" OFS - YouFra we are Church: Church on a synodal journey.

The motto of the Congress is: Creation and fraternity: one family, one mission. And the central theme is the 800 years of the Canticle of the Creatures.

Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters,

peace and good.

You have asked me to reflect on something that we are, in fact, already experiencing: the Church on its synodal journey. We are here to reflect on this theme: the Secular Franciscans in the context of a Church that walks in a synodal key, one that wants to make and is making a synodal journey to understand what this must mean in terms of a call and, therefore, a response to communion, participation, and mission. And this in the context of this Congress: Creation and Fraternity: one family, one mission, on the 800th anniversary of the Canticle of the Creatures of our father St. Francis. This canticle, inspired by that of Daniel (Dn. 3,57-88.56), is like the portico that should frame this reflection that I would like to offer you.

Let me begin by saying that this is above all a time of listening and discernment. The Holy Spirit urges us to rediscover the richness of the charisms in the Church, and among them, the Franciscan charism, which has a particular strength when it is incarnated in the life of the laity, because if I am not mistaken, when Francis of Assisi began his journey in response to a call he received, he was a layman, and he remained so for a long time as well.

I would therefore like to develop my intervention in several points

We will rely on the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, which takes up and updates with vigour many aspects of the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

1. The Secular Franciscan, the young Secular Franciscan is Church.

I want to say that it is not just a matter of ‘being part of’, like someone who joins an association or a club, but of ‘being Church’, which is the community, indeed the family brought together by God himself with his Son as its Head and which is made up of all its members, all the baptised.

2. The lay Franciscan: a vocation of his/her own

The universal vocation to holiness and the new life as children of God represent a unique vocation of their own. Often, when we think of Franciscan spirituality, we imagine friars or nuns. They are the most visible dimension of Franciscan spirituality. But from the beginning, St. Francis understood that the radical following of Christ in the Gospel way was not reserved for consecrated people. He himself, in the beginning, was not a consecrated person... Many laymen and laywomen felt called to live the Gospel in the midst of their families, their work, and their social commitments.

Thus was born the Third Order, today called the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), a true lay vocation in the Church, with a spirituality, a rule, and a mission of its own. It is not a second-rate spirituality but a specific form of holiness lived in everyday life, in the secular—seculars—with radicalism and joy. A specific way of living the spirit of St. Francis in the Church.

Therefore, the **lay Franciscan** is someone who:

- Lives **fully in the world**, with an evangelical and fraternal outlook.
- Feels an **active part of the Church**, not as an ‘assistant,’ but as a living member co-responsible for the mission.
- Takes the **Gospel as a way of life**, inspired by St. Francis of Assisi.
- Seeks **unity between faith and life**, between prayer and action, and between contemplation and commitment.

In today's Church, which needs to return to the style of Jesus—simple, close, without clericalism or distance—you lay Franciscans can be a **prophetic and hopeful sign**.

3. Franciscan spirituality for a world in crisis

Today's world is marked by many wounds: indifference, violence, loneliness, inequality, and the devastation of the planet. In the face of this reality, Pope Francis made a clear proposal in *Fratelli tutti*: **a universal fraternity based on love, human dignity, listening, and dialogue**.

This proposal is deeply inspired by the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, who was able to see brothers in everyone: in the leper, in the sultan, in the sun, and in the wolf.

The Secular Franciscan, in this context, has an **urgent task**: to incarnate this evangelical fraternity in the places where life is at stake:

- Within the **family**, through listening, forgiveness and tenderness.
- At **work**, with ethics, responsibility, and humane treatment.
- In **society**, with a commitment to justice, peace and holistic ecology.
- In the **Church**, with active participation, humility and a spirit of service.

And all this lives in the

> **Active listening**, not only to the other, but also to God in the signs of the times.
>
> Listening, learning to listen: listening is not only hearing, but rather receiving from the other. It is not about what I am going to answer…
>
> > You have heard of conversation in the spirit: this is a method that was used in the last session of the Synod.
>
> **Universal fraternity**, beyond groups, classes, ideologies or cultures: 'Fratelli tutti'.

