

THE INCARNATION WELL UNDERSTOOD

MAITE URIBE BILBAO





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Letter of the Year, 2019

Bilbao, December 27, 2018

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The Assembly of all the Associations *a.e.* and the 18th General Assembly that took place in July and August of 2018 in Los Negrals, were occasions of truth and freedom, of communion and diversity, of faith and hope, and of coming together and sending out on mission.

We would like to share this sending to be

*Witnesses to hope and communion,
called to leave our homeland*

with all those who find inspiration for their lives in the charism of Pedro Poveda.

It is a strong call to live in hope and to communicate hope, the hope that makes us feel sent by God, who says to us, as he said to the prophet Amos: *Go and prophesy to my people!*

The Assemblies have stirred up and renewed our way of being and doing things, our vocation-mission and commitment, our lifestyles and daily choices. They invite us to change the way we look at things and to a different way of being and presence in our milieu, as people who live with the certainty that the Risen One goes ahead of us and accompanies us. He is the source and origin of our call to be witnesses to hope and communion wherever people long for this, especially those who are most disadvantaged.

We are coming to the end of a year of striving to live with a perspective of gratitude and thanksgiving. This springs from our hearts when we realise that God has been so good to us. Indeed that is how it has been and that is why we feel joyful.

As a people, as the Teresian family, we have experienced the power of living our lives with

- * *gratitude* for all that we have freely received from God and from others throughout this year, and in particular for the assemblies;
- * *passion* for the present time and its needs, a time in history given to us by God and to which God has sent us, in which the Spirit continues to work;
- * *confidence* in the future. We are hopeful because we know that the God of Jesus has called us and is sending us; God is faithful and always keeps promises.

All of this is the reason for our joy.

The Assemblies have been an experience of crossroads, paradoxes and dilemmas. As Joaquín García Roca told us, this invites us to be alert, concerned and vigilant so that we can overcome resistance and inertia, and above all so that we can work together for the Kingdom with imagination and creativity. Crossroads, paradoxes and dilemmas help us grow as long as we do not stop still at the intersection when faced with difficulties and opposition.

Pedro Poveda also came to a crossroads in the period from 1918 to 1924. It was a time that called for reflection, study and discernment, a time to consolidate an association that had received diocesan approval in 1917 and that hoped to open up to new cultures, to new organisational developments and new challenges. *Now all my attention, all my influence and all my resources must be used to consolidate the Teresian Association, for it is God's work.*¹ It was a period when many questioned an association that was going against the tide. That is why his writings during that period, fruit of his deep conviction of the value of a work that is God's, will guide us in the six-year period 2018-2024. They will help us to go forward with creative fidelity in implementing the guidelines of the Assemblies and prepare us to celebrate the centenary of the Pontifical Approval in 2024.

IN PURSUIT OF ALL THAT IS HUMAN

In 1915 when the 4th Centenary of the birth of Saint Teresa was being celebrated, the nascent Teresian Academies joined in the celebrations of the occasion, as did many other educational and religious institutions in Spain at that time. That was because one of the current themes in culture and society of the period was “the reform of man”: how to reclaim the human person in a dehumanised world.

Poveda too, from his early years as a priest and throughout his life, felt passionately about humanity and the human person. As a *seeker of the human*, Flavia Paz Velázquez says, *Poveda saw that the highest value a human person possesses is the possibility of an encounter with God, for it is in God that we discover the meaning of our existence*².

This meant, Flavia Paz continued, that Poveda could not help thinking about systems of ideas and individual style of being put forward by others, especially when what they advocated was different from his recommendations for those who taught in the teacher training colleges. He searched with an analytical and rational eye to understand what kind of person would find fulfilment in his association. After discussing this with Josefa Segovia, Pedro Poveda presented his ideas on a new spirit for humanity. He did so in a text that because of how it demonstrates his vision for the style of spirituality of the people who worked with him, it has become programmatic for the Teresian Association³.

Poveda expressed these ideas in a letter he wrote after reading an article by an Augustinian priest about Saint Teresa of Avila. The letter was addressed to Maria del Mar Terrones⁴, a young doctor who was modern in outlook and courageous. She was starting out in the style that Pedro Poveda wanted for the association.

