

# The Joy of Prophecy



*Letter of Casante  
Fr. Miguel Tofful  
to the Calabrian Family*



**- OPERA DON CALABRIA -**

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Verona, September 8, 2017

CONGREGATION OF THE POOR SERVANTS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

« In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on every mortal.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your old men will dream dreams,  
your young men will see visions». (Joel. 3: 1)

«... The Opera, as I told you many times,  
has a particular **relation with the present times**: Jesus looks at us asking the  
effective contribution  
of our life in order to fulfil his designs of mercy  
for the present times»<sup>1</sup>.

## INTRODUCTION

Dearest **B**rothers and **S**isters of the Calabrian Family,

1. Let the joy of the prophecy that springs from the Evangelical and Calabrian Radicalism fill up our life, so that we may be witnesses of the Paternity of God in today's world.  
Through this second sexennial letter, I would like to continue with the main themes started in the first one<sup>2</sup>, and to introduce the subject of this triennium, which should involve the whole Calabrian Family in the reflection on the prophecy and evangelization.
2. This kind of prophecy is neither about the prediction of the future nor about somebody who is doing heroic achievements in order to draw observers' attention. Prophecy is a message inspired by God, a divine inspiration given to a person or community that welcomes it. The prophet, therefore, is a person or a community which receives this message from God and conveys it to others by words or concrete gestures that are by themselves eloquent. Prophecy for us means to give rise to the prophetic creativity that comes from the dreams of our Founder; he has a very important message of God to communicate to the world in this moment: *"The Opera is for the present times"*.
3. The joy of prophecy that we propose, therefore, is embodied and comes out from the same Christian and consecrated call, refers to the Gospel *"sine glossa"* and finds especially in our Founder Fr. John Calabria the criteria to read today his deepest experience. It indicates also the way to announce, to denounce and to devote ourselves to the work of evangelization and transformation of the world, with the particular concern for the most vulnerable people. It means even to go out from the worldliness, and from those ways of thinking and behaving, which don't give us either the true joy or the fullness of human, Christian and consecrated life. We can only live this ideal through a growing awareness of our prophetic identity, in order to become courageous and reliable witnesses, guided by the strength of the Holy Spirit.
4. *"The certainty that 'the entire world belongs to God' fostered in Fr. John Calabria the passion for the announcement of the Gospel. Urged by the same passion, we are sent to the various places of the world, preferring the frontiers, the desert and the peripheries, to announce with*

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<sup>1</sup>ST. J. CALABRIA, [from the Letter of which Fr. John Calabria speaks to Card. Schuster in another letter of April 11, 1952 and signed by him].

<sup>2</sup>FR. MIGUEL TOFFUL, *The Joy of Radicalism*, Letter of Casante to the Calabrian family.

*joy the good news of the paternity of God*<sup>3</sup>. It is a prophecy strictly related to the signs of the times, which announces, denounces and makes people involved in the reality of today's world. It is necessary to emphasize the strict relation of the prophecy with the mission of Christian and consecrated life, especially with reference to the fraternal life, the poor, justice, injustice and martyrdom.

5. Our reflection is divided into three fundamental moments, which develop three aspects bound up with the prophecy: the light of the Word of God, the charismatic intuitions of Saint John Calabria, and our prophetic commitment to the present times.

In the first chapter, ***“Prophecy in the Scriptures”***, we will emphasize some aspects of the prophecy which can enlighten our life and our prophetic mission. Through a deep look and a solicitous listening, we will examine some expressions of the prophecy in the Old and New Testaments.

In the second chapter, our reflection will enlighten ***“Prophecy of Saint John Calabria”***. We will consider with particular attention his message and his concrete choices, which made him a living witness of the Gospel.

Finally, in the third chapter, we will try to highlight precisely what does it mean ***“To live today prophecy inside the Opera”***. We will investigate prophecy of the lifestyle and the trust in Providence; prophecy of the prophetic choices and not of the repetitions; prophecy of the fragility; prophecy of the mission among the poor and outcasts; prophecy of the closeness to the youth and the families; and prophecy of the evangelical and charismatic management.

6. I wish that this itinerary, prepared with simplicity, without any pretension to exhaust the topic, may be a helpful instrument for our reflection and sharing. May the rediscovery of the joy of the prophecy help us all to grow in the awareness of our great responsibility to share and live the one Charism that unites all of us in the witness, prophecy and evangelization.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. THE POOR SERVANTS OF THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE, *“Witnesses In All The Earth”*, Final Document of the XI General Chapter, Ch. 2.

## I- PROPHECY IN THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

*«True prophecy is born of God, from friendship with him, from attentive listening to his word in the different circumstances of history. Prophets feel in their hearts a burning desire for the holiness of God and, having heard his word in the dialogue of prayer, they proclaim that word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin». (VC 84b)*

7. As we speak of prophetic vocation of Christians and religious, immediately the figures of the biblical prophets of the Old and the New Testaments appear; they are the points of reference that we need to understand its implications. The theme of prophecy in the Scriptures is wide, complex and it has its own originality in comparison with the prophetic phenomenon in the context outside the Bible. In our reflection on "*the joy of prophecy*," we will consider only some biblical aspects of prophecy, which can enlighten our life and our mission today. The thread running through our reflection is the believing awareness that the constant contact with the Word of God, eager and obedient, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the condition making us able to find again and to wake up the boldness of the prophetic choices, and the fervour to make them visible *through* and *in* our life. Prophecy is true when prophetic life is concretely visible in the lifestyle of the persons.
8. In this perspective I propose, in the beginning, a description of the figure of the prophet and the prophetess in general; in the second moment we will let ourselves be guided by some prophetic passages that paint the face of the prophet and prophecy. While we describe the figure of the prophet and contemplate his face we are invited to *«measure the temperature of our prophecy»*, which we express with our life and mission.  
It is evident that not all the characteristics of the biblical prophets are so important. Some can be considered essential features and therefore they cannot be missing in an authentic prophet or in the same prophecy. Over these, we will linger, as a preamble to our reflections on the prophetic vocation of the religious and Christian life of the Opera.
9. As a *primary aspect*, we must consider that the prophetic charism is connected with a *vocation*. The biblical tradition teaches us that the prophet, the prophetess and prophecy are not born as a theoretical project, nor are they fruit of an assembly of the people of God, and still less of a personal initiative. Prophecy and prophets are a *«creative work of God»*. God moulds his prophets and gives rise to prophecy. This is also a criterion to discern if prophecy and the prophet have *«the scent of God»* and serve their people, or if they are at the service of the power, the powerful men and their projects.
10. The *second element* that characterizes the prophetic figure is the *Word*. The prophet and the prophetess are persons of the Word; they belong to the Word. This Word is received from on high; it depicts a new lifestyle and is embodied in the history. Just because they are a woman and a man of the Word, the prophetess and the prophet are people both of deep and radical listening: *«listening to God's speaking and listening to the history's speaking»*. This passion for the Word of God is manifested through the proclamation of the Word which the prophet receives, and through the symbolic gestures which he lives among the people of God. It cannot be remembered sufficiently that this passion is the fruit of a daily personal rapport with the Lord

who desires to speak with me. The prophet Isaiah expresses intensely and concretely his passion for the Word of God: «*The Lord Yahweh has taught me so I speak as his disciple and I know how to sustain the weary. Morning after morning he wakes me up to hear, to listen like a disciple* (Is. 50: 4).

