



Thoughts at the Assembly's End

Sister Françoise Petit

How can one conclude a meeting as rich as a General Assembly? We have heard, shared and decided so much! What can we add?

Let us start again from the essential. Today, the Church invites us to celebrate Christ, King of the Universe. It is a feast that closes the liturgical year and turns us towards the future, a pivotal day that invites us to fix our gaze on the Son of God, the one who came to tell us that he is at the heart of the world and that his Kingdom is one of love, justice, and peace.

The General Assembly is the culmination of a long period that began in the local communities, then in the Provinces, and finally, during these last few weeks, at the Motherhouse. It has been an intense time of reflection, prayer, and a common desire to correspond evermore to the call of the Lord in the manner of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. Christ has accompanied us and now he proposes that we look to the future. Yes, today is also a turning point for the Company, one that commits us to the paths we have decided to take together. We are committed to continue in spirit and in action our “Ephata” in the Provinces and at the level of the entire Company.

Christ is the center of our lives and we expressed this again, especially at the beginning of the Assembly, when you reviewed what should be kept from the previous Inter-Assemblies Document. **Let us continue to rely unceasingly and always on the Word of God and on our personal relationship with Christ, to truly be with our brothers and sisters who live in any kind of precariousness.**

The synthesis of responses from the young Sisters challenged us, especially their yearning for quality “living together” as missionary disciples. How, with them, can we move forward in this process? How could the local communities be better places of renewal on the human, spiritual, and missionary levels? Communities where fraternity is experienced honestly and concretely in day to day relationships?

We then entered resolutely into our reflection on the four major challenges, these missionary challenges that preoccupy us so much. We had the confirmation that the whole world is concerned with the passing on of Christian values to the younger generations, care for our common home, “living together,” and the defense of respect of human rights.

The in-depth study of these four subjects has allowed us to identify concrete points and it seems to me - and I have heard it here and there - that we have made progress. Each Assembly allows us to take a step forward. What one or two steps have we taken in this Assembly?

There are, of course, those in the orientations expressed in the Inter-Assemblies Document. They are the fruit of group discussions, plenary sessions, and what you have decided is necessary to implement as a priority focus in the Provinces. This is one of the objectives of a General Assembly: to **“promote fidelity to its specific charism and its apostolic vitality”** (C. 84a), and, I add, according to the diverse realities of the Provinces.

Beyond these many orientations, I would like to highlight three aspects that we have experienced during these almost four weeks and that ultimately correspond to what you wished to include in the future Inter-Assemblies Document.

1 The atmosphere in which the times of work, relaxation, and prayer took place was marked by the joy of meeting again to experience this important time in the Company. The pandemic had deprived us of real contacts, of closeness, and of the simple possibility of being together. We experienced this and you highlighted the need for communities to be places of fraternity where human relationships could be warmer, not for the purpose of forming cocoons closed in on themselves. Rather, so that these relationships give us the strength to go out and live generously the

mission with our brothers and sisters who aspire to the same thing. For, as we have also repeated, we are of the same humanity.

2 A General Assembly only makes sense through a sharing of thoughts, experiences, cultures, and ways of looking at the missions and the presence of local communities. You have said that you wish to continue on this pathway of sharing among the Provinces when you return home. You have expressed the desire to continue the collaboration that already exists but that could go further. The orientations specify this and you will be able, according to your contexts, to promote connections among you even now for a better service. Everything starts with better understanding.

3 We noticed the interest, the richness, and the strength in the discussions relating to the challenges and, in particular, with the one on human rights. I believe that the time of forums gave you the opportunity to understand better the different realities and to clarify your own. Where are we in our own Province in terms of human rights violations? This is a question to be asked because every Province, every country, is involved. The missionary enthusiasm is really present in each one. This is good, and it is a source of hope for the Company and for your Provinces. You will leave strengthened at this level, and now it is your responsibility to transmit this fire of charity to rekindle the momentum for the coming six years. We lit this fire at the beginning of the Assembly in front of the conference room and it was a reminder to us each day.

“Living well together” and making our communities places of fraternity founded on the Gospel, more sharing among Provinces, and taking action when human rights are violated - these are three strong points of our Assembly. While not summing up everything, for there have been other topics, these have been a major focus throughout these weeks.

