

# There can be no sharing between those who are full of themselves

We are witnessing the hollowing out, the fragmentation and even the dissolving of communities – from the smallest, such as marriage and family life, to the largest: the international community bewildered at seeing the order on which it has long relied fading away. Between these extremes lie the intermediate communities: associations and neighborhoods, religious, educational and parish communities, villages and cities.

Encountering one another in a meaningful way and actually journeying together is by no means automatic. Doing this is impossible among people or realities which are focused only on themselves, living under the illusion of being self-sufficient. This is even less so among people and realities which seek to outdo or dominate one another. Equality is certainly necessary and unquestionably just, but it is not enough to resolve the issue of generating bonds, mutual exchange, or the birth of “fraternity,” of *com-union*. There can be no sharing between who are full of themselves.

Against this backdrop, the idea of truly being a *community* – not merely in a social or external sense, but in a real, existential and interpersonal one – becomes a prophecy of a new world. However, this requires going out of oneself and making a gift of oneself, decentering oneself in order to place the other at the center, learning to set aside one’s own point of view, one’s personal interests, tastes and preferences. This always requires a personal revolution, which in biblical terms involves a conversion and becomes an event of grace because it demands overturning our frames of reference and challenging the comfort zone into which we are constantly tempted to retreat due to the prevailing notion of what it means to live as a human being.

Fr Silvano Cola, whose cause for beatification has just begun, was an outstanding priest and both a patrologist and psychologist. He often quoted the Pauline maxim: “Each of you... regard others as better than yourselves” (Phil 2:3). Every time he said this left me unsettled: it was difficult to believe that a person of such stature could consider me superior to himself! Yet this was his guiding principle in life and the criterion he applied in every context and situation.

It is no coincidence that this exhortation forms part of the passage from the Letter to the Philippians which exegetes describe as a “rule for the community,” culminating in the famous Christological hymn: “He emptied himself, taking the form of a

servant... unto death, even death on a cross" (vv. 7-8). The *kenosis* (*emptying oneself*) Jesus proclaimed thus becomes the measure and key to relationships both within and beyond the Christian community.

If in these times we, as Church, are becoming increasingly aware of the urgency of walking together ever more fully and faithfully, despite the diversity of vocations, experiences and cultures – and if, as humanity, we have a desperate need to relearn what it means to be community – then we must also make, and interiorize, another discovery upon which the success of this endeavor ultimately depends: there is no such thing as a ‘cheap’ community. In other words, there can be no lasting, true and authentic community without this process of freely and mutually “emptying oneself” in order to place oneself at the service of the other.

This issue of *Ekklesia* seeks to explore this perspective from multiple viewpoints, from the ecclesial dimension to the broader civic sphere. Through these reflections – and above all through examples of an increasingly prophetic journey already underway – against the backdrop of the current collapse of the world order and of a Church that has embarked upon the path of walking together, we wish our readers, and one