



## **Communion in family life**

*Paolo and Maria Aminti*

### **Premise** – **slide 1** (communion in family life)

Dear oblate brothers and sisters, we thank the Lord for this magnificent opportunity to meet together. We have prepared for this meeting by praying and by asking questions to ourselves; we thought of producing a common presentation, the result of a patient wait. We purposely avoided producing two distinct presentations. We strove to be receptive to each other – an echo and a personal description of what we were coming to understand regarding the way in which the family may be deemed a place of communion.

We are grateful to you all because through this task we could delve deeper into certain intuitions and almost experiment their consistency. While undertaking this “impossible task”, we realized that our capabilities were limited, but we also experienced the strength and the joy of witnessing the growth of a new and deeper consciousness of our being a family. We are very willing to share this joy with you. We are sure that despite our limitations and the differences there may be between us, it is possible to communicate an experience of faith based on the Word of God and on the Rule of St. Benedict.

In order to clarify the meaning of what we are about to say, we would like to use some illustrations, hoping that this may make it easier to follow.

### ***1 – we are all Colossians*** – **slide 2** (Called to carry out His Word)

In the Letter to the Colossians, St. Paul tells us: “...in accordance with God’s stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God ... it is Christ in you...”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1; 25-27



I was struck by this phrase, separated from the various asides which characterize the letters of St. Paul. Usually we think that St. Paul's mission was to “*announce*” ... Here he speaks of “*bringing [His Word] to completion*”. Then he specifies “*it is Christ in you*”. The call to communion could not be more explicit.

“Christ in us”, in every one of us, “brings His Word into completion”, therefore He brings Himself into completion<sup>2</sup>!

As a visual commentary to this passage we have chosen the painting of Mary by Antonello da Messina (circa 1476), as an icon of she who listens and accepts, studies and contemplates, marvels and accepts God's plan for her – as is admirably expressed in the “Acatistos” hymn of the Eastern Church: - “Hail, guide to the mysteries of an inexpressible will...”.

As oblates, in “lectio divina” we give attention to His Word, listen to it and accept it so that it resonates in us. St. Paul tells us that we ourselves are called to become His “Word”, or “Verbum Dei”: an effective word, God's action in the history of humankind. This is expressed most highly in Mary who accepts Christ even physically – “verbum” in its wholeness – but to a certain extent this may be said of each one of us. Even we – with all our limitations – open ourselves to listen and to accept His Word which wants to “live” in us.

This intuition may bring forth interesting implications as regards our being “in communion” with Him and with each other. We can consider three spheres:

1. **in church community life**
2. **in family life**
3. **in the personal spiritual life of every one of us**

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<sup>2</sup> John 1; 1 - prologue



- **in church community life:** - As St. Peter Damian said: “**all the Church is in every one of us!**”<sup>3</sup> and the mission God has given to the Church (as he did to St. Paul) is to help one another to “bring **His Word to completion in us**”, that is to discover Christ’s presence in our lives. Communion with God and communion with one another are not two distinct realities, but rather two faces of one reality into which we must let ourselves be immersed in Spirit – St. Paul’s “**new life**”<sup>4</sup> that is primarily a gift.
- **in family life:** - as families of men and women, of monks/nuns or lay families, we are included in God’s plan. We are destined to become “**perfect in Christ**”<sup>5</sup> by means of His Grace. We must eliminate from our way of regarding communion in the family any misunderstood “sense of duty” or, worse still, any prudish “obligation” to observe a more or less rigid “code of laws”. Not doing so would mean returning “under the curse of the law”<sup>6</sup> and risking the “wicked zeal”<sup>7</sup> mentioned in St. Benedict’s Rule.
- **in spiritual life:** - in this sphere too, we cannot become “perfect” and consequently be “in unity” with others by resorting to our “merits”. Certainly, this may not happen without effort and cooperation on our part. We must do away with the idea that there exist “levels of perfection” linked to our religious beliefs, our work in church life and our choices regarding marriage and celibacy – our actions, convictions and conditions of life are certainly useful tools, but they are not decisive. In respect to the greatness of our vocation, i.e. in respect to the possibility of our being made “verbum Dei”, our distinctions and our foibles become such petty things indeed.

