

MEMBERSHIP IN THE FRATERNITY



Fraternity is a group of brothers. When we feel and are brothers, we are a fraternity.

The Iesus Caritas Priestly Fraternity, within the framework of the Families of Charles de FOUCAULD, has its own dynamic of diocesan priests, which each fraternity establishes and which all fraternities adopt through the Directory.

To belong to a fraternity, the bonds of friendship, mutual understanding, motivations for trust and sincerity, attitudes of faith and listening must be consolidated; otherwise, it would be nothing more than belonging to a group of good friends, or a group of mutual aid, if not something sectarian, elitist, or spiritualist in nature.

This is reflected in the fundamental attitudes characteristic of any serious human group.

These attitudes could be the following:

1. EMPATHY. Putting myself in the other person's shoes, putting myself in their place. This will allow me to understand and accept others. This attitude frees us from the personal knots that trap us in our opinions, fixed ideas, etc.
2. LISTEN. Open the ears of our hearts to hear the voice of the Lord in our brothers and sisters, so that they, in turn, feel heard and we ourselves are cared for.
3. TRANSPARENCY. If I don't allow myself to be seen within, I won't be able to see others either. Sincerity, honesty in communication, and never judging are signs of transparency in people.
4. RESPECT. Synonymous with love and friendship, concern for others, and acceptance as they are. When there is respect, there is not only good manners, but also flexibility in relationships and good understanding. When respect is lost, true friendship, partnership, and the spirit of teamwork are lost, and relationships deteriorate fatally.
5. GIVING. Giving ourselves freely to others, offering the best of ourselves, without expecting rewards, without being held accountable for everything we've done. Free and selfless love.

Up to this point, we could speak of a compact and at the same time open human group. Compact in its convictions and open to improvement, to accepting criticism and innovation, open to new members and new ideas.

As the Iesus Caritas Fraternity, there are characteristics and attitudes that we all know well, framed within the charism of Brother Charles and the spirituality of the Gospel: fraternal life, the desert, the review of life, adoration, the Month of Nazareth, the option for the least, contemplation in life, the life of Nazareth as a way of life and coexistence and, in turn, as a pastoral style.

We all know this very well. What would be necessary is a thorough reflection on personal involvement, which is linked to the vocation received, and on a community level—at the local or national level—on what is specific to our Fraternity and which involves a heartfelt commitment to our brothers and sisters, human beings, not only to the Lord as priests or consecrated men.

Given this, I suggest the following headings:

1. FRATERNITY AND EVANGELICAL COMMITMENT. Does the Fraternity bring me closer to the Gospel? Does it help me spread the Kingdom? We begin from our Christian vocation to follow Jesus from our baptism, which is renewed with our confirmation and strengthened in ordination, not as a professionalization but as a service to the People of God and to society. Is my fraternity a sign of the Gospel in my diocese, in my local church? We do not stand on the margins as an elite.

2. FRATERNITY AS A MEANS OF EVANGELIZATION. Do I feel evangelized through the Fraternity, through each brother? Do I feel called not only to live the Gospel but also to proclaim it with my life—a key point in Brother Charles's charism? As priests, we are called to proclaim Jesus, to share the Good News with the poor, freedom for the captives... We are not professionals in sacramentalization or preaching, like media entertainers; we are sent in the name of Jesus. Do I believe and hope in the style of Nazareth to evangelize? Nazareth is not utopia; it is everyday life in its small ways.

3. FRATERNITY AND SPIRITUALITY. Is our membership in the Fraternity one of the means of cultivating the spirit? Is the Fraternity, the charism of Brother Charles, a school of prayer for us, a resource for the interior life? As a Fraternity, we have an enviable wealth of resources for the spiritual journey of other priests. Our retreats and encounters are appreciated by those who approach us for the first time. We are valued in our dioceses as men of prayer, but does that correspond to reality? It's not about giving lessons, but about sharing a way of loving God and allowing ourselves to be loved by him.

4. FRATERNITY AND FRATERNAL LOVE. Am I friends with the brothers of the fraternity? Do I care for them? Do their pains hurt me and their joys rejoice? Fraternity is not an ecclesiastical label. We don't choose where we are; we are given them. We don't choose our brothers; they are given to us. Seeing God's voice in all of this is sometimes difficult. Idealizing my fraternity as a perfect state of mutual understanding and friendship is a mistake. People, all different, have their values and counter-values. Loving our brothers as they are means respecting them. This makes it easier to allow ourselves to be helped, to listen, to contemplate their lives with the eyes of the heart, without judging attitudes or events, but challenging them when necessary and allowing ourselves to be challenged. Are we afraid of others entering our lives? Our human psychology often masks us, and we generate defenses.

5. FRATERNITY AND THEOLOGICAL PLACE. Is fraternity the last place for us? Can all this be synonymous with false humility? Is God Love also within my fraternity? Encounters with the Lord occur in very diverse settings, moments,

and events. Sometimes we try to pray and cannot; other times it is the Lord who reaches out and speaks to our hearts. How does my fraternity help me and how do I help find God in people and in life? Am I clear that following Brother Charles's charism is a search for God and accepting the last place? The Fraternity, the brothers, not so much the structures, is either a priority in our time and dedication, or it remains a beautiful form of spiritual complement or self-help.

Belonging to the Fraternity is not an achievement, it's a gift. Committing ourselves to it means continuing to commit ourselves to the work of spreading the Kingdom.

We all shy away from labels, both social and pastoral; we don't like being singled out by the diocesan clergy as oddballs.

The conviction that we are called by Jesus to serve him in others, to make our lives a proclamation and a denunciation, commits us to be consistent, to not play with two decks.

Do we consider the Fraternity one more aid within the wide range of possibilities or offerings for living a serious spirituality?

How concerned am I about the progress of my fraternity and the other fraternities?

Do I value and read the Fraternity's Mail, the Iesus Caritas bulletin, and the various communications? If possible, do I access the fraternity websites online?

How much time do I dedicate to my fraternity each week or month? Do I frequently use the phone to check on others? Do I visit them? Do I allow myself to be loved when they also care about me?

Do I consider my local fraternity a small fiefdom apart from other groups or fraternities? Perhaps a taifa kingdom (where no one interferes)? Are we open to criticism, to innovations in the spirit of the charism?

Am I in my fraternity as I might be in any other group of priests or lay people? Why? What spaces can I share?

Am I hesitant to talk about fraternity within the diocesan clergy, in meetings, gatherings, or celebrations for fear of being considered different, labeled? Why "here yes and there no"?

To be happy, we must love what we are and what we have, as a gift and love from God, as part of his heritage.

Thank you.

Aurelio SANZ BAEZA