11. The *third characteristic*, which helps us to understand the essence of prophecy, and the prophetic figure, is *the involvement of the prophet and the prophetess in the history*. The place where we can live prophecy and the prophetic mission is the history, and the concrete way to do this is our involvement. As man and woman of deep experience of God and his Word, the prophet and the prophetess intervene concretely in human events and their various dimensions: political, economic, religious and social. In this sense it is enough to remember the three pairs of verbs that summarize the life of prophet Jeremiah: «*to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant*»(Jer 1: 10).
12. A *fourth characteristic* of the prophetic identity is *the intercession*. The prophet and the prophetess are faithful to God and in solidarity with His people. They announce the exigencies of God for His people and, at the same time, they represent the people before God, playing the role of ministers of intercession. It is important to stress that we find this characteristic of intercession even in the Patriarch Abraham and in Moses, whom the Hebrew tradition considers the model par excellence of all the prophets. We find in prophet Amos a considerable example of this intercession: «*Yahweh, forgive! How shall Jacob survive, small as he is?*» (Am 7: 2).
13. The *fifth characteristic* of the prophet's identity is to be *sign of contradiction*. The prophetic charism does not consider visible success and striking results. The authenticity of prophecy and prophetic life includes the possibility of being rejected by people to whom the prophet/prophetess is sent. Many times the prophet, the prophetess and their messages are seen as a menace to the assurance on which the religious and the political formalism of the community is based. In the Hebrew and Christian tradition, there is a close connection between prophecy and martyrdom. Trying to eliminate the *sign of contradiction* is the typical reaction of those who don't like to welcome the invitation to «*return to the Lord with one's whole heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning*» (Gal 2: 12).
14. The *sixth characteristic of the prophetic identity is to fulfil the mission in weak conditions*. A common experience of the prophets is that of their own limit and weakness in fulfilling their mission. This sentiment does not appear only at the moment of their call and election. But when the disproportion between their condition and the exigencies of the mission becomes evident, this sentiment [of weakness] leads them to raise some objections (Jer 1: 6; Is 6: 5). They bear also the weight connected with the faithfulness to the service the Lord asks from them. The strength of God and the certainty of his word will urge the prophet to face all the risks and overcome the resistances of his poverty and human limits. Many times, he must walk in the darkness of faith and the commitment of hope. This experience of weakness helps the prophet and the same prophecy not to cling to their own strengths and human conditions, but to God's strength, which rescues us in every weakness when we place our trust in Him.

**Prophecy in the Old Testament:**  
**«To be the mouth of God»**

15. We said above that the prophetic vocation and prophecy are fruits of God's action and his initiative. The Lord moulds his prophets and his prophetesses so that they may announce his Word and projects to the community. God himself defines his prophets with the symbolic

expression addressed to Jeremiah: «*you will be as my own mouth*» (Jer 15: 19). Certainly to be *the mouth of God* among his people entails the need to «*meet with the divine actions*» which mould the prophet and enable him to the mission. While contemplating these divine actions that shape the prophet, we are invited to welcome and undergo the same actions in our life and mission. These are some conditions so that my life may become prophecy in the world.

**a) «The Spirit came into me... stand up and listen»  
(Ezk 2: 1-2)**

16. The prophetic mission and the prophecy are events connected with the Spirit of the Lord. According to the theology and the spirituality of the Old Testament the prophet and the prophetess are persons guided by the Spirit of God, and what they do and say comes out from this presence that fills their life. Without the Spirit of the Lord no prophet, no prophetess or prophecy can exist. When this Spirit comes and enters the life of a person, it gives rise to some movements. The first movement is to make the person stand up. Prophet Ezekiel describes it in a simple and moving manner: «*He said to me, "Son of man, stand up for I am about to speak to you". A spirit came upon me as He spoke and kept me standing and then I heard Him speak*» (Ezk 2: 1-2). *Stand up* is the classic verb which expresses availability to start something new and start walking.
17. Before setting off, the person is called to live a second movement: *to listen to the One who speaks to him*. *Stand up* and *Listen* are two imperatives which the prophet and the prophetess must learn to conjugate in their life and mission. The quality and authenticity of prophecy have as their starting source a movement – *Stand up!* – and an attitude – *Listen!* However, in order to avoid that these two verbs may be only a theoretic experience, without affecting their life, a third movement is needed – *to announce*. In order to announce the word that they received, the prophet and the prophetess have to go, to live somehow an exodus, an exit towards the mission the Lord entrusts them with. *Stand up*, *listen*, and *announce* are divine actions that mould the life of the prophet and the prophetess and give a new horizon to their life.

**b) Take and eat this scroll» (Ezk 3: 1)**

18. So that they are «*the mouth of God among his people*», the prophet and the prophetess are invited to take the book and eat the Word. At this stage of *creation and formation* to prophecy, the main verb is just *to eat*. *To eat* in the biblical tradition means to integrate, to embody into one's life, to let something be part of me. *To eat the Word* means to interiorize it and let ourselves be moulded by it in the depth of our heart and life. By eating the Word, the prophet and the prophetess educate their language and enrich the vocabulary of their heart, so that their speech should be in agreement with the Word of God, and, above all, should be its epiphany. Now it is not only the Spirit but also the same Word of God that fills the life and feeds prophecy.
19. Every prophet lives the arrival of the Word in his life in different manners. Ezekiel is invited to eat the scroll. Jeremiah says: «*Yahweh stretched out His hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth"*» (1: 9). Isaiah experienced the Seraphim touching his mouth with a live coal and purifying his lips (Is 6: 6). Prophetess Miriam, with great joy recognizes the intervention of God who releases his people, and invites all to sing and dance (Ex 15: 20-21). To eat the Word, or to let God himself put His Word in the mouth, are narrative expressions which mean that God moulds the mouth of the prophet and the prophetess, so that they are preachers of the Word and of the project of the Lord for His people.