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<sup>3</sup> St Peter Damian – Treatise X – “the Church is all in one and one in all!”

<sup>4</sup> Romans 6; 4

<sup>5</sup> Colossians 1; 28

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 3; 10

<sup>7</sup> Rule of St. Benedict 72; 1



## *2 – The family is a gift of communion in itself*

Within the vocational framework we have just described, we will now deal more specifically with the theme with which we have been entrusted: we will try to justify the claim that **the family is a gift of communion “in itself”**, in other words **that the family has its own specific way of bringing to completion His word in us**, of bringing to completion the new life to which Christ calls us.

From the story of Creation up to the Apocalypse, all Scripture tells us about God as “trinity”. We can guess how the “peak” and the “source” of communion between creatures is the relationship between the three divine persons. The human images which are most recurrent and closest to the reality of the “heavenly” trinity are the couple, the family and the wedding. One can say that the Trinitarian God wished to express His deepest being through the structure of familial communion, which is based on the relationship of love between a man and a woman.

### slide 3

For this reflection we shall use the picture “Tondo Doni” by Michelangelo Buonarroti (circa 1505), an apparently “profane” picture which was evidently not painted for a Church, but rather for a wedded couple of the Doni family of Florence.

### slide 4

It is only by means of a geometrical study of the picture (which we will not dwell upon here) that one can find the characteristic “canon” of Romanic and Gothic sacred art. The “Madonna and child” theme had been already used, particularly in the Tuscan tradition, to “illustrate” the Trinitarian reality (e.g. the “Maestà di Santa Trinita” painted by Cimabue).

Certain elements seem “out-of-tune” especially in the figure of St Joseph. His limbs, hidden by his wide clothing, are out of proportion. They do not seem to be connected to the bust which is



partially hidden behind the two other figures. Similarly, if the twist in Mary's body were not considered within a geometrical context, it would seem almost "strained". However, one can see how the outer circles "direct" the design of the painting.

### slide 5

The detail of the main figures (enclosed within the circle at the top in the picture) brings us into contact with such an evident love relationship, so well expressed by the artist's mastery, that we cannot avoid feeling emotionally involved in it. We can consider this detail on two levels:

- **the human level:** the mother's love for her son and the father's concern for both seem to be the stereotype of what one may wish for a couple during their wedding feast.

### slide 6

- **the theological level:**
  - the Father who holds in a "mysterious" and "invisible" way the figures of the Son and Mary brings to mind the role of the first person of the Holy Trinity.
  - The Son who reaches out to his mother who receives him, looks downwards ... he is the Word of God that becomes flesh and "descends".
  - Mary receives her Son, she meets his glance, she opens her arms to support him in his descent ... this is the movement of the Holy Spirit who follows the will of the Father and of the Son. Notice the artistic effect of Mary's arm which seems to take the place of Joseph's ... she is the faithful servant who carries out His will.



If regardless of religious undertones, as oblates, married persons and members of families of human beings we ask ourselves “who are we in God’s eyes? How does He see us? What does Jesus Christ have to do with our lives?”, we can realize that despite the infinite disproportion between divine and human reality, God as Father, Son incarnate and Holy spirit is/are not far from us, but He/They live “in us”.<sup>8</sup> As we have seen in the “Tondo Doni”, in our human relationships there is a spark of Trinitarian love.

This is a theological reading of our being “in his image”<sup>9</sup>. If every human being is “in his image”, the union of two or more persons who love each other is an even more representative image of the Creator who, by revealing His Trinitarian self, reveals Himself as a communion of love between distinct persons.

In terms of the Sacraments of the Catholic Church, we say that the “Sacramental Grace” is the Gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed on those who accede to the Sacraments. It should be noted that in marriage, the Spirit is not bestowed individually on each one of the spouses, but is “tied” to their relationship of love.<sup>10</sup> What is being “blessed” and “invested” by Grace is the relationship, in other words the union. The Holy Spirit, who is a relationship of Trinitarian love, “resides” in the relationship of love between a man and a woman. He lives in all relationships of love.

