



president of the teresian association

Los Negrales, 21 July 2018

## **Assembly of all the Associations of the Teresian Association**

### **Opening Address. President**

#### **1. Called together by faith in the God of life**

I welcome you all, each and every one, members of the Primary Association and of ACIT Associations, members of the Teresian Association represented at this Assembly.

We are here together, people from diverse cultures, languages, ages, professions and family experiences, called by the vocation we share.

When Jesus called the disciples, they felt that something had changed in their lives.

*"They felt reborn, they felt heard, understood, loved, and this made them go to say to others, 'come and see'. Their lives changed forever. At the same time, they continued living the normal life of their time, like others of their time: they were hungry and they ate, they were thirsty and they drank, they were tired and they rested, they went to the temple and prayed, they visited friends, the sick, the poor"...*  
as Edward Schillebeeckx († 2009), described the experience.

Our lives have also been changed and it is that experience that calls us here today. In us this call has become a vocation, a lifestyle, a community and commitment.

We are "a community that has been called together by Jesus and is guided by the Spirit, people who listen to the call to proclaim the joy of the Gospel to everyone, in the style of Poveda", as we wrote in the letter convening this assembly.

Today we can say personally and as an Association represented by you who are here: faith has saved us, has called us, has set us on the road and has brought us together. Surely at the end of this meeting we will hear the Gospel words: "Your faith has saved you, go in peace".

Just as faith is strengthened by believing, as St. Augustine said, **the Assembly is going to be an act of faith**, an experience of faith, a celebration of faith.

**By faith**, Mary accepted the word of the Angel and believed, in the obedience of her self-surrender, the message that she would be the Mother of God (cf. Luke 1, 38).

**By faith**, the Apostles went throughout the world and announced the joy of the resurrection to everyone without any fear.

**By faith**, the disciples formed the first community gathered around the teaching of the Apostles, in prayer and the breaking of bread, sharing their goods

**By faith**, the martyrs, among them Pedro Poveda, gave their lives as witnesses to the Gospel.

**By faith**, men and women of every age, language and culture have through the centuries professed the beauty of following Jesus in the family, profession, public life and in exercising the charisms and ministries entrusted to them.

**By faith** we too are here today, recognizing the living presence of the Lord Jesus, present in our lives and in the history of the Teresian family. The faith of Pedro Poveda, of Josefa Segovia, of so many generations of men and women who have preceded us because they felt called by faith to personify Pedro Poveda's charism.

We can find it difficult nowadays to discern the signs of the Risen One in our world, but we are mistaken if we worry about statistics or results; faith is not a measurable concept, and neither is the vocation to which we have been called. They are experiences of relationship and of trust.

Let us find support in Pedro Poveda's intuition; in 1929 he said,

*I am convinced that everything is God's Work ..., and everything was and is done for God ... that is the source of the faith with which they undertake their enterprises, the peace with which they act, the confidence with which they await the fruit of their work; because all the effort, all the confidence, and all the hope is of God, through God and for God. (PP Creí por eso hablé, [297])*

His programmatic words of almost a century ago are also meant for us today, "You then, taking utmost care, add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge, temperance, and to temperance, patience and to patience, piety" (2 Pet 1: 5-6)

*"First comes faith, continues Pedro Poveda, and with it virtue and science. ...because the secret of the holiness of the first Christians is not to be found in the difference of the times ... but rather in the living faith that generated charity and gave rise to its natural fruits which are the virtues". (Pedro Poveda, Selected spiritual Writings, 12, page 43, Creí por eso hablé, [111])*

## 1.1 A credible faith

Difficulties with belief are often to be found among our contemporaries, and in the perception of others the world in which we live is opposed to God, to God's mystery and mercy.

In our societies touched by secularisation no-one can measure the influence of the Gospel, the influence of personal contact with a witness of the Risen One, a gesture, a word, when in one way or another a person's heart is touched.