A universal fraternity that needs us to be convinced that we are truly brothers and sisters.

Minority and humility are fundamental to being recognized as a community.

Humility is not a position of victimization or pessimism, it is an acknowledgment of our reality.

An invisible but effective service that does not seek to be in the spotlight, but changes the environment from within.

Mt 20, 25-28:

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave

just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”.

All this is easy to say... But this is the daily challenge - to make it a reality, despite our weaknesses and infirmities.

The Franciscan layman, based on his/her spirituality enlightened by St. Francis, is called to be **a bridge between the Church and the world**, between the spiritual and the secular, between contemplation and action. His presence is not marginal, but **evangelical**.

I understand this is his/her mission.

4. Church on the synodal journey: an opportunity for Lay Franciscans

Synodality is not a fashion or a church strategy. It is about **walking together,** and that is what the term “synodality” means and expresses. It is walking together as God's people, each with their own gifts and charisms.

But walking together can be done in many ways. Often the streets of our cities are crowded with people walking together, or there may be hundreds of people riding public transport, and even in the very same direction. However, this is not synodality. It is about our hearts walking together, about having one goal, one gospel mind set.

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (Phil, 2, 5)

So, it is about walking together, yes, but not just in any way. But how can we achieve this? The Word of God, the Gospel, which is the mirror in which Francis looked at himself. Without comparing ourselves to anyone, without judging anyone, Jesus in the Gospel, who is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1, 15), is the one on whom we should focus our attention.

In this journey, the lay Franciscan has much to offer. What does it mean, what do I mean by each of these characteristics?

The Church today certainly needs mature, committed, formed, prayerful, courageous lay people. And the Secular Franciscans can offer such a model: **people who live in the world with their feet on the ground and their hearts in God**.

The synodal journey is an invitation to all, also to the laity, to step out of anonymity, out of passivity.... The Spirit calls us all to speak, to participate, to recognize, to build a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission.

5. The Secular Franciscan as the face of an outgoing Church

Pope Francis insisted that the Church must be a Church that **goes out, missionary, close, without clericalism**. To do this, it needs **concrete faces**, credible witnesses, missionary disciples in the midst of the world.

The Secular Franciscan is one of these faces. Because we look at Jesus' face, and in him we see the face of St. Francis and the face of the brothers. His/her mission is to show that the Gospel **can be lived in everyday life, in the simplicity**. This is not necessary to withdraw from the world to live a holy life because only God is holy.

Pope Francis wrote: *"San Francis* calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance*"* (*FT*, 1).

This is the mission of the lay Franciscan today: t**o break down barriers, sow peace, build bridges**, and do so as

- **An Educator**, who transmits human and evangelical values by his/her example.
- **A Committed citizen** who works for a more just society.
- **An Active member of the parish**, who contributes without imposing, and encourages without dominating.
- **A Silent witness**, who does not seek applause, but whose way of living speaks for itself.

In a world in need of authenticity, the lay Franciscan can offer a **spirituality lived with open eyes, with hands dirty from work, and with a heart full of God**.

Conclusion

St. Francis did not found an order for himself, in fact he had no intention of founding anything. He founded a spiritual family, a wide, diverse, fruitful family. A family that is still alive today in religious men and women, in lay people who live the Gospel in their own reality, with simplicity and radicalism.

The Church needs these lay people. She needs their prayer, their insight, their words, their actions, their witness. The synodal journey will be true only if it fully includes the voice and the life of the laity, and especially of lay people with special vocations, such as Secular Franciscans.

I am going to end with some words from *Fratelli tutt*i that seem to have been written for you, words that also place us in the Holy Year, the Jubilee of Hope that we are celebrating.

*"*I invite everyone to a renewed hope, for hope "speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning*."* (FT, 55).

Lay Franciscans, you are called **to cultivate this hope**, to sow it with humility and joy, to be a light in the midst of darkness. To show with your life that **the Gospel is possible**, that fraternity is possible, that another world is possible.

Peace and good.