We may ask ourselves what are the special characteristics of the gift of communion as experienced by the family. We shall deal with this with the help of some reflections by Fr Renzo Bonetti<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> John 1, Prologue

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 1; 27 – “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them”.

<sup>10</sup> Gaudium et Spes, 48 “Christ our Lord has abundantly blessed this love, which is rich in its various features, coming as it does from the spring of divine love and modelled on Christ's own union with the church. Just as of old God encountered his people in a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Saviour, the spouse of the church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of marriage. He abides with them in order that by their mutual self-giving spouses will love each other with enduring fidelity, as he loved the church and delivered himself for it. (...) Thus they increasingly further their own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render glory to God”.



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<sup>11</sup> Fr Renzo Bonetti – formative theological and pastoral itineraries – 2003-04.



## slide7

### *2.1 Communion as complementarity*

The foremost element that characterizes the special gift of communion that is the family, is complementarity. The spouses are two persons who are fulfilled because they are connected to each other and involved in a relationship of reciprocity. Ontologically, it is only the family that unites what is distinct according to the gift-acceptance modality, by tending daily towards the unification of the distinctions due to sex, sensibility, character, ideas and age. Living marital complementarity is a call to grow in love every day, in order to constantly find new ways of bringing together the existing distinctions without losing anything of the individual's originality<sup>12</sup>.

Lived personally and in an original and unique way by the husband and the wife, complementarity becomes a concentric resonance starting from the relationship between parents and offspring, and continuing with the relationship between the family and relatives, between families and with neighbours, between the family and the Church, and between the family and society.

Married life, including the parent-offspring relationship, is called to express a type of harmony that gives value to the differences between different people and builds unity. The "ailments" of family and married life often rest on the absence of complementarity, which generates dependence, "fusion", adaptation, authoritarian attitudes and difficulty of communication.

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<sup>12</sup> The union between spouses in God is a great mystery (Ephesians 5; 32), a sign which not only represents the mystery of Christ's union with the church, but which also contains and radiates it by means of the grace of the Holy Spirit who is its lifegiving soul (Paul VI, allocution to the Equipes Notre Dame, 04.05.1970).





## *2.2 Communion as sharing*

The second characteristic of living communion in the family is sharing. Sharing is the plot line of love. It is the sharing of the body, where we open our intimate delicateness and fragility to one another. It is the sharing of the soul with its feelings, emotions and desires. It is not always as perfect as we would like it to be. In some instances it may be frayed, but its roots will still be strong if it is based upon the awareness that life in common expresses a common **feeling**, that is a **search** for a deep, daily and concrete unity.

Sharing is also pain because of what cannot be shared. It is a pain which is really felt and which is offered to God from the altar of any home, possibly even from ours itself. Sharing is hope and determination to mend damaged relationships, maybe with our parents and siblings or with relatives with whom we have been in disagreement.

Sharing is the relationship which God creates with all those who are “last”, starting from those who are victims of too many injustices and conflicts. Sharing is the family’s opening to the problems of the world.

Whereas complementarity mainly concerns relationships within the family, sharing also involves relationships with the outside world. Sharing is the path through which a family may grow in love among its members and with others too.



### ***2.3 Communion as co-responsibility***

The third characteristic of the way in which communion may be lived in the family is co-responsibility. The family's lifestyle aims at being co-responsible for the human, affective and spiritual development of each of its members. This is the lifestyle the family is called upon to "export".

When spouses grow in co-responsibility, the Lord involves them in His plan of love. Between themselves and with their offspring, the spouses care for this gift for their own sake and for others. They do not give up when faced with misunderstandings, and joyfully they constantly look for new ways of reaching towards one another.