Many have removed God from their lives; they live as if God did not exist. It is a question of a social viewpoint that is more and more widespread, above all in the west, where understanding of life, criteria and social living show a disconnection between the Gospel and culture.

This phenomenon also affects believers, and the weakening of faith weakens the mission. We need, therefore, to re-root our belief and hope; strengthen our existence in personal encounter with the God of life, who gives meaning to the deepest and most vital questions, longing and desires.

*"In the depths of the human person is the desire for a presence, the desire for profound communion. This desire for God is the beginning of faith. Many around us ask, "but what is faith?" Faith is trust in God, a cry of trust which we renew every day"* Brother Roger of Taizé said.

We believe with our intelligence, will and affectivity. Behind faith there is desire, search, decision, and commitment. *"Taste and see that the Lord is good"*. (Psalm 34:8)

What we believe is not a set of truths, doctrines or ideas; our faith is in belonging to and following a person, Jesus, in whom we believe and in whom we have placed all our trust"

This relationship is nourished by listening to his word, by prayer and by the mission of helping to build his Kingdom of justice and love. It translates into living as *"salt of the earth" and "light of the world"* (cf Matt 5:13-16).

If we truly believe that Christianity is a form of humanisation, of giving direction and meaning to life, our faith will be credible to others, as are love and hope.

If we are able to give the reason for our hope, if we reject any attitude of tension, of confinement, of fear or denial of a possible future, if we truly witness to the hope that dwells in us, our faith will be credible and fruitful.

*"The task and vocation of Christians in the current crisis consists above all in keeping alive a shared vision, faith, and hope"*. (Martin Maier, Secretary of the Jesuit European Social Centre -JESC)

This is how we express it in the Working Document that we have received:

*"It is crucial that we lay ourselves open before God and allow God to dislodge us and impel us to cross borders and transcend ourselves, to say yes to his Kingdom Project, and to be happy and confident that we are "mere instruments being used by God our Lord so that they may know him and love him". Leave your homeland, AAA, No 32*

That is why I am happy, in opening this international gathering, to give thanks to God for the life of each one of you and to do so with the words of Paul to the Thessalonians:

*“We always give thanks to God, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”. (1 Thess 1:3)*

Let us be witnesses to Paul’s thanksgiving during these days and let us take it afterwards to our homes and to our daily tasks.

*Let us not let our hope be stolen, said Pope Francis in his exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*.*

## **2. With head and heart in the present – an embodied faith**

We share a spirituality of incarnation that leads us, like Saint Pedro Poveda, to live *with head and heart in the present moment*. Or as the Second Vatican Council expressed it: *“The joys and hopes, sorrows and anguish of the people of our time, especially of the poor and those who suffer, are the joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties of the disciples of Christ. There is nothing truly human that does not find an echo in their hearts” ... (Gaudium et Spes, 1).*

I would like to offer you some features to live in faith incarnate in today's world; these seem to me to be fundamental in guiding the new six-year term:

- 2.1 A restless and hopeful faith
- 2.2 Living in diversity as a source of creativity
- 2.3 Journeying in communion: a prophetic sign.
- 2.4 The Kairos of synodality, co-responsibility, gifts and charisms working together.
- 2.5 Welcoming the call to holiness as the fullness of faith.

### **2.1 A restless and hopeful faith**

At the root of our spirituality there is a heritage of searching and restlessness, of risk and openness to the surprises of God in life and in history, at the same time of trust and hope. The experiences of Saint Teresa, Pedro Poveda, Josefa Segovia and so many people reveal this to us.

The spiritual experience that we share needs inner restlessness, questioning and being alert in the search for the meaning of life.

"You made us Lord for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in You," Saint Augustine said.

In being open to surprise, our soul remains restless, available to new paths and horizons. It is the opposite of living in a fortress of certainties and security. This uneasiness that Fernando Pessoa calls "the impatience of the soul" in his work *The Book of Disquiet* (*Livro do desassossego*), leads us to live the faith as a way of embodying hope today. "We count on hope, which is like a firm and sure anchor" (Hebrews 6,10-20)

In the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 26:41) Jesus invites us to keep vigil, to stay awake, alert to the life that grows, which is expressed in the searches and cries of humanity. We could say that restlessness is the impatience of the soul that watches and waits. In that they will see that we are the disciples of the Risen One.

