



CHAPTER OF MATS

CHAPTER OF MATS 2025 – Reflection by Sr. Therèse Myriam

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SECOND CORE

Walking in the style of a fraternity of minors

I consider my presence amongst you to be a great exercise of 'exodus': to come out of the cloister chosen as a form of life and also to share a word with you all. I imagine that you also make this effort in listening to me. But, fortunately, I will be brief.

When I was asked to share with you the experience of walking according to the style of a minority fraternity, I immediately spoke about it with the sisters, who welcomed it as a beautiful stimulation for our community: in fact, we made a very rich reinterpretation amongst ourselves of the moments of communion lived together. In this sharing I was struck by the fact that there was no discordance as unfortunately sometimes happens in our meetings: the narratives were different, they spoke of even different moments, but we all recognized the preciousness of the Lord's passage in the story of communion of the other. Starting from this sharing, I drew some reflections and consequent questions that emerged and resonated significantly.

Personally, I represent the St Colette monastery in Assisi whose community is currently composed of 13 Poor Clares, aged 30 to 87, with a great cultural difference: the sisters are mostly French together with an Italian, two Congolese and one from Gabon.

1) Reading *the Instrumentum Laboris*, it was interesting for me to place the different proposals according to the different geographical areas. You feel that the accents and experiences are varied. Meeting here in Assisi for this gathering of the Chapter of Mats certainly represents for many of you a unique and fascinating experience, an extraordinary opportunity for enrichment. There are perhaps also prejudices about the reality of others, tensions in the face of the choices of other provinces.

Are you able to live this reality in the light of the story of the authentic Friar Minor, in gratitude because the other exists, and is also different from me?

God does not stutter, and if the Holy Spirit accentuates differences, it is precisely to create harmony. It is no coincidence that St Francis planned the great Chapters for Pentecost, and so do you by gathering in this great Novena to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit awakens the different charisms in the Church; Apparently, this seems to create disorder, but in reality, under his guidance, it constitutes an immense richness, because he urges us to live difference in communion. He presents Himself as the conductor who plays the scores of praises for the





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great works of God. In playing together, there should be no room for comparison, envy, competition.

After a very difficult summer experienced by our community, with health issues, help that had been taken away from us, numerous solicitations from outside, a terrible heat in Assisi that had exhausted us, I proposed that each of us bring a symbol that could evoke her state of mind. For my part, the image of the 7 dwarfs came to mind. Yes, in trial, the character of each one emerges with many gleanings: there are cries, tears, tensions, but the personal gaze turned to the Lord Jesus keeps us united.

I don't know who invented the cloister. I doubt it was Jesus Christ! But I, to those who thought of it, say thank you, because the cloister keeps us together in this tension in diversity. In fact, it can be the space that preserves our communion. I don't know if today there is so much talk about the *fuga mundi*. In the *Testament* Francis says: *I came out of the world*. But I would like to ask you the question:

What means do you have not to flee from the world, that is, not to flee from the brother who is next to you, to live deeply the escape from the flight of the world, that is, not to flee the other?

In the Gospel, Jesus first calls two pairs of brothers, all fishermen. The fifth apostle called is Matthew the publican. Perhaps a stanza could be added to the *Canticle of the Creatures*: Praise be to you, my Lord, for the thumb, this fifth, different, which allows comparison, which allows the hand to perform all the gestures of daily life.

Are we reconciled - using an image left to us by Pope Francis¹ - with the reality that is not spherical but multifaceted of our fraternities?

2) This unity, similar to that of the joints that form the hand, it is not for us to build: it is given to us, we are put together, called together jointly by grace.

Moreover, I was struck this morning at Mass to hear the Gospel according to John in which Jesus addresses the Father and says: *'I pray that they may all be one²'*.

In the beautiful account of the appearance of the Risen Lord on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples see an ember fire next to Jesus. Pope Francis says: *'The fire of embers is mild, hidden, but it lasts a long time and is used for cooking. And there, on the shore of the lake, he creates a family atmosphere where the disciples enjoy amazed and moved intimacy with their Lord'*.

¹ *Evangelii Gaudium* n.236

² Jn 17,20





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Do we feel responsible, guardians of this fire of embers, committing ourselves to rekindle it in times of personal prayer, of heart-to-heart pause with the Lord?

'The fire of embers is the fire of the "home", of the family. It is the fire of charity among us, of fraternity, of the warmth of strong and delicate bonds that ignite the heart and open it to the experience of God's love, of the Lord's closeness.'³

*How do I feed the **fire of embers** in my fraternity, in the Province, in the Order?*

Do I try to weave bonds of fire, which are nourished by charity, blessing, benevolence, care, delicacy, attention, respect?

3) In the *Instrument Laboris*, amongst the many beautiful proposals, I appreciated the desire to grow in mutual trust, despite conflicts. Remembering the last years of his life, I think of St Francis wounded and disappointed by the fraternity that climbs La Verna: in the experience of the Stigmata, his vulnerability becomes a source of healing for Br. Leo.

*Do we dare **vulnerability** in our relationships, even if we are in a leading position?*

It takes a lot of trust in one's own fraternity, in one's brother, to be able to be 'seen' with one's own inconsistencies, in one's own need, in one's wounds and personal mistakes. Now if I feel welcomed into this, I am regenerated by fraternity.

And how difficult it is to reaffirm our belonging when our brothers and sisters are exposed before people outside and before the world in their fallibility, in their sin!