Knowing that we are called upon to keep those who live close to us in our hearts is possibly the most beautiful aspect of co-responsibility. This includes knowing that we can never dump on somebody else the responsibility of a dialogue which has broken down, and that we can and we must keep a relationship alive even when we are faced with silence, even if this means that we just keep alive our hope and our wish to continue it. We can consider this in the light of our difficult moments with our adolescent children and of the loneliness felt by some of our elderly or sick brethren.

Living in this manner with friends, relatives, neighbours, and with our brethren in faith in our monastic community, means bringing forth a power of growth in others and in ourselves too. This is not a strategy to better our human and spiritual relationships, but rather the only path that leads to Christ, whose face we find in a communion which is lived, sought, built and protected.<sup>13</sup> We cannot avoid reading in this journey John's "new commandment".

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<sup>13</sup> Rule of St. Benedict 1; 2



## ***2.4 Communion as presence in one another***

Let us now examine the last aspect: communion as presence in one another. If this presence means that one is present “inside” the other, if it is a wedding of souls, then the foremost way in which this internal unity expresses itself is prayer.

The prayer of two spouses is a symphony, a tuned chant of two souls. Their intimacy becomes one voice and acknowledges that it has one Father, one Lord and one Spirit.

They find themselves being an “image” of the Trinity in reality, a created trinity in the Uncreated Trinity.

God did not only get involved with Mary. Through the Sacrament of marriage, He also wanted to get involved in the concrete married life of two people in order to make them participate in the love that unites Christ to His Church<sup>14</sup>. Christ is with the spouses, **he remains with them** and in them<sup>15</sup>.

The Eucharist is the apex of the experience of the praying spouses’ presence in one another. In the Eucharist the spouses become one flesh, not only in their own flesh but also in the flesh of Christ Himself. They therefore become concrete and visible evidence of the Sacrament and of Christ’s self-offering in their reciprocal gift of the “flesh” because they were in the Last Supper<sup>16</sup> and they participated in Christ’s self-offering of His flesh as a gift of love. They are aware of the infinite distance from this, yet they feel that they have the same attitude. They wash each other’s feet, and they give each other the best morsels even when suffering betrayal. They overcome misunderstandings with impulsive acts of love like St. Peter, and they rest on each other’s chest like St. John the Apostle.

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<sup>14</sup> “The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God’s love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride”. John Paul II - Familiaris Consortio no.17.

<sup>15</sup> Gaudium et Spes, 48.

<sup>16</sup> John Chap.13.



The Eucharist is a sign that expresses an extraordinary truth. Christians form part of one body in Christ. They are His body, as we said earlier.

Nobody has the perception of what it means to be one body as much as spouses do. This presence in one another is lived with the same intensity, albeit in a different way, with their offspring. The latter were generated by the couple's unity and grew inside it. They belong to the couple's presence in one another. Sons and daughters have a permanent place in their parents' hearts. The lives of the offspring are the lives of the parents. But if the former are away for some reason, the parents feel their presence in their hearts even more. This extraordinary experience of presence in one another on the part of the spouses and on that of the parents and offspring makes the family a unique exporter of the sensibility of the presence in one another in the Church and in the world, and also a precious call for our monastic communities.



## slide 8

At the end of this first part of our reflection, we can say that:

In our daily life as spouses we can partake of the living presence of the Holy Spirit given to us in the sacrament of marriage. This presence discovered through Faith is a reviving action that merges into all the realities we live through, and it is a capacity that transforms even the most painful experiences. It is a new perspective, a new solution, a boundless imagination that leads to perseverance when facing obstacles (impossible tasks<sup>17</sup>) and to ceaselessly look for new resources of acceptance, understanding, sharing and change.

As we are used to perceiving God's action in our personal and family lives, we can gradually become able to see it in the lives of people with whom we come in contact, in order to praise the Lord who revives every person and every situation all the time.

There must be people who pay attention to God's action and help others to grow in the awareness of His presence and effectiveness. Patient attention and docility towards divine action should not be limited to one's inner self, but also extended to the realities of family life and to the whole of society – the *conversatio morum*, as Norvene Vest will tell us this afternoon. Could this be one of the primary tasks of Benedictine monasticism?