**c) The life of the Prophet is a sign and makes signs**

20. The prophet and the prophetess receive the mission to announce the message of God to His people. In order to fulfil this mission, the prophet not only speaks of the message God has entrusted to him and commanded him to report. Many times this report is expressed through symbolic actions, which he performs before the people. The symbolic gestures aim at helping people to reflect on their life, and to take up a journey of conversion and return to God and His Word. Jeremiah has to buy a jar of clay and break it in the sight of the elders of the people and a few priests (Jer 19: 1-13). It is the symbol of destruction which the Kingdom of Judah is walking towards. Isaiah walks naked and barefoot on the streets of Jerusalem (Is 20: 2-5): it is the metaphor of the impending exile. Ezekiel announces the deportation to Babylon walking along the roads of Jerusalem city with the baggage on his shoulders, as an exile does (Ezk 12: 3-7).
21. But there are also moments and situations where the prophet must be a sign of the message and embody in his life what he is announcing to others. In other words: the first instrument of the prophecy is the same life of the prophet, which becomes a visible sign for his people. He has rather to become a sign of contradiction and announcement with his life than to make symbolic gestures. Prophet Hosea, for example, has to take as his wife a prostitute and have children born of prostitution, in order to be a sign of Israel, which has turned away from Yahweh and is lapsing whole heartedly into prostitution that is a symbol of spiritual adultery (Hos 1: 1-9). Jeremiah is invited not to take a wife but to assume celibacy, nor to have sons and daughters. And all this, in a context where to marry and have children was a sign of blessing (Jer 16: 1-13). By contemplating the life and mission of the prophets, we discover this double reality of prophecy: *to be a prophetic sign through the life and to make signs.*

**Prophecy in the New Testament:**

***«To be a prophetic community».***

22. In the New Testament we find both continuity and novelty with regard to prophecy. *Continuity* because all the elements that characterize the prophet, the prophetess and the prophecy in the Old Testament are not outdated but fulfilled. In this sense, we only have to look at Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth who assumes the passage of prophet Isaiah as the programme of his life and messianic mission: *«The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and new sight to the blind; to free the oppressed and announce the Lord's year of mercy»* (Lk 4: 18-19). Another example is in the *Acts of the Apostles*, when the Holy Spirit sends Philip towards the road to meet the eunuch and to announce him Jesus Christ (Acts 8: 26-40). The dynamics is the same as we find it in the ancient prophets: *the presence of the Spirit of the Lord, a Word (Good News) which must be announced, and the call to change one's own life.*
23. In the New Testament, according to Christian tradition, we find a *novelty* with regard to prophecy: the community of the Risen Lord is called to become a prophetic community. The prophecy, thanks to the Easter event of Jesus, acquires a dual dimension: *personal* – every baptized receives a prophetic vocation; and *community* – the community born of the paschal mystery should be a prophetic sign of the Risen Lord in the world. This theological and spiritual intuition we find in Peter's speech on the Pentecost day when he cites Joel's prophecy to explain what is happening: *"It will come to pass in the last days," God says, "that I will pour out a portion of my Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. Indeed,*

*upon my servants and my handmaids, I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy.* "(Acts 2: 17-18).

24. The Easter community, which finds its fullness in Pentecost, becomes a prophecy of the Resurrection of Christ in the world. The sign of prophetic life will not only be the individual person, the disciple who follows Jesus, but also the community of disciples and their way of living relationships in history. In the theology of the New Testament we call this as *the prophecy of fraternity*.

It is a prophecy capable to convince the world to believe and to accept the love of the Father, revealed to us by his beloved Son. Let us see some characteristics of the Risen Lord's community, which becomes prophecy in the world and proclamation of the Gospel with life.

**a) The Cenacle of intimacy: The upper room (Acts 1: 12-14)**

25. We have mentioned at the beginning of our reflection, that the prophet and the prophetess are "*God's creative work*". He moulds and forms to prophetic life. A prophetic community, living the prophecy in the world, is the result of a "*divine work, both paschal, and pneumatic*" realized in the upper room. The reference to an upper room is found both in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. At first, this is the Cenacle, then this hall becomes the symbol of the place where the Risen Lord's scattered community is assembling in Asia Minor and today in every corner of the world. What the Lord did with a single person, to form him/her to a prophetic life, now the Lord Himself, through the Holy Spirit, realizes it with the community gathering in the upper room.

26. The upper room is the place of the fundamental events of the life of Jesus and of the nascent community. Easter banquet (Eucharist), Washing of the feet (Service), the Commandment of love (Charity), Secrets of Jesus shared with the disciples (intimacy, friendship), the place where one perceives the fragility and fear of the disciples (humanity). It is the place where the community closes after the death of Jesus for fear of the Jews (security). The place of the manifestation of the Risen Lord (restart, renewal). The place of prayer waiting for the Holy Spirit (relationship, communion), the place of the first Christian Pentecost and the birth of the Church. The prophetic community is moulded into the upper room; and the heart of the prophetic community will pervade the peripheries of the world if it is radically rooted in the contents of the upper room. It is by assiduously attending the cenacle of intimacy with the resurrected Lord, listening to his Word, and letting himself be shaped by his Spirit that the community becomes prophecy of life and resurrection in history

**b) We and the Holy Spirit are witnesses (Acts 5: 32)**

27. The Easter community articulates its prophecy through testimony. For the theology and spirituality of the New Testament to be prophets, one has to be a witness to Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen. While this witnessing is alive, the community is prophetic and announces to the world an alternative and salvific lifestyle that has its source in the Paschal Mystery. The witnessing of the early Christians was so vibrant and crystal-clear that they were recognized and esteemed for their mutual love. In fact it was said of them "*look how they love one another*", and the pagans were converted because they saw the prophetic beauty of love translated into gestures and into new and fraternal relationships. Prophecy, which is expressed in believing and credible testimony, becomes attractive, elegant and generates true, free and beautiful humanity. In this sense, the prophetic community becomes yeast that transforms the story and transfigures the situations and contexts that disfigure human being and social life in the various dimensions. But

to receive and have this attractive and prophetic quality, one cannot miss some elements in the testimony. Among many, we propose three: *a testimony in the Holy Spirit; testimony related to a founding event; and testimony that shows in the present times the fruits of the founding event.*

28. Prophetic testimony is the result of an encounter between the community and the Holy Spirit. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit there is no prophecy and less witness of the Gospel. The response of Peter and the community to the Sanhedrin is clear and decisive: "*The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, though you had Him killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at His right hand as leader and saviour to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things, as is the Holy Spirit that God has given to those who obey him.*" (Acts 5: 30-32). A testimony of prophetic quality and taste is linked to an event: the person of Jesus Christ, His life, passion, death and resurrection. "*We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of His majesty*" (2 Pt 1: 16). This prophetic testimony, precisely because it has as its source the paschal mystery of Christ, gives the community the ability to read the signs of that event in the present day.