At the Annunciation, Mary received the message of the unexpected, of the surprising, of the unimaginable, and together with it a word of trust: *Do not be afraid*. This gives way to trust, to the madness of a love that will never fail her. The restless concern that we are talking about here, the concern that today's world needs is like this, surprising and creative of life. It makes us capable of renouncing a life of certainties and security because we put our trust in Jesus, our hope. In his way of living like this, the Gospels tell us, we see that he walks with people and meets with them.

Jesus walks, moves around continually, looking for people; he climbs mountains and goes down into the valleys, retires to pray and returns to the tumult of life, rarely takes the same route, avoiding neither deserts nor lakes. He does not hesitate to ask for hospitality, because *the son of man has no place to rest his head*. We could say that his restlessness is the dynamism of his desire to encounter people and relate to them. We recognise this attitude of movement, of going forth, in Saint Teresa.

Jesus goes out to encounter; he seeks people, he lets himself be found. There is nothing that awakens awareness more than an encounter with someone who shows you a path, who speaks to you of meaning, who awakens you and sends you forth in love and trust.

We do not stay the same when we experience a true encounter of friendship, of family, of community; with people we know in the parish or at work; or with those that we meet along the way. How often hearing another person, experiencing their otherness, is an experience of healing, of encouragement, of sending forth. In the Gospel Jesus continually invites us to start again, to risk a word, a silence, a forgiveness, an embrace, in essence, an encounter.

In the framework of this Assembly we can ask ourselves, do we walk sufficiently with young people, families other than our own, those who are different ... or do we just observe them? Do we go out to meet them, or wait for them to come? Do we share their lives, their joys and sorrows, or allow ourselves to be immobilised by our own securities? Do we listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, guiding our decisions according to solidarity and care for the common home? ...

Our young people and many others, our families and others that we do not yet know; the people with whom we walk hope to find in us companions for the way, happy and

hopeful believers, who show ways that have a future, and by their actions show paths of humanisation for the world we share.

Today we are here to be infected by a restless faith that moves us, makes us leave certainties and securities behind and leads us to discern the where the Spirit is leading us today.

Teresa of Ávila sends us an invitation when she says: *Pity the soul that even in desires is content with little*, because the restlessness of the faith that we want is that of a desire that mobilises all our life and that only finds rest in God.

Let us help each other to feel restless, searching, to go out of ourselves to look at the reality of the world that God has entrusted to us.

## ***2.2 Living in diversity as a source of creativity***

Diversity today is the new Pentecost. Here we enter into a dynamic that continually reminds us that Christianity is plural, as is the call to embody Poveda's charism today.

We must learn again the value of diversity, not only theoretically, but in practice. Therefore, we must abandon the dream, if we still yearn for it, perhaps the bad dream, of uniformity, because it conceals the desire for everything to be the same for everyone, to measure everyone by the same yardstick, even to want to impose a model, a style, a way of understanding the world, life and also faith or vocation.

Faith, like vocation, is a path of diversity, of plurality in expressions, in styles, in ways and in shared richness; it is a path that we must travel in communion, as Jesus did. He sat at the tables of sinners, of evildoers and of his disciples, of the rich and the poor, the elderly and children. He was compassionate with the sick and exiled, defended women who were judged by their condition and pushed the law to its limits, "*The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath*" (Mark 2:27).

To walk today with people, to be companions on the road, is to walk with diversity, to walk in diversity, to seek and desire it, to encourage and accompany it. It is learning to discern what is of God in the diversity of the present in everyday life. Paul urges us: *Do not stifle the Spirit or despise the gift of prophecy with contempt; test everything and hold on to what is good and shun every form of evil.* (1 Thess 5:19-22).