Being open to the action of the Spirit is a divine grace, but it is also the result of an awareness of His presence. We think that as Benedictine oblates we must not think of having a protagonist's role. Doing, deciding and planning are not inherent in the oblate's being. They may well be included as a consequence of one's openness to the Spirit, but they are not the oblate's central and specific task. The role of the oblate is that of paying attention in a state of acceptance, keeping the Word, thanking and praising the Lord for His presence, persevering in Faith even in silent and dark moments, seeing and identifying His action – a small and fragile stem – in those around us and

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<sup>17</sup> Rule of St. Benedict, 68.



rejoicing for it without envy, without being self-centred. It is also that of being able to nourish the stem with drops of hope, tenderness, understanding, solidarity and sharing.

Our faith will be ground like a ripe grain by a millstone so that it may revive any situation, no matter how difficult, enabling us to knead pain, suffering, discouragement, resentment and rebellion with the awareness of His proximity – the love that saves.



### 3 – *Women's eyes* – [slide 9](#)

In order to try and illustrate our life experience of communion in the family, I too have chosen to start off from a picture. It reminds us of the episode in Exodus when Moses was saved as a child by three women, the Pharaoh's mother, sister and daughter. This episode shows us how communion between people can bring salvation.

This episode is far away in time, but it is also the Word which enters into my life and which helps me to see my reality according to God's viewpoint. If I stop to reflect on those three intense gazes I manage to perceive deep echoes of the reality I have lived and I continue to live within my family.

### [slide 10](#)

The detail of this stained glass composition will serve as a background while we reflect on the gaze of these three different female figures.

The mother of Moses sees the beauty and the goodness of her son<sup>18</sup> just like God contemplates the beauty and the goodness of His creation<sup>19</sup>. She therefore reminds me of the ability to see and reflect joyfully on the beauty and the goodness of those around me. She reminds me that the person close to me, my son or myself, are a beautiful and good "gift of life" that is part of divine beauty itself. The mother's eyes form part of God's attentive and caring gaze.

The mother, who can contemplate the beautifulness of life, makes me contemplate the beautifulness of the gift of grace that God gives me by means of the presence of my spouse, my children, and all those whose life is entwined with ours. Even in moments of difficulty, misunderstanding and pain, I can still see the others as a gift that keeps its beautifulness despite the loss of lustre caused by misunderstanding, pain and disagreement.

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<sup>18</sup> Exodus 2; 2.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 1.



The mother's glance courageously challenges the Pharaoh's deadly command despite her personal risk, but it encourages me to keep a clear perspective in order to avoid getting discouraged when faced with difficulties and suffering as it keeps hope alive. Moses' mother shows us what our priestly task may be. She entrusts her son, with all her hopes, to the waters of God's mercy. The term used to refer to the basket is the one used to refer to Noah's ark in which one had to enter in order to survive<sup>20</sup>.

I cannot keep my husband/wife or son/daughter to myself. My love towards my husband is not limited to our relationship but has a deep vocation tending towards eternity. I experience the same feelings as those of Moses' mother when I understand that my husband is not exclusively mine, but that we both belong to God. I do this when I support his personal spiritual growth or when I respect his peculiar journey to the Father, which at times just seems a mystery to me whereas for him it is an invitation to take a new route for his own spiritual development. I entrust our relationship itself, with its positive and negative aspects, to the waters of God's merciful providence.

I understand that even our relationship is not mine. It does not belong to me because it is generated, guided and questioned by the Spirit who lives within it. It is therefore not enough that in our relationship each one of us entrusts himself completely to the Spirit individually. It is necessary that we both entrust our relationship to the Spirit together, finding the courage to leave the paths we expect, know and consider to be safe. This is our life-experience as oblates. We have chosen to entrust our relationship to the Lord without presuming to reach a state of perfection. The Spirit asked us to live in our fallible and mortal flesh. The sign of His presence is not that we do not make mistakes, but that we start anew every time as a gift of the Spirit by giving Him praise. I was struck by a passage in a book by Chittister<sup>21</sup> in which she mentioned the reply given by a monk to a visitor who had asked him about what the monks did in the monastery. The monk answered "We fall and we get up again". This applies to us too.