I give thanks for all that we have experienced together, and it is my turn to thank all those who have made this Assembly possible.

Thank you, Father Tomaž, for accompanying us throughout this gathering even though your schedule is very busy. You are currently preparing your own Assembly. We assure you more than ever of our prayers for that. Thanks also to

Father Bernard, faithful and brotherly, whose presence always delights our hearts.

Thank you to the Sisters of the Motherhouse who everywhere and in every way, put all their energies, into many services to facilitate our daily life.

Thank you to the interpreters and translators who, thanks to the gift of languages and their work, have built bridges among us. We recognize that this week has been particularly intense and that you have had little sleep.

Thank you to the Sisters of the General Secretariat, including the Sisters in the control room. They always amaze us with their ability to run and react to technical incidents that are always possible! A special thank you to Sister Marie Odile who, in an incredible way, has her eye on everything and thus avoids many oversights or confusion in the organization. Thanks also to Sister Teresa for her daily availability, especially to the Provincial Treasurers.

Thank you to the new communications team. They have been preparing for months to allow the Daughters of Charity from all over the world to follow the work and life of the Assembly day by day. It was a bit of an adventure and they can be truly satisfied and thanked.

Thank you to all those who were asked to provide services (liturgy, animation, Scrutineers, different Secretaries, cleaning in this room or the dining room, etc.). I thank especially Sister Annie and Sister Michèle who faithfully recorded the minutes. Their reading helped us to ensure a certain continuity from day to day. Thank you to the Sisters of the Coordination Commission. Some of them started their work well before the Assembly. I naturally mention Sister Micheline, our facilitator, who is such an efficient and joyful support! Sister Iliana and Sister Maria Teresa who, from the beginning of the preparation, gave all their time for the Assembly. Sister Raymonde and Sister Antonia later joined them. Thank you!

Finally, thanks to all of you gathered here. The preparation is important, the day-to-day organization too, but everything depends on the participation of the Assembly members. You have taken an active part and have shown your concern for the future of the entire Company.

Now I come to thank the six Councillors who have just finished their mandate. We have experienced wonderful things. We often have been amazed at the encounters and what is happening in the Provinces. Of course, we have had more difficult moments. I express once again how I treasure the friendship I shared with Sister Kathleen. We can say that she has been present here with us.

I ask simply Sister Iliana, Sister Neghesti, Sister Marie, Sister Carmen, Sister Maria Teresa, and Sister Corina to join me here so that you can thank them for all that they gave to the Company for six or 12 years... I thank each one of you. All have worked hard for this Assembly before, during, and through all its details. There were many of them! Thank you!

Before concluding, I would like to ask the members of the new Council to come and sit next to me.

Sister Hanna and Sister Luisa will stay. I am happy about that. Sister Julie, Sister Ana Amélia, Sister Theresa, Sister Antonia, Sister Anna, and Sister Alicia Margarita will go back to their Provinces for a little while, but I eagerly await their return so that we can set out together in the service of the Company, together with the Provinces. It is ever more right to say it in that way. Thank you for accepting to leave your missionary places and your communities to give yourselves more broadly to the entire Company.

We are going to do everything we can to keep the gates open so that the Company continues to go out unceasingly to precarious places to meet our brothers and sisters. We have also to complete this Document which you have entrusted to us for the final draft. Our objective will be to remain faithful to the spirit that you wanted to transmit, as well as to the content. It will take time to do this work because we must think about translations too, so that each language can reflect the meaning of what has been expressed.

I trust in the Spirit, in the gifts of each one, and in the fact that the Lord is certainly there every day. We all have experience of this.

It remains for me now to say again how deeply grateful I am to the Lord that we have been able to hold this Assembly with all the unforeseen events. I wish each one a safe return. Some of you will be going back to Provinces that have been tested by the political situation, war, violence, and uncertainty about the living

conditions of the people. We will pray for one another and remain in communion. The Company is a body, a family, and **“If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it”** (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Please, all of you, greet your Sisters on behalf of the Assembly members. Thank them again for their prayer. We have felt their presence and their joy in participating at a distance in this experience of the Company.

I conclude by calling on the intercession of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. May they encourage us to continue on the pathway of giving and of love, every day and wherever we are.

Mary, only Mother of the Company, pray for us.

Thank you.