### **c) Street Cenacle: Go and proclaim the Gospel (Mk 16: 15)**

29. The prophetic community, shaped in the cenacle of intimacy with the Lord, expresses his prophecy not only in its relationships *ad intra* but also *ad extra*. *The Cenacle of Intimacy* has its test in the Street Cenacle, where the prophecy of the fraternity "*must touch the flesh of Christ without fear*" in the poor and marginalized one meets (Pope Francis).

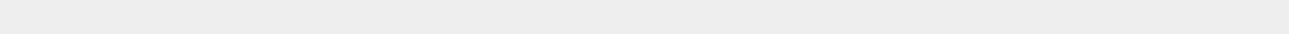
It is the same Spirit that moulds and drives the prophetic community to the existential outskirts, to be a concrete sign of the new world: reconciled and fraternal. It is good to contemplate the moment of the first Christian Pentecost when the community gathered in the cenacle receives the Holy Spirit. But much more beautiful is to be able to contemplate the same community that comes out of the cenacle and, infused by the Spirit, announces Jesus Christ in the presence of all, with *courage and joy* (Acts 2). Without the cenacle of the way and the cenacle of intimacy with the Lord, the community becomes a closed place; it fossilizes the community and its relations. A community in these conditions becomes ill, weakens its identity and ends up dying in itself.

30. *The Street Cenacle*, in this perspective, is not just a test bench for the community; the way and its dynamics become a place where the community continues to be shaped by the Holy Spirit. While living the Risen Lord's witness along the streets of the world and going to the existential peripheries to proclaim the Gospel, the community improves its prophetic ability and purifies its way to be in the world.

An example of the many who helps us see this process is found in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles in Chapter 15, when the first community, coming out of the known Jewish world, have to deal with Greek culture and a "*pagan world*". In this exit, the apostolic community finds cultural and spiritual sensitivities different from those it had learned. How to announce the Gospel in this cultural context? Today we find the same challenge in the proclamation of the Gospel. The historical and cultural contexts change, but the mission of Jesus and our mission remain the same: "*Go and proclaim the Gospel to every creature*" (Mk 16: 15); "*I am with you every day until the end of the world*" (Mt 28: 20)

31 A biblical look on the subject of prophecy offered us some elements that shape the personal and community prophetic life. The insistence always comes back to the need to put the Word of God and the Holy Spirit into the centre of our projects and processes of discernment. When this Word

comes to us, it makes us prophets, prophetess, and a prophetic community that live prophecy as a critical and enlightening ministry. But this can only be done with a mysterious experience of "*inner modelling*", uprooted from the common and convenient way of thinking. It invites us to see, beyond the walls of our homes, our activities and our security, the paths of a new fidelity to the Gospel and the charism. A creative loyalty that becomes a prophecy of a lifestyle alternative to that proposed by the "*liquid, gray and flat society*" of our time. This "*prophetic boldness (parresia)*" is the fruit of the Word and the Spirit within us. "*To be the mouth of God*" in the midst of the people and "*to be a prophetic community,*" testifying to the saving beauty of following Jesus Christ, embodying his proposals of life, is the most urgent prophecy we are called to live in the present world.



## II- THE PROPHECY OF ST. JOHN CALABRIA

«*The Opera is of Jesus: so often I have told you and I repeat it. He is at the helm of the boat, He is the soul that gives and preserves the life of the Opera. ... There can be material and moral shortcomings in the Opera: but, as long as we are faithful to the pure and genuine spirit, that Jesus has engraved, the Opera goes on, grows more and more and better, expands and improves, like the physical life of the body; and extends the area of good to God's glory, and to the benefit of the souls*”<sup>4</sup>.

- 32 Fr. John Calabria's greatest prophecy is not as much as he has said or written, and in a certain way, what he did but his own life. He has so embodied the gospel that he can be called *the Living Gospel*. I think it is the most honourable title that has ever been attributed to him. He wanted his Religious Men and Women, and Laity "*graduates in the Holy Gospel*". He was the prophet and the creator of an evangelical renewal (*an Apostolic form of life*) that after the Second World War brought in the Church and the Italian seminaries (and not only) a storm of purity and a genuineness of apostolic life.
- 33 The relevance of Fr. John Calabria's prophecy is still strong and incisive: the primacy of spiritual life; to light everywhere the fire of the kingdom of God (*impisàr foghèti*); the validity of the spiritual accompaniment, to which he devoted much of his time; ecumenism; service to the poorest and the abandoned; the graciousness - just to name some of his prophetic examples. However, I would like to stay on some of the prophetic dimensions which I find particularly important for the Opera and for the Church in today's reality.

### Prophecy of Holiness

- 34 . The greatest prophecy of Fr. John Calabria is the call to holiness. Because holiness is the greatest absolute prophecy, on which every other form of prophecy is envisioned. "Holy, holy, holy" is the threefold praise in the Jewish Bible that is reserved only to God. But God connects His holiness to the people He chose, calling Him in worship and life to behave differently from other peoples: "*Be holy therefore, for I am holy*" (Lev 11: 45; 19: 2). All the Old Testament prophecy is realized in Jesus Christ, the "Holy One" for antonomasia who was sent by the Father to make the whole humanity holy. The Apostle Peter affirms: "*In the image of the Holy One who called you, become holy in all your conduct*" (1Pt 1: 15).
- 35 For members of the Calabrian Family, this prophecy is realized by reflecting on one's vocation. Also to us Jesus told, "*Come and follow me.*" Follow me as a religious, as a priest, as married, as a busy lay person ... Each of us could go back to our life and remember circumstances, people, readings, insights that led us to embrace this present choice of life. That was just a beginning, but it is not the end. I am called to follow Him today; I will be called tomorrow, until the last day of my life, because it is my call to holiness.
- 36 This call to holiness was so strongly felt in the nascent Church that Christians did not hesitate to call themselves "saints," and the Church as "the communion of saints". Becoming members of Christ through baptism means accepting the imperative of being holy. God, calling us into His project of love for the Opera, throws us into this infinite programme, which knows no stops, barriers or measures. Fr Calabria wrote to a youth, "*I will pray for you, that you may always*

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<sup>4</sup>FR. CALABRIA, [Letter where Fr. John Calabria speaks to Card. Schuster in his of 11 April 1952 and signed by him].

*do nothing else but the will of the Lord, and become holy: this is essential. Where and how are unimportant; It is important to become holy where and how the Lord wants*<sup>5</sup>.

