



Message to the Scalabrinian Family

SEEKING, LISTENING TO AND NARRATING THE TRUTH

Dearest all,

We, the general administrations of the three Institutes of the Scalabrinian Family, have met in these days to strengthen our fraternity. Called by the Spirit, thanks to the inspiration of Blessed Scalabrini, to follow Jesus through the consecration to God and the service of the migrants, we had the opportunity to reflect on how to be faithful to that call today.

We are living in a time when old and new conflicts uproot thousands of people from their homes and their land and force them to seek security elsewhere; a time in which the exasperated search for one's own comfort exacerbates the inequalities among people and between nations and forces many to look for opportunities in another country, where access to those opportunities is often denied; a time in which to have hope one must buy it illegally and end up buying the probability of failure or death; a time in which rhetoric against migrants prevails and is utilized as an easy tool to obtain consensus while giving in return uncertain and short-term solutions. These are not abstract considerations. Just think of the many borders where so many tragedies are taking place every day.

It seemed to us insufficient to dismiss that rhetoric as a gross distortion of reality or as a simple instigation to preservation. The many who line up on that wavelength probably live their own insecurities and are mistakenly led to feel safer by siding against migrants, presented as a threat to security. But it is not by opposing brothers to brothers that greater security is obtained. It is only by creating greater brotherhood.

This has led us to review our rhetoric as well and to ask ourselves: why is it so unconvincing? Our rhetoric is made up of the words of Jesus: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me"; of the parables of Jesus: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"; of the commandment of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you." Our rhetoric is made up of the teachings of Blessed Scalabrini: "Emigration in almost all cases is not a pleasure but an inevitable necessity;" "While spontaneous emigration is good, forced migration never is;" "We must evangelize the children of desolation and hard work;" "While the world is shaking ... a much broader enterprise is maturing." And we use the rhetoric of Pope Francis: "More bridges fewer walls." "Those who build walls end up being held captive." "No to closures, yes to solidarity." A rhetoric that also reminds migrants of their responsibilities: "Respect the culture and laws of the country that welcomes you."

Why then are we not convincing? And yet, we have translated rhetoric into theoretical elaborations, we have discussed welcoming and hospitality, dignity and human rights, cohabitation and integration. We have tried to convince that migrants are not a burden but a resource; that they should not be treated only as an object of assistance but considered protagonists in society; that it is not only they who must integrate themselves but we must also integrate with them; that we must foster intercultural dialogue

and appreciate what they can teach us. These formulations are correct. But then, why are we not persuasive?

It is not so much a matter of improving our speech techniques. Undoubtedly, much has changed in the world of communication, where it is more difficult to make one's voice heard, it is more difficult to find the truth, it is more difficult to hear those who have no voice. We have a duty to improve our communication skills, but even more we have a duty to seek, listen and tell the truth. It therefore seems important to us to suggest three orientations on which to work in our Scalabrinian Family.

A. Narrating through facts and witnessing. In the classical Aristotelian rhetoric, the first element is the search for the factual elements that can support the discourse. There is a lot of repetitiveness in the way migration is discussed. Repetitiveness in stigmatizing migrants as a threat to national well-being, to the security of citizens, to the cultural heritage of a society. Repetitiveness in the words of those who defend migrants with abstract principles, ignoring the real conflicts of everyday life, excusing attitudes that are not excusable. What is lacking is the ability to connect all the dashes, which include violence and oppression from which to escape to often encounter other violence and oppression in a context in which everyone earns on the skin of migrants, in some way even us, without giving them back what they paid for. Our arguments must consist of facts. We must build more and more a rhetoric of action, of concrete service, of offering possibilities, stability, future. Migrants do not leave to be always on the move, always uprooted. They leave in search of security. Where we are, we should try to work so that the conditions are created for everyone to feel at home, creating communion in the contexts where we meet migrants and where we offer protection and promotion. But our arguments must also consist of the way we are with migrants, as consecrated persons who let themselves be met by God who became flesh and bear witness to his love unreservedly and to the end.

b. The narration of migrants. The conflict of rhetoric that dominates the discourse on migration is essentially devoid of the voice of migrants. It is a missing element in the Aristotelian rhetoric, the arrangement of arguments. Political decision-makers speak, making migration the problem of the century; administrators speak, who feel unable to manage a few people from outside; non-governmental organizations speak, which have found in the rescue of migrants a new reason for commitment; sociologists and economists speak, while remaining in disagreement on the explanations and even more on the solutions they can offer; some bishops speak, ministers of the same gospel but in disaccord on how to apply it to migrants. We also speak, perhaps with passion, but sometimes with little depth and consistency, sometimes with dissonant voices. Traffickers and entrepreneurs, who earn out of migration, are silent. The migrants especially are silent, because nobody wants to hear their voice. It is our duty to create opportunities for migrants to speak and for someone to listen, for us to listen.

c. Narrated to God. In the end, when the conflict of rhetoric is on fire, when the cacophony has increased, when everyone is talking and nobody is listening, our voice, though feeble, will be heard if it has the tone of God's voice. To acquire this tone, we must bring the narrative before God, where differences are dissolved, where walls become porous, where borders fade, where no one is excluded. We know it, it is possible that precisely before God we feel even more distant from one another, that indeed division is generated in the name of God, that precisely before God the migrants will not accompany us, but we must create opportunities to narrate together our stories that intertwine to become the history of salvation. This is our way of being eloquent.

In the conflict of rhetoric there are instant winners, and often it is not us. However, we must not try to win because we have a better speech, but because we serve the truth, the truth of those who seek, perhaps in a confused way, more life, "life in abundance". We should not be afraid to narrate this truth through witnessing, through facts, with force also in front of those who have closed their hearts. We should not be afraid to tell it to God. "He turned to me and heard my cry."

Casa Alpina Scalabrini, Villabassa, Italy, 1st September 2019

Leonir Chiarello, cs, Neusa de Fatima Mariano, mscs, Regina Widmann, mss