1 Pedro Poveda to the Bishop of Burgo de Osma, 4 November 1923 quoted in *Cref por esto hablé* p. 363.

2 FLAVIA PAZ VELÁZQUEZ, *Una Institución se abre camino*, Ediciones Narcea 1997, p. 11.

3 Cf. 1.

4 Letter from Pedro Poveda to Maria del Mar Terrones. Jaén, 9 April 1915..

“Focusing only on the *eminently human character* of her life, that on the other hand belonged all to God, was *pervaded totally by God* and dedicated wholly to the service of God, St Teresa, without a doubt, is one of the most generous and attractive souls that have come into the world.”

An eminently human character. (...) I want our association to be like that. . Do you not think it right that our undertaking carries the name Teresian?

That life belonging totally to God. That must be your life: belonging completely to God. But being wholly of God, you must also stand out with an eminently human character, a character that, being informed by a life belonging totally to God, is perfected without ceasing to be natural.

That this is the way St Teresa was, who doubts it? And because of this, she won such universal affection. How could it not be recognised? If that life was fully of God, could she be other than generous?

Filled with God. Yes, she was filled with God who made humanity in order to perfect it and not to destroy it. (...)

I think, yes, [this ideal will come to pass when we have] households where what is human governs. But as I understand that these lives cannot be as we desire them unless they belong to God, I seek to begin by filling with God those who are to live this truly human life by dedicating the members of this family in which true humanism is to reign to God. [...]

Are we aiming to destroy what is human? Never. That is an illusion. Seeking the perfection of what is human by other means? A vain pursuit. Do we dispense with God in order to perfect his work? A fanciful folly. Do you not think that the procedure is simple, the process reasonable, and the result of this system certain? [...]

Humanity was assumed by the Son of God never to leave it; [...]

The Incarnation, well understood, the person of Christ, his nature and his life, provide for those who understand it the sure standard for becoming holy, with the truest holiness, being, at the same time, fully human with true humanism. In being so, we shall be generous and our work will be attractive. Our Model? Saint Teresa⁵

This paradox was chosen by the 18th General Assembly to accompany this first year of implementation of its orientations and resolutions.

It is a way of showing a tension that is typical of the spiritual life. It expresses in a dynamic way two truths that are not opposed but go together. They are not exclusive but rather complement each other. That is because they weave and interweave, they coordinate with each other and they invite us to incorporate them harmoniously in our lives. This is characteristic of the incarnation spirituality that Pedro Poveda wanted for those working in the association, a work of God.

⁵ Cref, por esto hablé, Verdadero humanismo. Toda de Dios 9 abril 1915, [74].

The paradox and tension between these two elements allow us to comprehend, integrate and appreciate each of them, especially when we experience them through deep inner dialogue.

The Letter to Diognetus expresses this in the following way: “Christians are indistinguishable from other people either by nationality, language or customs ... Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law”. It was a positive and peaceful attitude that allowed them to live in the midst of society and embrace all that is human. They were citizens like everyone else, but at the moral level there were certain practices that they did not adopt, even when it cost them their lives. They were guardians of the Good News that radically transforms human relationships. What is the secret? It is to know that God dwells within us.

Twenty centuries later, the Second Vatican Council was to adopt this in one of the most important documents of the Council: *The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts*⁶. This conviction is experienced with the spiritual tension so loved by Poveda. That is, not to withdraw and isolate ourselves, or let ourselves be trapped by the fear of being a minority. There is no unnecessary boasting, but on the contrary, we seek to join forces, to build a more human city, to be salt and leaven, and to hold within us the secret of a friendly Presence that nothing and nobody will be able to take from us.

It is the humble discipline of the everyday, that pays attention with discerning eyes to all that is born, grows or emerges as new. It values the essential and leaves aside whatever seems secondary. This is to avoid falling into the danger of *the globalisation of superficiality*⁷.

Pedro Poveda wanted us to be - as he was in his time - attentive and concerned. We must listen to the times in which we live, times that can be tough and difficult, but they are our times. This is the here and now for which God has called us and entrusted us with a mission-vocation.