We need to learn to discern what is of God in the diversity of everyday life.

Let us not worry about the influence we can exert, nor about the results of our actions, because true Christian influence is to bring a message of humanisation and redemption to our day to day world. Christian spirituality is the art of living humanly, humanising everything we touch, being fully human knowing ourselves fully of God, who is the one who has called us, who sustains us, who sends us and who saves us. This is our secret.

If those who see us live and act perceive that our life has a flavour and we know how to share our secret, they too can ask themselves about the meaning of their own lives. In these situations, proclaiming Jesus Christ as source of fulfilment and meaning will come naturally. It will be the fruit of witness, of dialogue, but never of imposition or obligation.

Our study document, which is the result of a diversity of views and presences of the TA, invites us in the first part to weave diversity from inclusion, dialogue and equality.

*“With words and expressions that are sometimes different and have nuances that arise from each person’s biography and sensitivity, and from contexts, circumstances and/or cultures, one statement is repeated among us more than any other. It is the need and the desire to cultivate and strengthen our experience of our spirituality of incarnation in all its aspects and dimensions, in all its depth and consequences, in all its possible expressions”. (AAA Study Document, 7)*

Making this shared dream real will have been to live in diversity as a source of creativity, in the commitment to walk with young people, with families, with so many people who suffer in our changing societies.

### **2.3 To journey in communion: a prophetic sign**

Our faith is trinitarian. The God of Christians is manifest as the one and at the same time diverse God, a creator God and a liberating God, a saving God, a God who becomes human.

To welcome, accompany and develop the diversity we wish to opt for and to which we feel sent, asks of us that we walk in communion.

Diversity is part of our daily life but communion is the result of a decision, of an active attitude; it asks us to desire it, to build it, to communicate it.

It is not about agreeing, or having the same sensitivity, or the same priorities. It is about looking in the same direction, walking towards the same objectives, in accordance with “the vocation to which we have been called.”

Pedro Poveda expressed it very clearly in 1918 when he mapped out the course for the Teresian Association.

*Although we recognise that the diversity of characters, culture, etc., imprint individual styles which are inevitable, and not wanting, by any means to eliminate the individual’s personality, but rather aiming at perfecting it, there must be a substantial, identical something in everyone’s formation, and that something must be well defined for everyone to know, to teach and to implement. If we do not secure what is substantial, the Work will never come to have its own well defined character. (Pedro Poveda, Selected Spiritual Writings, No 11, p 40; Creí, por eso hablé, [95])*

Faith is an experience of communion, of the People of God, of community that walks in communion with a shared history of alliances woven and shared with tenderness, mercy and forgiveness.

Sometimes the essential in creating communion is not what we have, what we have achieved, but what we perceive together as unfinished and that we want to construct; it is the result of an interdependence that is woven to respond to what we want to contribute and what we want to do together.

Walking in communion is to practice an active love that forgives, heals, cures, as Paul reminded us, writing to the Thessalonians: *We always thank God for you all. We remember before God how active is the faith, how unsparing the love, how persevering the hope which you have from our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thess 1:3), or when addressing the Galatians, he affirms: *For in Christ Jesus ... the only thing that counts is faith working through love* (Gal 5:6).

Sometimes we can feel vulnerable but the greatest vulnerability we can experience is that of love. It is love that makes us vulnerable, that brings us closer to the mystery of the other, to the fragility of the other and to my own. To be prophetic today is not only to opt for diversity; what is truly prophetic is to walk in communion, to create communion.

Times of doubt and crisis also need to be lived in communion. They need dialogue, truth based in faith and open minds and hearts.

Faith is alive if it always wants to look forward, does not avoid any combat, or suffering, or crisis. When we share doubts and times of crisis, we let the other enter our inner space of searching and combat, and we open a space for communion.

Love in deed and in truth is love that does not seek mirror images of self, or even of ourselves, but looks to advance together, looking forward, greeting, opening the doors of our homes, of our activities. [This](#) holds true for young people, for families, for adults and for the elderly.