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 7.

<sup>21</sup> Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict – Insights for the Ages*, Crossroad, New York, 1993.





## slide 11

I will now pass on to the second figure in the picture whose gaze is also able to contemplate the beautifulness and the goodness of life, so much so that she disobeys the Pharaoh's deadly command. Her compassionate heart enables her to overcome the apparent great differences in race, religion and social rank. The Pharaoh's daughter makes us wish for eyes that can see others as God sees them, as God wishes us to be His sons and daughters, full of His grace and His life. She teaches us to do away with the roles, distinctions and distances behind which we hide as a means of defence. She knows how to be a neighbour, enjoy life and take care of it. She knows how to take advantage of an unexpected event and to turn it into an opportunity to delve deeply in herself to discover the beauty of others. Like her, in our family life we are invited to put away our masks, our defences and formal distances to engage fully in relationships. Like her, we are invited to accept the cooperation of apparently less important people who however are endowed with genuine wisdom.

## slide 12

We pass on to the third female figure. It is a fragile figure, a girl who watches her mother entrusting her brother to the waves and who follows him until the Pharaoh's daughter sees him and takes him. She is a young woman who watches over life in contemplation. She does claim the rights of a natural or adoptive mother.

She just has the ability to create a relationship between the two women who do not close their eyes in front of what they see and who act freely according to what they feel, even despite the will of who is more powerful than them. The three women become accomplices in an act of disobedience because they want to remain faithful to the call made to them by life, which they perceive as good and beautiful<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Women with fiery eyes – a Biblical study presented at the IV<sup>th</sup> UN Conference on Women.



The sister's role is to keep watch. Her nervous gaze focuses on the development of events in order to see how she can intervene in defence of the defenceless baby. She could wait in the storm for an unforeseeable turn of events leading to the solution she hoped for. She cannot generate and nourish, neither can she order that a fragile life be saved. She can however bring together at the right moment she who can help life grow and she who wants that life be cared for.

She is a woman who communicates, cooperates and builds communion. She is a woman of mediation and of dialogue between apparently irreconcilable distinctions of race, caste and religion.

What does this young girl say about our reality as a family? She tells us that it is not sufficient that I love my husband, children, relatives and friends. The Holy Spirit, the Breath of God creator of life, wants to live in my family. He asks me to support relationships in which I am not directly involved, those between my husband and our children, those between our children themselves, and those with our parents and friends.

He asks me to be tireless in my efforts to support their reciprocal acknowledgement as something good and beautiful, as God's gift for one another despite the misunderstandings and the tensions resulting from rifts. In these instances of difficulty, those who want to abandon themselves to the action of the Spirit are asked to keep watch, to remain lovingly attentive until one finds a crack into which an unexpected act of love can be inserted to heal the wounds. This is the tangible proof that God loves each one of us as he or she is. It allows God's unrepeatable dream to blossom in every one of us, a dream only God can see. In this way, the watchful and caring presence of each member of the family helps the others to come out of the murky waters of difficult communication, misunderstanding, disappointment, regret and demands.



My husband and I are called by the Spirit to take care of every relationship according to the specific abilities of each one of us, so that every relationship is interlaced with God's own love and people can look into the eyes of those who face them and see the face of a God who chose to incarnate himself in man, in every man ("Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me"<sup>23</sup>).

The young girl tells me to keep a daily watch on relationships, even those between monks and oblates, so that these relationships will be able to grow according to God's plan, because God sees them as good and beautiful.

The girl tells me to face the others every day fully conscious of my fragility which requires that I accept it myself, to accept fragility and to protect it. She calls upon me to be astute and imaginative in order to overcome apparently insurmountable obstacles. In fact, she astutely does not tell the Princess "I know the baby's mother". That would have been risky for both. She just says "Shall I go and call one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?"<sup>24</sup>. In this way she achieves the result she wished for when the Princess commands her to do so. The command given by the Princess brings to mind the one given by God to Moses. The former command is a promise of salvation while the latter is the beginning of a process of liberation. However, the second command was only made possible by small but courageous acts of women with a divine perspective.