In a way, Poveda is telling us that the Incarnation, properly understood, is the beginning and origin of the mission-vocation that Jesus introduced to his disciples. He offered it to those working with the first Academies, and today we embrace it as a prophetic inspiration for our lives.

Poveda lived through times of great change like ours, a period of accelerating transition that was pluralistic and sometimes contradictory. Poveda vigorously emphasised whatever helps people to reach their true human calling.

That explains why he liked paradox as an expression of human and spiritual tension. It helps us not only to understand better the world in which we live. It also dynamically demonstrates how some balances in human life can only be maintained through attention and respect for complementarity and the wealth of diversity we find in the real world.

6 *Gaudium et Spes*, Chap. 1.

7 cf. ADOLFO NICOLÁS, s.j..

Our world is becoming increasingly complex with our multiple aspirations and religious expressions, as well as the plurality of our convictions and understanding. That is the reality we experience. This is where God has sent us. It is the theological place where God comes to meet us, and where our mission and vocation invite us to recognise the humanity of Jesus in every face.

At this time in the history of humanity, as we think about the societies in which we are present, we must ask the fundamental question about how to enter into them by “adding and not subtracting, at a time that will belong to those who know how to integrate and be inclusive”⁸.

We recognise some of the paradoxes or dilemmas that Pedro Poveda discussed in his writings and we find them motivating. Here we recall some of them: identity and mission, faith and science, prayer and study, accommodating and unwavering, naturalness and diligence, fortitude and love, inwardly singular and outwardly ordinary.

If we address the dynamic quality of each of these, we will be able to comprehend how innovative Pedro Poveda was with the incarnation spirituality he wanted for Christians who find inspiration in this charism. The 18th General Assembly recommended that we concentrate on one of these each year during this six-year period. For 2019 it will be: *eminently human and belonging totally to God*.

This phrase has been given to us in order to refresh it, understand it and make it our own. In this post-Assembly year, it can help us to renew our way of being and acting, both in our personal lives and in the various expressions of an associated life like ours - family, profession, mission activities, community spaces, groups, etc.

THE NEWNESS OF THE INCARNATION PERMEATES OUR BEING AND DOING

*WHEN THE FULLNESS OF TIME CAME, GOD SENT HIS SON,
BORN OF A WOMAN (GAL 4,4)*

The Incarnation is completeness, completeness of God’s communication, of the closeness of God, of the revelation of God. It is interesting to put this text from Galatians (4.4) side by side with another of Paul to the Colossians (1.15) in which he affirms: “*Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation*”.

For Paul, Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and this reflects one of the deepest desires of the human being: to see God. Our contemporaries want not only to see God but want us to show them where God is. And we know that when the deepest desires of the human heart find a response, even if it is only a partial one, we enable them to have an experience of that fullness to which we feel called: to seek and recognize God, to enter into a relationship and friendship with Him.

⁸ Joaquín García Roca, Los Negrales 2018.

Therefore, presenting our mission-vocation, our spirituality, from the profound experience of the Incarnation, has very important consequences for our way of being, and doing, for our lifestyle, for the faith experience we want to live and share inspired by Poveda's charism.

What are human beings that you spare a thought for them? (...) You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, says the psalmist in Psalm 8.

It is necessary to understand the consequences of the Incarnation, in order to express it and live it in the most appropriate way. A first fundamental consequence is the gaze of God on the human person. For God, each and every person is a marvel, worthy of undivided and invaluable attention.

Every day, and in different fields of culture and knowledge, we experience the enormous capacity and worth of the human person, and with this the great challenge to be eminently human, because this involves understanding that it is both gift and task, grace and responsibility, seed and fruit, path of growth and promise of fulfilment.

Being called to the fullness of being and doing means being called and sent to be fully human, to humanise all the dimensions of our life: relationships, how we manage our professional, family and social tasks, culture, institutional dimension, time and space.