Can we overcome the shame that can invade us, to continue to present ourselves as his brother and consider him as such?

With pertinence, you wish to promote a culture of mutual care, faithful to Francis who asks in the Rule: "*And let each one love and nourish his brother, as a mother loves and nourishes her child, in those things in which God will give him grace*". In other words: '*what happens to you, concerns me*'. Often, in the monastery, sisters come to me to ask me: *Where is this sister?* My first reaction generally is: don't worry, the sister is responsible for herself, she will come... But instead I am learning that it is not good to always refer to the individual, to personal conscience. Because what you do concerns me, you are in fact my business. Your way of being in fraternity touches me, it belongs to me. Perhaps you are more at risk than we are in this regard, even if we find hiding places even in the cloister, rather than the justifications that allow us to lead a life in great autonomy. I am curious to know how you manage to take care of the brother of your fraternity, of the Province, or of the Order.

³ Cf. Sister Simona Brambilla at the Federation of Poor Clares of Umbria – Sardinia





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Are you able not to limit yourself to the judgment expressed from afar and from above, but to move to reach the other and listen to him?

One of the questions in the Bible that is particularly dear to me is that of God who in Genesis 3 asks: *'Adam, where are you?'*⁴ Our vow of obedience must lead us out of our individualism towards a decentralization that chooses communion, the common good, which is the good of all. Mutual care must lead us to bonds of communion, to a mutual, reciprocal obedience that enters into the rhythm of the other, who limits himself in order to open a space for the other, and not to put the other in a situation that could plunge him into sin. Is this not being 'minors and subjects to all'?

However, putting ourselves in the school of Francis, we discover that its motherhood has strongly paternal aspects! In the letter to Br Leo, who is experiencing a moment of fatigue and fear in the face of the complexity of life, it is as if Francis were saying to him: *'I will not answer for you. Stay in your toil, don't run away!'* But he does not shy away from Leone's need for consolation. At La Verna, he responds to Brother Leo's desire and writes him the famous note, and at the same time shows him the Only One to turn to: the face of the Crucified One, source of all blessing and peace, to whom each of us can hand over our wounds that become a sign of belonging.

In the *Instrumentum Laboris*, I did not find the vocabulary of fatherhood or motherhood. You are certainly very cautious in the use of these terms that can quickly be misunderstood. But I testify that in my journey of human and spiritual growth, beginning with You Brother and the Third Order to which I belonged, some friars were fundamental who, with their presence, welcome, listening, mercy and fortitude, supported me and showed me the face of the Father of Mercies, and allowed me to put my steps in those of Christ. So I make myself the voice of so many young people, so many lay people, and so many Poor Clares: *May your brotherhood and minority grow in the form of the Good Shepherd!* Pope Leo has given us some characteristics. He says: *there is 'an indispensable commitment for anyone in the Church who exercises a ministry of authority: to disappear so that Christ remains, to make himself small so that he may be known and glorified (cf. Jn 3:30), to expend oneself to the end so that no one lacks the opportunity to know and love him'*⁵.

4) Finally, let me tell you an anecdote. One day the Radio asked us to be able to broadcast the conventual Mass on the airwaves. I asked the Guardian to send us a friar capable of such a commitment, that is, to bend to all the constraints of timing, and to give a wide-ranging homily given the large number of radio listeners. The friar prepared himself well for this challenge.

⁴ Gen 3,9

⁵ Pope Leo, 9 May 2025





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Now the day before, visited by the flu, he saw himself in need of being replaced. The next day another friar came. His homily was wonderful, delivered with great truth. At the end of the celebration, I thanked him warmly for his service, and congratulated him on his homily. He replied with a big smile: *it was the homily of the other friar, I just fixed it for myself!* It was for me a beautiful testimony of what they lived in fraternity, with this ability to recognize the gift of the other, to welcome it, and to give it a personal form. We are far from all copyrights! I was moved to hear this 'TOGETHER'.

For this three-year period, our community project is all centered on this TOGETHER: collaborating, working together, witnessing together... I see how many beautiful fruits it is bringing. I also share how beautiful it is for us to live the great liturgies together, preceded by fasting together, and then enjoy together the best of multicultural cuisine as an image of our community. So praying together, eating together, but also fasting together, can be very high moments of communion.

We have already done it together through *googlemaps*, to go and visit the countries of origin of each sister... How many things you understand about the other when you see the environment in which she grew up! From the fifteenth-century castle to the Mediterranean border, from Paris to the small colourful Sicilian house, up to the Congolese village.

Surely, you are more privileged than us in this area! In the *Instrumentum Laboris*, you are sensitive to the readiness to invite and welcome friars from other entities. I appreciate the effort of the General Curia to promote mutual knowledge through the *Fraternitas* bulletin. But then you need to meet faces, and weave personal bonds, to really get emotionally involved.

A big step for us was when the whole community met different groups of young people, which for us represents the greatest performance anxiety! Already giving one's own testimony in front of young people is not easy, but exposing oneself in front of one's sister, and listening to the sister's story, is a great challenge for us. And instead I see how much we have grown together in this exercise.

Do you know the vocational history of your confreres?

Do you also have the opportunity to tell the story of your province?

I strongly believe in the narrative tool to constitute a *WHOLE*. And in particular to narrate what the Lord has done for me, for us.

To conclude, it is precisely a storytelling exercise that is proposed to you in today's questions, which I found very interesting and suggestive. May the Spirit of God make you live in this experience of rereading and narrating a little of this Trinitarian communion for which we were created.