#### **a) The call to holiness is a call to be with Him**

37 *"Sanctify yourself, and you will sanctify the Opera,"* Fr. Natale the confessor of Fr. John Calabria often repeated. Holy is the one who is united to the person of Jesus Christ. It is no surprise therefore that Fr. Calabria sensed holiness as identification with Christ. He considered every priest *"alter Christus,"* another Christ, but we could equally say the same to every Christian: you are an *"alter Christus"*.

We are the shoots, Christ the vine. The branches should have the full and abundant sap of the vine. It is clear then that the path of our holiness is characterized by the attention, love and listening to our Lord and Master. This, for Fr. John Calabria, means to remain faithfully with Him in prayer, listening to Him in the Scriptures, celebrate Him in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist and the confession. *"For this, we must cultivate the inner life with all the effort, which will find its natural nourishment in holy meditation, in the devout praying of the Divine Office, the Holy Rosary, and in all the practices of piety. Let us also seek the dignity and splendour of the holy functions; let us often keep company to the Divine Host of our altars"*<sup>6</sup>.

38 In this sense, we can speak of a true prophecy of the priority of spiritual life. To make Christ live and work in me, so that I can radiate Him, I need to make my daily prayer palpitating, to engage in listening to His Word, to live Him in the sacraments. Fr. John Calabria writes: *"Why must a priest who celebrates the Holy Mass in the morning, speak of God as an aloof while he should feel Him palpitating in himself? Or at least be aware of His nearness to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, to talk about God with passion, to make Him known; to speak of the Holy Spirit, of His reality, of the future life, of the purpose of life, of the salvation of the soul"*<sup>7</sup>.

39 All the activities we do, all the circumstances we live, do nothing but recall each of us our commitment: be holy, because this is the sole purpose of your life. *"Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him"* (Jn 14: 23). Thus, commented on these words Francois Mauriac, the Nobel Prize winner for Literature: *"It is a matter of experience: there are living tabernacles, and sometimes, in a conversation, without moving the lips, we are forced to worship the visible presence of God in a man"*<sup>8</sup>.

#### **b. The call to holiness is a call to be instruments of salvation**

40 A document on religious life upholds, *"Prophets feel in their hearts a burning desire for the holiness of God and, having heard His word in the dialogue of prayer, they proclaim that word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin."*<sup>9</sup>.

Fr. John Calabria wrote (1908) in the First Holy Rules (*Sante Norme*). *"The purpose for which Divine Providence has united us together is double. First, so that we upkeep our sanctification,*

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<sup>5</sup>FR. CALABRIA, DOC. \*8577 (dateless).

<sup>6</sup>FR. CALABRIA, *Giornata di santificazione sacerdotale, Santità Sacerdotale*, in: *Settimana del Clero*, 23 (1947), p. 1. [Day of priestly sanctification]

<sup>7</sup>FR. CALABRIA, *Anno Santo, Anno di Santificazione*, in: *Rivista del Clero Italiano*, Anno XXX, Fasc. VIII, Agosto 1949. [Holy Year, Year of sanctification].

<sup>8</sup>F. MAURIAC, *Journal*, Grasset, Paris 1940, vol. III, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup>JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 84.

*and secondly, so that we use all our efforts for the wellbeing of poor abandoned children, who due to the absence of a friendly hand, go on the path to perdition."*

For Fr. John Calabria calling to holiness means to share the same mission of Christ, because holiness is not a personal product, but must transcend to the salvation of the brothers.

- 41 We are called to save: Calabrian Family is called to save. Only Jesus Christ can save, but by the power of His Spirit, we are called to team up in this work of salvation. If, as Fr. John Calabria says, "the Opera is of God," means that He has almost invested the Opera in His mission of salvation.

What does it mean to be prophets in this mission of salvation? I believe that, at present, is to overcome a certain form of heaviness that binds our lives, our structures, and our undertakings. We are struggling to go beyond established practices, to detach from restraints with organizations that end up linking homes, people, and endeavours. Fr. John Calabria dreamed of apostolic teams of prompt intervention – but we are not "light", we are struggling to move ourselves easily where the Spirit directs, to hear the cry of new poverty.

- 42 The manual on charity of Pope Francis is the *Evangelii Gaudium*. In Chapter 5 he affirms an important point: if you are made capable to worship, you are also gifted for action. True work leads to adoration; in turn, adoration drives you to action. If you do not get worship into action, you do not really live the experience of Fr. John Calabria. Therefore, if you are able to act you are also able to worship, and if you are able to worship you are capable of working.

On the other hand, if we look at the history of our Congregation, where was the charism of Fr. John Calabria born, if not in a meeting? The encounter with the Gospel in a sleepless night of Fr. John Calabria: "*I discovered the Gospel!*" – And meeting with a little boy, son of a fun fair, coiled in one evening at his door when Calabria was just a seminarian. These meetings stirred up our Charism.

- 43 Going to our origins today means to make sure that the charism we have received is revived prophetically in us through our meetings with the Gospel and the poor. Who has changed society over the centuries in the best? The Saints. [They are] simple people, devoid of power and human means, who have had a strong encounter with Jesus Christ and felt moved by that compassion of Jesus toward the brothers. Pope Francis writes, "*I am in a mission on this earth and for this reason I am in this world*"<sup>10</sup>.

### **Prophecy of the community**

- 44 No one can become holy on his or her own. The prophecy of the community is the logical consequence of the prophecy of holiness. "*We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers.*" (1 Jn 3: 14); this is the paschal exodus we must accomplish. This makes us pass from the slavery of selfishness to the freedom of love. The place of the gift of ourselves to those who are religious is primarily the community, for the lay person it is above all his family. "*Where there is charity and love, there is God,*" and God manifests Himself in all forms of love.

It is written in the First Holy Norms that Fr. John Calabria has given us: "*First of all, consider ourselves as brothers, and as such, to love one another and to help each other in the spiritual life.*"<sup>11</sup> This community is that Fr. John Calabria visualised – a community that speaks to all through the language of charity.

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<sup>10</sup>POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 273.

<sup>11</sup>FR. CALABRIA, *Sante Norme* (Holy Rules) 1908.

45 Fr. John Calabria was a master in enhancing differences and harmonizing every individual talent. An example for all: the first group of brothers of the early 1909, were completely different by character, even by age.<sup>12</sup> It was a community with every problem, all the more the difference about characters, mental structures, education, and abilities. Yet in just over a year, that very different and difficult group of people became a living family and a highly qualified management body. Their bond is to be brothers, having been called to share the same charism of God's Paternity and abandonment to divine Providence, under the impulse of Don Calabria. We owe the Holy Spirit, the capacity Fr. John Calabria had to harmonize and to enhance the individual talents, and the wish for holiness present in each of them, if from that group of so varied people the Opera flowered.