Jesus shared two fundamental experiences with his disciples: being with them, that is why he gave them space and time, and giving himself, to give his life to the end. To make space, offering time, availability, listening, in a world so frantic and hurried is an art that we must all cultivate. We need space and time to be, to speak or be silent, to exist and let the other exist. The God of Jesus leaves us so much space, offers us such freedom, that sometimes we do not even perceive his presence. God does not overwhelm us, God lets us breathe⁹.

In Jesus, God offers himself unconditionally, holding nothing back, *having loved those who were his in the world, he loved them to the end*¹⁰. His is a love that frees and does not possess, a love that offers space and time for listening, for conversation, for words that open and do not close, do not end, because they are encounter, exchange, mutual enrichment. This gives freedom to recognize personal searching, to imagine the future with hope. Our hope is in the spirit of God who looks at the confusion and chaos of our lives, to recreate them, to open them to true life.

When we read the creation accounts in the Bible, we discover the human person as the fruit of a creative act by God, an act of love and trust, *Let us make the human being in our image and likeness*, a promise of life and of eternity in the image of God.

From that moment on, human beings are persons with a vocation, called to maintain a loving and free tension before the gaze of God: to be themselves and to live in relationship, in otherness, with a particular and unique nearness with God.

⁹ Timothy Radcliffe, *El borde del misterio, Tener fe en tiempos de incertidumbre*, pp. 20 ff.

¹⁰ John 13:1

All this must be in the style of Jesus, the one who was saved and is saviour, the risen and the giver of life, the first among all, the only true man and true God, in whom the promise is fulfilled. He is for us the key to understanding what it means to live, to live fully, to live forever, to live in and from love, a love received and communicated, and in a total and definitive reconciliation with ourselves, with others, with the universe and with God.

This can sometimes call on us to go against the tide, to break away from the ways our societies offer us: the thirst for power, desire to dominate, to possess, to succeed at any price; and not to get caught up in them. In our ordinary daily lives, being fully human and totally God's is an invitation to adopt a personal style and live as citizens who integrate the tension of those who want the Kingdom of God to become close, incarnate, to be open spaces of truth, justice and peace for all, in their personal, family, social and political relationships.

This spiritual tension is the only condition needed in order to open the reality in which we move to the mystery of God, to the desire of God, and for God to be incarnated afresh in history through human actions. This is what we want to express when we affirm that the Incarnation is the fullness of God's communication, of God's closeness, of the revelation of God.

This fullness has been embodied in Jesus, born of Mary, who we can all imitate, because as Pedro Poveda reminds us: *We can all copy Christ, whatever our temperament, age, condition, sex and career, and in imitating him we do not destroy our own particular mode of being, given by God, rather we elevate and sanctify it*¹¹.

In the fullness of time Jesus was born, God incarnate, Emmanuel, the human God with human beings, from whom we can learn to be fully human and totally of God.

*THE INCARNATION WELL UNDERSTOOD,
"HAS MADE ME A PERSON"*¹²

This creative act of the God who gives life basically means that we are not the origin of ourselves, that we were born into a world that was given to us, that we have come to a reality that precedes us, that we owe our existence to other people, and this truth of being dependent makes us understand something much deeper and more radical: we are not our own creators, we have received life as an act of goodness and love, we have been created to live from God's own life.

Throughout his writings Poveda insisted that the ideas emerging in the culture of his time did not have to be exclusive, and that these ideas ought to enter into a dialogue with faith, beneficial for culture, overcoming apparently insurmountable conflicts: doubt- faith, science-philosophy, evolution-tradition. For Poveda, Professor Feliza Elizondo writes, "there was no incompatibility between freedom and autonomy of human beings and the recognition of the Creator." The reuniting of God as constitutive of being human was a basic conviction in the humanism of Poveda, just as it was in his educational proposal: he identified the highest way of being human with openness to the God who creates and recreates our being¹³.

11 *Selected Spiritual Writings*, page 35 1917.

12 Testimony of a resident in the caves of Guadix.

13 Maria Dolores Gómez-Mollada, Felisa Elizondo, *Crei, por esto hablé*, page 314.

Therefore from our birth we are marked by an inherent characteristic of the human being: our desire, the desire to be, to be in fullness, to live fully, to be totally fulfilled. Desire is that unique and necessary power that moves us and impels us to the dream that God has for each one of us in giving us life, a life that carries in its seed our own fullness. *I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full*¹⁴. That is God's dream for the human being, for each one of us. A full life, a life in abundance.