Indeed family life is not only an experience of communion; it is also an experience of hope. We cannot be satisfied with a kind of hope merely conceived as an "ultimate" desire, as a further event – that is – the overcoming of one's present existence.

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew 25;40.

<sup>24</sup> Exodus 2;7.



Together with the return of Christ, there will also be the construction of the new heavenly Jerusalem<sup>25</sup>, where the river of the enlivening presence of God will everlastingly flow in its midst, where His light will be the everlasting source of new and vivifying heat and energy that will penetrate us and cancel all the barriers we usually build to oppose it. There is certainly an element of expectation in hope, a sense of leaping towards something, of summons to something beyond, but I believe such a leap can be done starting from the awareness we have of a gift that is at least partially already fulfilled. So I wish to go and seek within the depths of my family life, where this gift started its journey toward fulfilment.

We can already live hope today as the memory of an experience, by lovingly cherishing the memory of all those people who addressed us with love, faithfulness, perseverance and trust. I see the faces of our parents, lit up with their love for us, who overcame misunderstandings, different opinions, the sharp edges of our nature, chasms of sufferance, who were the first to witness to the everlasting love of God that accompanies us through our whole existence, whatever twists and bends we may take on our journey.

Other witnesses have taught us the joy of faith, which envelops all the experiences of one's life up to the final passing into the arms of God.

My main experience of hope is the constant enjoyment of Paolo's faithful love. It is faithful not only because it is not spoilt by betrayal, but also because it remains loyal to our common dream of constantly renewing an experience of sharing, at a profound level, which involves our fondness, our desires, a yearning to know and welcome God. I can hope to go on building communion together with him only if I am capable of welcoming the great gift I have already received. I experienced hope every time he waited for me, looking beyond the temporary impossibility to understand one another, every time Paolo believed in our love and showed it to me with stubborn tenderness, a mix of limitless desire and trust.

I experienced hope in the gift of the life of our children, unrepeatably as they are with their beautiful personalities, but also in the loss of children, when sorrow breaks one's heart and you can't understand anything anymore, when we put everything into His hands, confident that even things that apparently don't make sense, actually do have a meaning.

We experienced our hope through times of uncertainty and loss at our jobs, waiting for new paths of life that opened slowly and with no guarantees.

We approached the source of hope in experiencing forgiveness, given and received. We have lived hope in sickness, lived not with a sense of desperation, but as a furrow burrowed deep into the ground which a frail stem of new life can rise from.

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<sup>25</sup> Revelation, chapters 21-22



I exercise hope when I experience diversity, cracks, irreconcilability of perspectives, when I decide to be a place where loving expectation for the other is cultivated, trusting in the Word that says “Behold, I am making everything new”<sup>26</sup>.

To hope means to choose to willingly take on our shoulders the burden of despair of those who are close to us, performing small gestures of justice and solidarity every day. This is not possible except by will of the Holy Spirit, which takes the small realities we are and cements them together so they may create a fresh structure of communion.

#### **Slide 14**

We have “read” this “vocation”, which is common to all of us, in the concrete round tray we used as a background for the crib: it is made of tiny chips of wood, probably wood shavings... they are a worthless material, usually used to clean the floor or for fires. Someone thought of rolling them up and sticking them together... and here’s a solid tray, a beautiful and useful object! This is what we are when we let ourselves be “shaped” and “joined together” by the Spirit!

Hope is when we wait for all our little and contradictory attempts to communion to be taken in His hands to build a new humanity.

I hope whenever I put all my imagination into action to build bridges of understanding and welcoming for the others and when I entrust to God the accomplishment of these bridges of communion.

What we have described to you are not exceptional experiences, it is what billions of families have experienced and experience every day, much better than we do and in many more difficult situations than our own. It is an attempt to look into the experience of all of us!