**a) Consider one another as brothers**

46 "*Look how they love one another*" is a very strong prophecy! It shakes up and has a great vocational impact. Prophecy for us today is the same as at that time. First of all, consider ourselves as brothers, and as such help each other, especially in the spiritual life, and serve the poor. The prophecy to which we are called is that within our communities a brother helps the other. We help each other so that everyone can accomplish his own vocation, with ones' own story and personal resources, within a common mission, continually chosen and valued, in creative fidelity.

It is not an individualistic exaltation, so present in today's culture. It is instead a call to the total gift of self, to express one's potentialities of generosity, creativity, and fertility. You can also donate by renouncing your skills, talents, personal projects, in view of your own human and spiritual growth, at some point in your own personal story.

47 Fr. John Calabria has a beautiful image on the community in one of his evening maxims to the religious. "*In an establishment intended to gather more workers, who, according to their profession, according to their driving license, take care of their machines – this in order to do their work, a perfect work – it is absolutely necessary that everything is in the right place, so much the master wheel of this machine as the smallest one; thus the job is well done. All religious communities are such great workshops, but they nothing have to do with the laboratories of the earth. God, the Great Performer, does some works destined to heaven, to eternity. Workers are those fortunate people who, through their cooperation, ensure these jobs.*"<sup>13</sup> I would specify: they are great workshops of charity where every single gift and talent is appreciated. How prophetic is a community in which the brethren put together their most beautiful resources! Here every personal gift is esteemed, encouraged, sustained and sometimes awakened by the brothers; here the gifts of others do not cause envy, jealousy and rivalry but joy and praise to God. In such communities the Holy Spirit

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<sup>12</sup>From now on, Fr. John Calabria is able to grasp the value of a hard-to-manage person, like Fr. Diodato Desenzani, and makes him a precious collaborator in the early years of Good Children Home. (first in Vicolo Case Rotte, and then in S. Zeno in Monte). In February 1909, Fr. Calabria welcomed Brother Massimo Besozzi, who is 47 years old; he was chief of staff at the Verona Arsenal and one of the leaders of the Catholic movement in Verona. With Fr. John he becomes the handyman of the nascent Opera, and much of the renovation of San Zeno in Monte is due to him. In May 1909 Fr. John Calabria received Giovanni Marchi, who is 40 years old; he was employed in an insurance company and later on will work with humility for many years in the House. In July 1909, Alessandro Fenzi, a stained glass technician, will be staying with Fr. John Calabria until his death. In August, it is the turn of Francesco Perez, 48, a lawyer, a Count, a Landlord, well engaged in politics. In November, Alessandro Podavini, a shoemaker, will work until the end of his days in Home. Finally Pietro Carlini, a former army officer with the typical temperament of the military, joined in that year. Fr. John Calabria will put him at the school of humility with brother Francesco Perez.

<sup>13</sup> FR. CALABRIA, *Pensieri e massime serali*, \*5577, 06.05.1918



evokes surprises, often in the most unexpected and humble people, revealing in them wonderful resource and gifts.

## **b) Intercultural community**

- 48 There is another prophecy within our communities that needs to be revived and better expressed in our times: that of intercultural presence. Multicultural communities are now a tradition in our Congregation, perhaps the result of necessity more than conviction. The prophecy is to move from multicultural religious communities to intercultural religious communities. This requires a lot of work on themselves by all members. These communities are a true gymnasium where you transform the diversity into an asset, a resource and a synergy. In a world that increasingly tends to accentuate ethnic, cultural, and religious differences, these communities are highly prophetic because they produce and testify exactly the opposite: communion processes.
- 49 In a Church document on religious life we read: *"It is necessary to cultivate the mutual respect with which the slow phase of the weak is accepted and at the same time does not suffocate the blossoming of any personality. A respect that favours creativity, but it also knows how to appeal to responsibility towards others and to solidarity"*<sup>14</sup>. A prophetic community life is able to organize effective service to the poor without neglecting what promotes in every religious growth of personal relationship with God and interactions among brothers.

## **Prophecy of the Religious Brother and the Laity**

- 50 In the beginning our Congregation consisted almost exclusively of brothers. And, in the history of the Church, there were many Congregations that were "only" laity: Benedict, Francis, John of God, Jerome Emiliani did not feel the need to be priests. They were messengers of the Gospel with their lives, trying to live the Word and to bear fruit, bringing into the Christian community the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.
- Religious brothers have nothing more than other Christians do. They are people of the Gospel, happy to be king, priests and prophets like all other Christians, by virtue of the sacraments of baptism and of confirmation. That is enough to become a saint.
- Fr. John Calabria strongly believed in the prophecy of the religious brother, but also in general of the laity, whom he considered able to give a vivid testimony of the Gospel and of the pure and genuine spirit in the world with full sharing and affiliation to the Opera.
- This great intuition of Fr. John Calabria was not so common to the brothers in the Congregation<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Fraternal Life in Community*, no. 40.

<sup>15</sup> In March 1932, the text of the Constitutions of the Congregation was printed in the printing press of San Zeno in Monte. The Brothers working in the press when reading them were hard pressed, just like all the other brothers. It is the text with the corrections desired by the Bishop of Verona, Monsignor Girolamo Cardinale, who reasoned according to the Canon Law. For him the Congregation is "clerical", so the brothers must be excluded from the government of the same. Until then, the General Council consisted of three priests and two brothers. It was not simply a matter of government but an attack on a prophetic instance of Fr. Calabria. In the Congregation there were those who wanted it as clerical with the absolute exclusion of the lay brothers from the places of responsibility, against the original inspiration of Fr. John Calabria about the absolute parity among priests and brothers, save the rights and duties deriving from ordination for the priests. Fr. John Calabria had to use all his charity and personal ascendancy with the religious, in private and in public, to calm the souls – inviting everyone to obey the bishop, with the certainty that the Lord would put everything in due time. Three years later, in 1935, it was just the equality between brothers and priests to be used as one of the greatest pretexts to ask for the intervention of an apostolic visitor.