Human experiences such as love and friendship make us see that we are beings of desire, of growth and at the same time we experience that desire is never fully satisfied. For Augustine, God is close to every human being, to his heart and his mind, and in the depths of every human being there is a mysterious and permanent search: *You have made us, Lord, for you and our heart is restless until it rests in you*¹⁵.

It is another way of saying that in every human desire there is the echo of a greater desire, of a fullness made of closeness to and distance from the other and from the OTHER, of those who are near and the transcendent. It is also the echo of a fullness made of the act of creative love of our own existence and of all the gestures of love that continue to give us every day the ability to live, to exist, to "make us persons", as the cave dweller of Guadix would say.

The Incarnation well understood is the best way to believe in the beauty of human beings, in their ability to fulfil themselves day by day, in their desire to love and to reach the fullness of being.

The desire for God, transcendence, beauty and goodness, the desire to relate to the other, to know them, love them, and also to let oneself be loved and known, marks our entire lives. It is the best proof that we are beings of desire. That is why Saint Teresa tells us, "Poor is the soul that even in desire is content with little. Because the Lord not only gives desires, but the strength to turn them into reality"¹⁶.

Knowing that we are called to the fullness of our being is an experience like that of a traveller who journeys along through crossroads and diverging paths, who all along the way can feel up and down about his attitude and ability to receive and share, to accept and give.

For the desire for fulfilment can involve advance and regress, diversions or leaving the right road, yet also those exchanges of glances that make us whole again, save us, make real people of us by setting us on the right direction once more.

When we sense the insecurity of darkness, hearing strange noises, fearful of going forward in the shadows, let us hope that we hear, like the blind man, a voice asking, *What do you want me to do for you?*¹⁷ And may we accept that look that gives hope and strength to break through barriers, to shed light in darkness, and to see in each gaze a brother, a sister, in each person the face of God.

14 John 10:10.

15 St Augustine, Confessions (I, I, I).

16 Saint Teresa, Life (2.1.5).

17 Mark 10:46.

The way Jesus looked at the rich young man in Mark's Gospel¹⁸ made the latter aware of inner emptiness, of missing something essential in his life. That is why he asks, *What must I do to gain eternal life?* The biblical understanding of eternal life is the fullness of Life that God desires for us. He was looking for fulfilment, he was looking for an ideal to pursue.

Jesus' answer is clear, "Come, follow me!" Don't live your life as just a series of duties, obligations and norms, but rather live in the knowledge that you are infinitely, eternally loved.

The fullness of life that Jesus offers him is a love with a taste of eternity, a love that never dies, a merciful love, that forgives, that accepts and does not exclude, a way of living that makes life fruitful and generous, because it opens out to an infinite horizon. So he looked at him with love, as Mark recounts. Jesus was inviting the rich young man to shed whatever could keep him centred on himself, locked into self, and offered him a chance to break free from what prevented him looking outwards, discovering others' needs, sharing with them. "Go and share." Jesus understood that the young man's greatest difficulty was his own wealth.

Jesus does not ask the same of everyone he meets along the way. Wealth can take very different forms according to individuals: it is not only money, it can be the talents that we share or keep for ourselves, time we give or deny to others, an air of superiority about what we know, the holding back of skills or gifts we have received. "only one thing you lack: sell, give, share ... Then come and follow Me".

If only we could discover what we are overlooking in order to follow Him, or in other words what is preventing us from being fully the person we are called to be.

This meeting with Jesus seems like a failure, something at times we may have experienced in our own life, but in reality, we do not know what happened ... That loving look of Jesus to the rich young man, as a gesture of love, trust and mercy, has the value of eternity, open and inviting. It offers him a path to the fulness of his person, and perhaps the rich young man did take it in the end.

How many times a look, a sign of welcome, inclusion, or appreciation for those we meet in our daily round can be liberating for them, because it gives a taste for living, for how they relate to self and others, helping them get their life back on track once more.