What spaces, experiences, projects, activities, will express the communion in diversity that we are and live in? will we be capable of extending our welcome to people whose stories are very different to ours, with less linear life journeys than most of us, with different family, professional, cultural, religious life stories?

During these days when we are considering building common lines I invite you to do so from a foundation of Trinitarian communion, which is the deepest expression of God's love.

In 1916, Pedro Poveda said that *"the Work needs to be strong, it needs to be perfectly balanced. The two forces, centripetal and centrifugal ... maintain balance, and these forces ... are prayer, and unity and fraternal charity. If the first is lacking, you will be dissipated ... you will not fulfil your task. If the second is lacking, you will not go out to the world ... you will not fulfil your mission"*. (Cf. Pedro Poveda, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, No 7, p 40; *Creí, por eso hablé* [79])

Today we are communion in diversity, an Association that welcomes rhythms, colours, languages, idioms and projects that are different and diverse.

#### **2.4 The Kairos of synodality, co-responsibility and gifts and charisms working together.**

Synodality is one of the expressions of communion. It is a feature that has accompanied the history of the Church, especially the Eastern Church and ecclesial communities. In the Latin Church, after a long synodal experience during the first centuries of the Christian era, it was allowed to disappear. But with the Second Vatican Council it was recovered as a sign of the ecclesiology of communion

In the Teresian Association, synodality is the way to express the co-responsibility and participation of all in the life and mission that we have received as an International Association of the Faithful. We understand it as kairos, God's time for an association that is communion in diversity.

Synodality favours how each person and each local reality finds its place, its responsibility, its own unique and specific contribution to the whole. We can experience it in extraordinary events such as this one, but above all in the most everyday aspects of our lives: daily living, relationships, work, cultural activities, family and associative life, celebration of faith, making proposals, sharing ideas, encouraging communities.

We can practise it in the style of our ACIT groups and of our PA groupings, of the meetings by city, of the broad and open invitations to collaborators, friends and families; all are expressions of diversity that we want to learn to value more and more, in order to grow in communion.

Caring for formation in the spirituality of communion, the practice of listening, dialogue and community discernment will help us to progress in this direction.

The assembly is an experience of synodality. We must be careful not to concentrate too many responsibilities on a few people, and to value the contribution of each person especially in areas of competency that not all of us have acquired. We need to look with open hearts, without suspicion or mistrust at what is different and comes to us from other cultures, minorities, younger generations, all those things that seemingly can dislocate us.

And after the assembly, challenges will surely arise that will call for new perspectives and an exercise of personal and community conversion. Some we can already glimpse:

- The need for a welcome at local level and internationally for creative proposals that are different, presented by individuals, groups, or countries.
- To facilitate real renewal and updating in the different fields of mission that as a charism we want to offer today in an appropriate way

- Better connections and complementarity between projects and activities at local level.
- Better connections between neighbouring local realities, by geographic or continental zones
- Better connections between the local and the international, the sectoral and the general
- Renewed formation in the exercise of responsibility and animation of communities
- A decisive step in dialogue and encounter with men and women from different denominations and religious convictions to create together a culture of encounter and peace.

## 2.5 Welcoming the call to holiness, as the fullness of faith

Holiness is not reserved for a few. The great newness of the gospel is that we are all called to holiness, to be saints moved by love in our daily occupations, work, relationships, family, friendship, and wherever we each find ourselves.

In his recent exhortation, Pope Francis says: *“I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God’s people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is the holiness to be found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence. We might call them “the middle class of holiness”.* (7)

He continues: *“Do not be afraid of holiness; it will not take away your strength, life or joy. Quite the opposite, because you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you”.*

We are brought together by faith, by vocation and the desire to discover and fulfil in day to day life God's dream for each of us and for the Association. *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.* (Pedro Poveda, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, No 5, page 28, *Creí, por eso hablé* [78]).

In the Beatitudes we find the features of holiness; they are calls to happiness, calls to the fullness of faith, love and hope.