51 .The Opera needs Religious Brother, because he is the one who can clearly indicate – more than the priest, who has a precise ministerial role – the call to be a living memory of the Covenant through the consecration to God in a community for a mission. At the time of Fr. John Calabria, the religious brother was considered a step lower than the priest, and the laity, still less. But Fr. John Calabria said that among the priest who celebrates Holy Mass and the brother with the broom in his hand, who cleans the courtyard, there is no difference. Prophecy is not so much in doing one service or another, but in freely giving life to the Lord, having Him as the only love, and pouring this love into the brothers – from those in your community. Here is the completely prophetic scope of Fr. John Calabria's vision of the religious brother: consecration as a Poor Servant makes him live fully the baptismal priesthood. The essential act of this spiritual sacrifice is to offer oneself to God as "*a living and holy sacrifice, pleasing to God*" (Rom 12: 1) in response to His love for us. The Brother's vocation is extraordinary, but unfortunately, it is not taken in its depth, especially in cultures where inclined to an absolute clerical mentality.

52 This prophecy of Fr. John Calabria is still alive and current. The Congregation can be said to be a ministerial community, because each religious is invested in the prophetic, priestly, and royal mission of Christ. This mission is implemented in two different ways but complementary: the common priesthood, founded on the sacrament of baptism, and the ordained one, based on the Sacred Orders. The relationship between the baptismal and the ordained priesthood is the image of Christ's relationship with the Church. Christ's rapport with the Church cannot be considered as a movement from above; in this case the ordained priesthood would be superior to the baptismal. We can think, instead, of this relation as an insertion of all in Christ. It functions by the common religious consecration, even with different tasks and ministries.

The one and the other priesthood, brother and priest, express the presence of Christ and the direct dependence from him: "*Set yourselves close to him [Christ] the living stone so that you, too, may be living stones making a spiritual house as a holy priesthood to offer the spiritual sacrifices made acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (1 Pt 2: 4-5).

#### a) **Create Spaces for sharing and reciprocity**

53 First, Fr. John Calabria created spaces of real partnership between priests, brothers and lay people. The prophecy for us today is to create spaces for sharing between Poor Servants Men and Women religious, Missionaries of the Poor and lay people. We all form the Calabrian Family, and it is very important that in the various cultures we find the ways to manifest this peculiarity of our spirituality. We can do this by stimulating and strengthening spaces of synergy and sharing in the mission, where we are present; and we should open other kinds of presence so that the various components of the Calabrian Family [religious men and women, and laity] can be present from the beginning. To shut ourselves up to such an interaction, would mean to stop us and limit us not only in our mission, but also in the way of living requested by Fr. John Calabria; and this should impoverish us.

54 Secondly, Fr. John Calabria has been prophetic in the exercise of authority within religious life, not falling into the temptation of clericalism. That a brother may be a superior of religious community or a responsible of Delegation, with priests "subjected to him", for us it is a well-founded thing, but not yet for Canon Law. The Congregation operates in cultural contexts where the person of the priest is valorised to the full, while that of the religious brother is considered a stopgap, "a missed priest". The prophecy for us today is not to fall back into the temptation of clericalism, but to be a very strong sign in the reality where we are, to show, even if reality says the opposite, that such a rapport [the consecrated brother with all his faculties] is strongly evangelical.

55 Third, the figure of a brother, as Fr. John Calabria thought it, is prophetic because the brothers have been the "economic soul" of the House from the beginning. Not as much as a workforce, but because Fr. Calabria relied on their expertise in economic management, that of the laboratories and of the activities needed to maintain the boys. The brothers were also very spiritual figures in transmitting to the inmates a lived Gospel and the living testimony of a life offered to the Lord. The brother's prophecy today is very important, more than we can think, in the technical and professional organization of the economic management that is growing all the more complex, but above all for his consecration and presence in the world and in reality, witnessing the charism.

#### **a) Sisters and Lay People**

56 Speaking of our brothers, we cannot overlook the intuition of Fr. John Calabria regarding the figure of the Sisters. They with their female genius are a complementary help to the mission. So too he profoundly appreciated the presence of the laity. From the beginning, Fr. John Calabria wanted and thought of these figures in the Opera.

Today we must try to deepen the specific identity of each single component of the Opera – religious men and women, and laity – and the way to be in relation and working together for a prophetic mission in the Opera and in the Church. I realize that in some cultures, it is more difficult to grasp the richness of this varied presence, but we must not overlook Fr. John Calabria's primary intuition who felt the great value of a varied reality integrated by different vocations. The Lord asks us to live together the charism, trying to translate it concretely into the different realities and cultures where we live. *"The Charism of the Opera is not in the hands of the Religious who transmit it to the Laity. On the contrary, each one in his/her specific state of life is co-responsible in living and conveying the charism. We have to walk side by side and turn to one common direction, which must be frequently sought after and reoriented. Brothers, Sisters, and Laity are "aerials" that capture the needs of the Church and the society today and tomorrow, share them and work in dialogue a common discernment for the prophetic responses that the Opera will be called to give"*<sup>16</sup>.

57 .The peculiarities of the various Calabrian Family members – religious men and women, and laity – help us to live the spirit of family, built in the richness of diversity, with the sharing of all the components, each one with its different but complementary characteristics. I think it opportune that through the Councils of the Calabrian Family, which I hope will be constituted in the different realities of the Opera, we begin to make a path of unity, in the reciprocal acceptance of diversity as a riches to be cultivated.

#### **Prophecy of the total abandonment**

58 The holiness of the person is reflected in his words and actions, in the apostolate and in one's work: *"The fruit of light consists in all goodness, justice, and truth"* (Eph 5: 9). This commitment to holiness is the foundation of every apostolate.

Yet, in the final years of his life, the light seemed to have vanished from Fr. John Calabria's life. Spiritual aridity, dark night of faith, nightmare of his nothingness and sin, sense of eternal damnation.

59 The certainty of the Father's love leads us to give a sense also to the most dramatic and harder events. Whoever has God as Father can never feel alone, even in front of the "why" that humanly

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<sup>16</sup>DON MIGUEL TOFFUL, *"Speech on the feast of the Calabrian Family"*, San Zeno in Monte, May 31, 2015.

speaking are the most disturbing of his life, such as: suffering, illness, or the small daily dying that is aging. Suffering and illness belong to the limits and the mystery of our human existence, which we cannot hide or seek to escape. With a serene abandonment to the will of the Father, we can understand that illness, suffering and fragility experienced in the Lord have a meaning, and then they acquire a dignity and an incomparable value, to such an extent that they become a premise of Joy. *"When a woman is in labour, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world"* (Jn 16: 21).

60 The apostolate of the absolute and confident abandonment in the hands of God even in these situations is perhaps the most effective form of apostolate, which is also an obvious and undeniable prophecy even for those who do not believe in God. It is a commitment of absolute holiness, because it is the commitment to continue the passion of Christ. In these years, I have met so many religious and lay people who have accepted with serenity and without complaints to live this supreme form of abandonment with a strong desire for reparation. They have been and are, more than an example, a great source of blessing throughout the Opera, the living prophets of the absolute and total abandonment to the Father.