This reflection makes us understand that *the Incarnation, properly understood, its eminently human character*, the question, *what do you want me to do for you?* ask that we promote an education of desire, an apprenticeship in desire, and purify desire. This will align the search by each human person for a full, realised life, as beings called to fulfilment, with God's desire that opens us to transcendence, to living with a taste for eternity.

Only in this way can an *eminently human character* reach its true height: that of men and women who can be both free and responsible, autonomous and in solidarity with others, with their own personality while open to the other and to God: human lives that seek to create and recreate a human experience in God and based on God, with a friendly and attractive style, letting *each one be as God allows them to be*, but relating to everyone the way we should¹⁹.

¹⁸ Mark 10:17-30.

¹⁹ Saint Teresa, Life 22,7.

These are lives that seek what is human and seek God, because they are lives fully of God, of the God embodied in our history, who has taken a human face in Jesus, and who is for our Work inspirer, support, life, model, theory, practice... in short, everything.

For people this may seem impossible, Jesus adds in the same story of the rich young man, but not for God; because everything is possible for God²⁰.

This poem is very popular, from an unknown author - although there are those who attribute it to the Portuguese writer José Saramago - who offers us an interesting reflection on “the possibles” of a life moved by desires.

*So how old am I?
What does it matter! My age is how I want and feel it to be!
The age at which I can shout fearlessly what I think ...
Do what I want, without fear of failure, or the unknown ...
I have the experience of years lived
and the strength of conviction about what I want.*

*Who cares how old I am! Don't want to think about it!
For some say I'm already old, and others that "I'm in my prime".*

*But it's not how old I am,
not what people say, but what heart feels and brain dictates.
I am old enough to shout out what I think,
do what I want, recognise past mistakes,
correct my map and treasure successes.*

Now they don't have to say: You're too young to make it! Or, you're too old, you're past it!

*I am at the age where I see things more calmly,
yet inspired to keep growing.*

*I am the age when the fingers of dreams begin to caress,
when illusions turn into hope.*

*I am the age when love is sometimes a crazy flare,
longing for consummation in the fire of desired passion ...
It is a haven of peace, like sunset on a beach.*

*So how old am I?
I don't need to give the years a number,
for my longings, my triumphs,
my tears along the way at the dashing of dreams ...
Are worth much more than that!*

*What does it matter if I get to thirty, forty, fifty or more!
What matters is the age I am right now!*

20 Mark 10:27.

*I'm as old as I need to be to live free and without fear,
To follow the path without dread, for within I carry experience gained
and the strength of my desire.*

*So how old am I?
Who cares!*

*Old enough to lose my fear and do what I want and feel.
What does it matter how old,
How far I've come, or how long I have to go?
If at the age I am ... I've learned to want just what I need and take only what is good!*

CALLED TO THE FULLNESS OF BEING

Every day we experience that the human quality of our life does not depend on what we do, but on how we are moving towards the fullness of being, regardless of being male or female, child or adult, a teenager or someone enriched and matured by the passing years.

We live in times when we are increasingly aware of the need to promote our quality of being and to reduce our quantity of having. It is a new paradox.

Sustainable development, responsible consumption, the priority of being, the option for a quieter, simple and less costly existence, is a new art of living that balances what we are, what we do, and what moves us. It gives a sense of purpose to our being and actions that does not close in on self, but opens up to being challenged by our collective dimension.

Convinced as he was of the Gospel's power of transformation, Poveda also inspires respectful and authentic communication between generations, aimed at discovering new ways together and encouraging responses towards sustainable and integrated development for all. Young people demand change. They question how we can think of building a better future without thinking about the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded. (AAA a.e. 2018)

In ways we are coming to understand that we are not happy when we want the world to adapt to our ambitions, needs and dreams. That is why we feel called to put behind us a certain level of comparing, of hyper success-seeking, in order to recover that connection with our inner selves which speaks of a different abundance and a different fulfilment, that of our own being, as eminently human persons open to the Other and others.

The more we advance in the spiritual life, the more we discover that no spiritual teacher or counsellor can do anything more than encourage each person to open up a free, inner, personal and unique space in which to discover and recognise our own path to God. Our true happiness is letting ourselves be drawn into total and unconditional love.