What makes married oblates or oblates living relationships of love within a family special is not the number and kind of daily prayers said, it is reading the life of our families as a history of salvation – the place where the desire of communion between God and humankind is fulfilled.

With multicoloured threads, an infinite variety of families weave a piece of reality made of relationships of love that embody the Mercy of God, who “extends his mercy to those who fear him, from generation to generation”<sup>27</sup>. The piece of material made by these threads is that “new life” that Jesus has come to inaugurate.

We live hope as a passion for what is already possible today, though incomplete, because in our daily life we build things we can only just catch a glimpse of today, but we believe will be fully completed tomorrow, a chance for new coexistence.

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<sup>26</sup> Revelation, 21,5

<sup>27</sup> Magnificat



No human relationship is too small to make the Trinitarian love of God shine and connect itself to similar experiences in an attitude of loving welcome. Whoever is capable of loving, whoever has experienced being loved and loving back, is capable of grasping the same capability in others, by being open to trust, recognising the risks, the mistakes, and being transported by the huge potential of “regeneration” there is in every relationship of love.

In this moment I am thinking of the relationship between monks and oblates: seemingly different paths may be harmoniously connected, enriching one another, if a person looks at things with the eyes of the sister of Moses, who – as we saw – preserves relationships and opens up to novelties...

How can each of the two realities, that of the monks and that of the married oblates, be a gift for one another?

Both realities give a special value to proclaiming to the world what will happen at the end of times when we will all be “one” with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in body and in spirit.

The monks visually show **Who** the eternal marriage will be with, as married oblates we show **how** the eternal marriage will take place: in the unity of distinct beings, within a **relationship** which is gift, forgiveness and welcoming together. We should help one another to become **specialists** in bringing together diversities for the greater joy of experiencing the nuptial communion lived in spirit and flesh.

Neither of the two ways of living is complete in expressing the vast and profound meaning of being Children of God, called to take part in the loving relationship as an identity of God One and Three.

The married couples who have received a gift of unifying power from the Spirit can make the love of Christ, who works within the Church so that they may all be one, shine in their daily relationship, pointing at the crucial value of relating to one another.

Monks point at something that goes beyond, since our love desires the infinite and it cannot be exhausted only in one's beloved one, rather it is called to grow and extend to all the other human beings recognised as brothers and sisters. Our beloved one is a sign, a spark, a small anticipation of the full and infinite relationship of love we will all have with God.

This is true for any Christian couple, but the Lord wanted to give us this special relationship of fraternity with the monastic community; according to me this means that in this fraternal relationship He grants us a special grace, so that each form of life may share with the other the fullness of its own identity.



As Enzo Bianchi, the Prior of the Bose Community, says, hope feeds on a convergence of horizons, plans, communities, of practise and exercise, of meeting, dialogue and of communion<sup>28</sup>. In order to accomplish the communion that Christ is within us, we need to extend the limits of our hope so that it may become hope for every human being; we cannot hope only in our own salvation, personal, as a family or as a community, we must hope for everyone, for the transfiguration of the whole cosmos and all the creatures that live in it. Cosmic hope, however, needs many small steps of loving relationships that we must take every day.

Thank you

### **Slide 15**

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<sup>28</sup> Enzo Bianchi – Prior of the Bose Community



## Prayer

Holy Spirit, divine love  
grant us the awareness  
of your presence as a Person  
in our married life.

Holy Spirit, ever hidden and ever present,  
make every cell of our being as husband and wife  
rise again to a new nuptial life.

Make us capable of living in our family  
that Trinitarian dance of love  
which we share, little as we are.

Grant us the courage to know  
the secret of total love that Easter is  
so that we may multiply your spiritual fruits.

Place the right words in our hearts and on our lips  
to say well and to bless marriage  
as a place where you are manifested.

Mary, you listened attentively to the Holy Spirit,  
help us identify its breath of love  
so that we may sing with you the Magnificat.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Don Renzo Sonetti – op. cit.