniment, and the possibility of an open sharing of spiritual experiences.

Some synodal circles were definite steps along this path - where the practice of synodality developed. This practice must continue after the Synod of Bishops in Rome, especially if the Synod fails to meet the high expectations of many of the believers. The eventual frustration of too great expectations should not lead to resignation or schism.

I can offer my own pastoral experience. In an academic parish in Prague, over the several decades of its existence, we have baptized several thousand adults, mostly university students, after a solid, almost two-year catechetical preparation.

However, many of the newly baptized after returning from their studies in Prague experienced culture shock and great disappointment because of the difference between the vibrant academic parish and the semi-dead local parish in the countryside.

However, when several spiritual centres have been established where people go for contemplation courses, creative spiritual exercises, long-term spiritual accompaniment and open discussions about the future of the Church, converts find strength to overcome crises and many spiritual seekers come.

One evening a week in our parish is reserved for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and pastoral counselling. Over the years it has become clear that people of different generations need other forms of spiritual accompaniment far more than the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They need the opportunity to bring their pains, questions, doubts, wounds, not just "sins". We began to use religious sisters and brothers and lay people, both men and women, with theological and psychotherapeutic qualifications. Often Christians from other churches and unbaptized, spiritually seeking people also come.

Here I see a great field of action for sisters and brothers from religious orders: the ministry of *spiritual accompaniment*.

The vanguard of this ministry of the Church – the ministry of *spiritual accompaniment* – is so-called categorial pastoral care: the ministry of chaplains in hospitals and in prisons; it can also take the form of spiritual accompaniment of people in all kinds of difficult life situations, or supporting those who are engaged in a similarly demanding ministry to others and are at risk of burnout.

The chaplains' ministry is intended for *everyone*, not just "the faithful".

It differs both from the traditional pastoral ministry of clergy, such as parish priests, who visit their parishioners in hospitals and administer the sacraments, and from mission in the sense of "converting non-believers" and winning new members for the Church. It is also different from the work of psychologists and social workers.

It is a *spiritual* ministry, a spiritual accompaniment. Spiritual ministry is based on the assumption that the spiritual realm is an anthropological constant, that it is intrinsic to human beings and helps to shape their humanity. The spiritual is concerned with *meaning*, both the “meaning of life” and the meaning of a particular life situation.

People need not only to know in theory, but also to actually live and experience the fact that their life, with all its joys and pains, has *meaning*; the need for meaning and awareness of meaningfulness are among people’s basic existential needs. Especially in difficult life situations, the awareness of meaningfulness is often shaken and needs to be resurrected. We need awareness of the meaning of life as much as we need air, food and drink; we cannot live permanently in inner darkness and disorientation.

The ministry of spiritual accompaniment straddles the boundary between the religious and secular spheres: it may draw on the spiritual treasures of religion, but it lives in a non-ecclesial, secular space and must express itself in a way that is understandable to that environment. It must transcend the boundaries of the church’s language game.

Jesus commanded us to love all people, to become neighbours. One of the faces of love is respect for others’ otherness: love is the space of freedom that we open up to others, so that they can be truly and fully themselves; a space of trust, of security, of acceptance; a space enabling our clients to develop what is most precious in themselves, to become themselves. It is only when we have experienced being accepted and loved, just as we are, that we learn to accept and love others.

The royal road of spiritual accompaniment, its alpha and omega, is the cultivation of a contemplative attitude towards the world and one’s own life. The mission of the spiritual companion is to say to clients what Jesus said when he first addressed his future disciples: launch out into the deep and wait in silence. But they must also be taught how to do it – to be initiated into the art of contemplation. Spiritual accompaniers do not have to be “spiritual” in the sense of “ordained ministers of the Church”, but they must be *spiritual people* – people who do not just live on the surface of life, but draw from their inner depths.

Let us now turn to a remarkable phenomenon on the post-secular scene: the ever-increasing number of people who, when asked what religion they subscribe to, answer that they subscribe to **none**. Sociologists have given this growing set of people the collective label of *nones*.

Nones are the third largest group on the planet today, after Christians and Muslims. They represent an extraordinarily diverse range of opinions and existential orientations (of *belief* and *faith*).

Sometimes what is too hastily described as the atheization of society actually means that people’s spiritual life has evolved away from the forms offered by the churches; the demand for a more mature and specialized form of spiritual life outstrips what the churches have to offer, which is too narrow and stereotypical.

The most interesting part of the *nones* are the spiritual *seekers*. Sociologists distinguish between *dwellers* and *seekers*. (It would be wrong to divide people into believers and seekers, because dwellers and seekers are found both among believers and nonbelievers.)

I am convinced that the future of Christianity will depend primarily on the extent to which Christians relate to the spiritual seekers among the *nones*.

In the corridor of the theology department of Harvard University a few years ago, I found a poster inviting to a conference or course called " The Nunes and the Nones" - a dialogue between the sisters of religious orders and people without denominational affiliation. I thought it was a good initiative.

The crises of our time, including the crises of the Church, are opportunities to fulfil the words of Jesus: Sell your possessions and follow me! This means: leave your securities and accept this poverty as a liberation, an opportunity for a new beginning.

It is the great task of religious orders to witness to the value of poverty - material and spiritual poverty. Many people are afraid of poverty in the face of the difficult economic problems of our time. A distinction must be made between poverty and misery. Misery is an evil that we must fight, striving for a just and solidary society. However, the crisis of a society of wealth and waste, and the need to adopt a more modest, ascetic way of life, is no cause for panic. This is where the Church - and especially the religious communities - should set an example.

We live in time of changes and crises in the world and in the Church. Let us try to understand these changes soberly, without panic. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid! Do you not have faith?"

The task of the Church is to proclaim these words and to bear witness to them by our resilience in the face of fear and despair.

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He studied sociology, philosophy, and psychology and graduated with a Ph.D. from the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University in Prague and in theology at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

During the Communist period he was banned from university teaching and persecuted by the secret police as “an enemy of the regime.” Clandestinely ordained a priest in Erfurt, in 1978, he worked in the “underground Church”. He closely cooperated with the country’s future president, Václav Havel.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, he was Secretary General of the Czech Bishops' Conference. Pope John Paul II appointed him advisor to the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers (1990); Benedict XVI named him Honorary Pontifical Prelate (2008).

Since the fall of the Communist regime, he has lectured not only at Charles University in Prague, but also at universities in Europe, as well the USA, Latin America, Canada, Asia, Australia and Africa. He has been a visiting professor Oxford and Cambridge, Notre Dame and Boston College. He holds honorary doctorates in theology from the universities of Erfurt and Oxford.

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His books have been published in 20 languages and received a number of awards abroad including the Prize for the best theological book in Europe in 2011, and in the USA Gold the Medal for the best book in Philosophy (2017) and the Gold Medal for the best book in Religion (2020).