To know oneself, discern one's emotions, tensions and needs, to love and cultivate one's gifts and individuality, enriched by those of others, to let ourselves be touched by what simple and poor people go through, to love one's own fragility and that of those around us, are some criteria for becoming fully human, fully spiritual.

And on that path of spiritual growth, Henri Nouwen points out three essential dimensions around which our lives oscillate in a certain tension: how we relate to ourselves, moving between loneliness and solitude, how we relate to others, moving between hostility and hospitality, and how we relate to God, moving between illusion and prayer.

This is how on our life journey we can become aware of feeling not only the sadness of loneliness, but also the aspiration to a certain solitude of heart; not only feelings of hostility but also a deep desire to welcome our brothers and sisters in unconditional hospitality; and more essential still, we are aware not only of the illusions that make us believe that we are rulers and in charge of our own destiny, but also and especially the fragile gift of a humble and hidden prayer in the most intimate part of our being.

The spiritual life as a call to the fullness of being, Nouwen continues, is a path of growth, of becoming ever more aware, of becoming free from everything that prevents us living in and through the Spirit²¹.

And being convinced, as Pedro Poveda reminds us, that all strength, all security and all hope is from God, through God and in God²².

REDISCOVERING THE HUMANISING CAPACITY OF FAITH

At the centre of our Christian faith is Jesus of Nazareth. Everything we know and can say about God is found in the man Jesus. Our spiritual life is to identify ourselves more and more with human fulfilment as Jesus lived it.

That is why to communicate God to our contemporaries, the language we need is that which enables them to understand in practice the human quality of Jesus' life: his choices, his searches, his way of being, of loving, of forgiving, of giving meaning to human frailty.

On 7 March 1920, at a time of great challenges for the development of the Teresian Association, Pedro Poveda wrote: "... no one can lay another foundation than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ (...) He is the inspirer, the support, the origin, the end, the means, in short everything"²³.

These words of his, known and repeated frequently by all the members of the Association, introduce one of the documents of AAA a.e. 2018: they inspire and permeate it. They point to the centre and the horizon of our searching and commitment to our mission and spirituality that the members and associations of the Teresian Association want to set before us for the next six years.

Our present times are also tough and raise a telling and radical question: what does it mean today, for the Association, in the context of its own mission and spirituality, to be and to live rooted in this one foundation?²⁴

21 Nouwen, H. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. 1986.

22 Pedro Poveda, *Creí por esto hablé*. [297]. 1929.

23 Pedro Poveda, *Creí por esto hablé* [168], 1920. *Selected Spiritual Writings*, 28, p.97.

24 "Leave your Homeland", AAA a.e. 2018.

The incarnation spirituality of the Teresian Association, the AAA a.e., says, aims to combine faith and world, history and eschatology, celebration and work, mysticism and politics, gratuitousness and effort, prayer and commitment, critical perspective and gentleness.

To be seekers of what is human and wholly of God requires that we rediscover the humanising capacity of faith; that is, to live and share a new style of humanising -associating, relating, interdependent.

This is a style of doing and acting which can only be born from an insistence beloved of Pedro Poveda: holy fruit can come only from being filled with God, not relying on human resources alone, but on union and friendship with God.

The men of God and the women of God are unmistakable. They do not stand out because they are brilliant, nor because they dazzle, nor for their human strength, but because of their wholesome fruit, because of what the disciples felt on the road to Emmaus, when they were travelling with the risen Christ, whom they did not recognise, but they felt the effect of his presence²⁵.

It is, in other words, the invitation of the AAA a.e. 2018:

“We listen to the call to walk humbly with our God and to cultivate an incarnation spirituality through which we recognize and welcome God in every person and in all creation where God lives.

“We choose to walk with Jesus by accompanying people and groups. We want to live according to an itinerant and inclusive spirituality that is exercised in hospitality and compassionate spirituality that draws us close to the wounded along the way, a liberating spirituality that empowers us and unites us for the good.”²⁶

Associating, relating, interdependent is how we want to walk among people, with people, with families, with young people, with people of good will; we want to do so as witnesses, involved in the course of history, as divers, exploring the paths of a new humanity, as lookouts, committed to an inclusive future for all²⁷.

