



Being Church - Our role as lay people.

What is the Church for us? It is not such a simple question to answer, because each of us finds an answer with respect to our own experience, education and culture.

What is certain is that our concept of Church cannot be limited to the perception of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as is often the case. It does not only concern the consecrated ministers of God, but also the entire people of God. This is because the universal Church presents itself as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. (Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 4).

Pope Francis also reiterates that “the Church constitutes a people, a people prepared with God’s love and patience and to which we are all called to belong.” (6 August 2014, General Audience at St Peter's)

So as lay people, we are called to not only acknowledge that we belong to the Church, but also that it is shaped by us. No one can exclude themselves. Thanks to Christ, we form one body, which is the Church. He is the head, and we are its members. This is an image that binds us together in fraternal communion.

We are a people with many faces, and each is valuable for the good of the whole.

This brings us back to an image of the Church that certainly cannot be described as abstract, but something which must be realised and fulfilled in our lives. It must become a sign of our salvation, where we are called to conform to Jesus Christ, and to his love for the poorest and for the most marginalised. This is why fraternal communion cannot be thought of as something that is given once and for all, but instead as a dynamic journey, animated by bearers of the one Spirit.

Being the Church in Christ, we are all asked: lay people, ordained ministers, and consecrated persons, to make ourselves promoters of the dynamism of fraternal communion. It is a call to allow us to be open to the Spirit, received by the gift of Baptism, to advance the Church towards the fulfilment of its mission. We must be a sign and a foretaste of the kingdom of God.

We are also called as lay people, to participate in the promotion of the Church by putting ourselves forward. This is because the Church is catholic and apostolic. As ‘catholic’ we mean the Church is “projected towards evangelisation and encounter with all... The Church was born catholic, that is to say that she was born ‘outward-bound’, she was born missionary. Had the Apostles remained in the Upper Room, without going out to disseminate the Gospel, the Church would be the Church of only that people, of that city, of that Upper Room. But they all went out into the world, from the moment of the Church’s birth, from the moment the Spirit descended upon them.” (Pope Francis, 17 September 2014, General Audience at St Peter's)

Like the apostles we are called to contribute, to take part in an outgoing Church. No one should feel excluded, because the Church is by its nature open and inclusive, and everyone can find their own space.

The Church, therefore, needs each and every one of us. We are all called to participate in building up the Church, according to our abilities and our charisms. We should not limit ourselves to our own personal faith journey but respond to the challenges of today's world with an attitude of dialogue and greater welcome towards all, even those outside our Catholic world.

As lay people, we are called to feel co-responsible for the Church's journey. Our uniqueness as spouses is particularly special, because together we build and grow a family. We can truly witness how enriching and deeply evangelical it is to face the challenges the Church is called on to address, in the spirit of co-responsibility rather than as individuals.

This is a very important issue. How often do we not really feel co-responsible for the pastoral journey in our communities? We are not merely simple collaborators, delegating all responsibilities to consecrated ministers. Instead, we must become promoters of new dynamic forces inspired by true fraternity. We need to be predisposed to dialogue and to serious discernment, to create a climate of mutual esteem and trust capable of generating community practices.

It is necessary to recognise that each of us is co-responsible for the Church's journey, as we are baptised with the one Spirit. We are not alone, and we must not leave others alone in becoming bearers of the Gospel, because it is the communion of the Spirit's gifts that enables the Church to progress in faith.

And it is not a path given once and for all, but it is the fruit of confrontation, of adaptation, and of life lived every day. It is capable of generating a new culture, a new way of looking at the world and being in the world, of finding one's place in an ever-changing society.

As married couples and as Team members, we cannot fail to think that this aspect of our belonging to the Church is fundamental. Teams is based on the foundations of communion, co-responsibility, participation, synodality, and service. We can build a future according to Christ for the benefit of all humanity.

Certainly, with respect to what we have just shared, there is still room for each of us to reflect more deeply on this theme. But as lay people committed to the promotion of the Gospel, we feel that being Church in Christ represents much more than mere status. It offers us the mystery of thinking that goes beyond ourselves, and that through us can be fulfilled, at least in a small way. This is a mystery of a bond of deep love, so we do not feel alone in facing our frailties, as well as the challenges of the modern world. It is the mystery of a message of hope that is dynamic and capable of renewal, addressed not only to us but to all. Without this, it would be truly difficult to live.

May the grace of the Lord always illuminate the path of all!

Paola and Giovanni, ERI Secretaries