To be poor of heart, to react with tenderness, to mourn with those who mourn, to hunger and thirst for justice, to keep our hearts pure, to sow peace around us, to look and act with mercy, to desire the growth of the Kingdom of God, to respond with meekness when we are persecuted for Christ are features of the holiness to which we have been called.

We have all been called to this holiness, regardless of our situation, age, whether we are well or ill. That is why one of the emphases that Pope Francis lists in his exhortation is audacity, as an evangelizing enthusiasm and impulse that leaves a mark.

In this meeting of courage in faith, we need the energy of the Spirit more than ever so as not to fall into the habit of walking alone, within safe confines, well defined boundaries, familiar experiences. These safe confines have many faces or many temptations: individualism, spiritualism, confinement in small worlds, dependence, repetition of old schemes, dogmatism, nostalgia, pessimism, relativism, refuge in norms.

God is always new, with a newness that pushes us to go out, to move, to go beyond the known, and to seek in his name the peripheries and frontiers. God incarnated in Jesus takes us to where humanity is most wounded and where human beings, under the appearance of superficiality and conformism, continue to seek the answer to the question of the meaning of life.

God is not afraid! God is not fearful, Pope Francis affirms forcefully. God always goes beyond our schemes and does not fear the peripheries. He himself became periphery, and if we dare to reach the peripheries, we will find God there. That is the spirituality of incarnation according to which we wish to live.

Jesus asks each one of us gathered here: *"Do you love me? Do you love me more than these? Feed my lambs ... Do you love me? Look after my sheep ... Do you love me? Do you love me more than these? Feed my sheep"*.

Let us hope that we are listening in the silence of our hearts: *"In all truth I tell you, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your arms, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go"*.

This is a way of telling us that changing to listening to life makes sense, although the habitual, the repetitive, can seduce and reassure us; getting used to what may be costly, we do not face evil and we let things "be as they are", or what some have decided they are.

Let us allow the Lord to come and wake us up during this meeting, to mobilise us, to free us from the inertia that blocks us and ties us to the past.

Let us ask the Spirit to enable us to challenge custom; let us open our hearts to the restlessness of faith to allow ourselves to be dislocated by what happens around us and by the living and effective Word of the Risen One.

Saints are always surprising, disturbing, because their lives invite us to leave behind tranquil and numbing mediocrity. Let us ask the Lord during this time that we may be *saints who surprise and dislocate*, who challenge, question, mobilise our best energies at the service of the Kingdom. Let us ask the Lord for the grace not to hesitate when the Spirit demands forcefully that we take a step forward.

*Have you ever thought, Josefa Segovia asked in 1954, what the Association would be like if we were authentically holy? ... God's part is assured and is firm. ... Grace has*

*been abundant, fruitful, continuous. .... But next to God's part, we have to put ours and this is where my fear and my hope are; fear if we do not fulfil our part, hope, if we move towards holiness with decisive and firm steps. (Josefa Segovia, Letter on the call to holiness, Josefa Segovia, Libro de cartas, Llamamiento a la santidad, pág. 564 y ss.).*

Josefa Segovia continues, listing some aspects that can help us to advance towards that goal, recalling the interior life, prayer, complete self-surrender, forgetfulness of self, a series of means that can guide and accompany our desire for holiness.

She concludes further on with something that we can take as opportune for us today assembled: *"We are at a decisive time for the history of our Work and we must make the most of it. ... This time is crucial. Either we launch ourselves towards the life of perfection or we condemn the Association to a mediocre, common and undistinguished life".*

At the beginning of this address we said that faith calls us together, the call of God summons us. As I conclude, I want to end with this invitation: holiness convenes us, holiness as that fullness of life to which we have been called, as the horizon of fulfilment for each one of us and for the Association as a community of faith and hope.

We declare that the Assembly of All the Associations is now open, and I invite you to truly be ***the Assembly of faith and of sending forth to live in hope.***

Maite Uribe  
President