IN DISCERNMENT MODE

In the Assembly of All the Associations a.e. 2018, we experienced a process of building together in discernment mode as a community. The prayer that Pedro Poveda wrote in 1933: *may I think what you want me to think, love what you want me to love, speak as you want me to speak, act as you want me to act*, has guided, oriented and above all inspired our work. It has helped us to reflect, to dialogue, to perceive differences and to integrate them to be able, in communion, to reach agreements.

We wanted to open ourselves as assembly members to a process of community discernment based on the study document “Leave your homeland”, in order to choose the commitments

²⁵ Creí, por esto hablé [210], pág. 690; Selected Spiritual Writings, 35, p115.

²⁶ Leave your Homeland, No 32.

²⁷ Cf. n.8.

in mission and spirituality that the spirit was suggesting as a result of the process. We felt that we were part of a universal community, and therefore diverse, that in different contexts had been attentive to God, attentive to the signs of the times. We felt supported by a community that in the light of the Gospel and the charism, had prayed, studied and dialogued, and had already discerned locally where the spirit is now leading, what paths are prophetic to share our vocation-mission in that reality. We want to take this experience as a staff and an example for our journey in the next six years, because we feel that the spirit is leading us in this discernment mode.

In order to live, share and explore the Assembly orientations, *being eminently human and wholly of God*, we need to practise the art of discernment and to do so on a personal, associative and Association level.

Some criteria can help us to advance as a people on the move, as discerning people and communities.

In the first place, the certainty that discernment is a gift of the Spirit, whom we must call on: *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!* (Luke 11:13)

It is a gift of the Spirit that works in us, through what we are, our abilities, gifts and charisms, and also through our frailties, mistakes and even our sin.

That is why it is necessary to see, listen and think, beginning with a profound experience of interiorisation, of prayer, of welcoming the Word.

Living in spiritual discernment mode involves being an assiduous listener to the Word, a servant of the Word whose ears are opened every morning by the Lord, to listen as a disciple (cf Isaiah 50: 4); to enter into friendship with the incarnate Word that is Christ; and remain conscious of the active and living presence of the Word of God, taking it to heart, so that it blooms and bears fruit.

Only in this way will we acquire a certain capacity, a feeling, a “spiritual sense” born of listening to our conscience, from the depths of the heart, which knows how to recognize the presence of the Lord and the manifestation of his will.

This is a personal and community journey that we can travel together, learning to cultivate in ourselves the spiritual sensibility needed today to accompany and walk with others, especially the people that the Assembly presents to us as priority companions of the journey of these six years. These are families, the young, the different, all the expressions and manifestations of diversity, of injustice, of exclusion, that we do not know and to whom we want to be open.

If in this way we learn to reach decisions together, these decisions, the implementation that the Assembly asks of us, will be experiences of life and service, fruit of unconditional love, God’s love manifested in Jesus. We will feel committed, determined, supportive of each other, aiming towards a single goal: love more, love better.

On 2 March 2017, addressing the parish priests of Rome, Pope Francis recalled: “At this time, we discern how to concretize love in the good that is possible as measured by the good of the other.” because “the discernment of real, concrete love is possible in the present moment as it works for the good of someone most dramatically in need, and this makes faith active, creative, and effective.”

This is the discernment that Teresa of Avila proposes to us when she asks us: How must we be? Let’s leave the last word to “La Santa”:

You have already seen the great task that we have undertaken; what do you think we must be like if we are not to be considered very bold by God and the world? Clearly, we must work hard ...²⁸

What must we be like? Eminently human and wholly of God.

That is why in this year in which we begin to implement the orientations of the 2018 Assemblies we will be united in a great desire that I propose we share and make known to all those people whose inspiration is incarnation spirituality:

**Lord, be for us the way, the truth and the life.
Make us eminently human and wholly of God.**

Maite Uribe

²⁸ St Teresa, The way of Perfection, Chapter 4.