But this is a phase that somehow does not belong to us, as it is not determined by us. I would like to identify in this mystery of the cross some demands that are more concrete, such as to be transferred in our daily life, and make it a prophetic life.

#### **a) Abandonment: a call to empty oneself every day**

61 *In this perspective, first we need to realize that we are daily called to deprive ourselves of everything that is not God. St. John of the Cross said, and said it to all Christians: "To love God is to undress for God of all what is not God's". This stripping of any value that is not Christ can also be a disturbing one, because it is about entering into our lives the renunciation of ourselves, in the broader and deepest sense of this word. "Let us be humble, and keep in mind that a heart full of itself will always be empty of God's love... Oh dear, immediately put our hand to the heart, and let's see if we are such instruments as the Lord wants us, to do his designs: join us tightly to Him... for total abandonment in His Providence"*<sup>17</sup>.

62 God wants to become our unique possession, sole treasure, only presence in our lives – and we must be available with the freedom of heart and with the unconditional abandonment to God's initiatives. *"The secret of life and strength of this Opera, I told you, is here, in the total abandonment to God and his Providence, without anguish for tomorrow, remaining far away from human protections. The means will come, and come to us directly from the Lord, who will be able to inspire those worthy people in due time. He moves those inclined according to the Gospel to do good, to help us in our needs, which are ultimately essential needs of these poor mortals, which the Providence has gathered and loved here, as one day He gathered and loved us"*<sup>18</sup>.

#### **b) Abandonment: Eucharistic Itinerary**

63 How can this be achieved? We must do this in our lives through very concrete itineraries. One of these is the Eucharistic journey. We come to conformity with Christ through the celebrated and adored Eucharist. We must realize that the power of this sacrament works in us the

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<sup>17</sup>FR. CALABRIA, *Esortazione per l'Immacolata e il S. Natale* – 1928. CONF. – Esort. \* 5608.

<sup>18</sup>FR. CALABRIA, *L'Amico*, August 1931, \* 5986.

configuration to Christ, the crucified Christ. We must become Eucharistic worshipers, not only to celebrate our faith, but to give fullness and fulfilment to this prophetic call to an absolute abandonment to the will of the Father, who wants us to be “*available to everything*”.

64 *"Lord God, here is my life, do whatever you want, so that it may become the life of Jesus Christ. Moreover, whatever my state may be, joyful or desolate, sick or healthy, satisfied or humble; I will never prevent the Spirit within me crying strongly towards you, invoking your Love for my brothers, who do not know that you are the Father. O Father, here is my life: but give me my brothers to bring them back to you"*<sup>19</sup>.

The total abandonment that Fr. John Calabria taught us, and that becomes a prophecy, is in entrusting our lives to the hands of the Father, so that we become a daily living sacrifice and precious gift to His Holy will.

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<sup>19</sup>PIERRE LYONNET, *Ecrits Spirituels*, Ed. de l'Epi, Paris 1951, p. 162.

### III- TO LIVE PROPHECY IN THE OPERA TODAY

«We Poor Servants, have the mission to implement these new designs, for this realization is connected to our blessed eternity, let us keep this in mind well ... The Opera must extend "usque ad finem terrae (till the end of the earth)" but on a condition: that we are faithful to our vocation. Humble instruments, like rags and clay, convinced of the infallible word of God: "Whoever believes in me will do the works I have done and will do even more»<sup>20</sup>.

- 65 In this chapter, we want to focus on looking at the reality of the Opera and the challenges of the historic moment, to offer some lines of reflection and action for the coming three-year period on prophecy and evangelization, as required by the last General Chapter. In the reflection on consecrated life today, it is strongly affirmed that in order to be prophetic it must communicate spirituality, must lead us to build fraternity and must be engaged explicitly in the mission. We too, as the Calabrian Family, are called to a prophecy of mysticism, fraternity, and mission. Only an intense and profound spiritual life that nourishes fraternity and mission is able to manifest the prophecy of God's Paternity. There is a *mysticism of fraternity* to be cultivated through the spirituality of communion and the culture of the encounter. There is a *mysticism of the mission*, to be cultivated through generous, joyful, free dedication, commitment to service, and visible relationship with God, community, brothers and sisters, and an emptying of oneself. "If consecrated life wants to maintain its prophetic mission and its charm, continuing to be a school of loyalty to near and far off (cf. Eph 2: 17), it must keep the freshness and novelty of the centrality of Jesus, the attraction of the spirituality and the strength of the mission, and to show the beauty of the following Christ (*sequel Christi*) and radiate hope and joy."<sup>21</sup>
- 66 Within the Opera we have a wealth that is unique and it branded us from the very beginning: it is the very reality of the Calabrian Family, composed of religious men and women of the two [now three] Congregations and the lay people. We can say that this dimension is by itself prophetic. Unfortunately, sometimes we are not aware of the strength and inner wealth we possess and run the risk of dissolving this potential, which can help Calabrian Family grow and develop.
- 67 One cannot be radical in living the evangelical and charismatic values of the Opera without being prophetic. Similarly, you cannot live a true prophecy without being deeply rooted in the values of the Gospel. If there is no such fundamental passage, we will experience the dichotomy of legalism (radical = rigid), or of performing signs, even beautiful but without an authentic depth, which speaks by itself of the values of the Gospel and the Charism. This would only produce a bit of "smoke" or "noise," which are blinking but devoid of substance.
- 68 Our pure and genuine spirit contains a peculiar prophecy within the Christian community and in the Church, which cannot be one among many. There is a precise style to identify us. "The world, those outside, though do not see any religious dress in you, must realize that you are not like the others. By your words, gestures, and behaviour they must realize that you are religious, and special religious."<sup>22</sup> I think it is important to find out what the Lord asks us today, and with discernment, and in the light of the Spirit, to give concrete answers.

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<sup>20</sup>FR. CALABRIA, *Lett. Collett.* \* 9373/B 1951(?).

<sup>21</sup>POPE FRANCIS, *Speech to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life*, January 28, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> FR.CALABRIA, CONF. ESORT.\*5644/B (datess)

69 We must have the courage to look closely and recognize all the wealth we possess, but also to tell us where the Opera is under risk; our communities or our activities. We live as Calabrian Family *"In a culture often dominated by technology, sadness and loneliness appear to be on the rise, not least among young people. The future seems prey to an uncertainty that does not make for stability. This often gives rise to depression, sadness and boredom, which can gradually lead to despair. We need witnesses to hope and true joy if we are to dispel the illusions that promise quick and easy happiness through artificial paradises. The profound sense of emptiness felt by so many people can be overcome by the hope we bear in our hearts and by the joy that it gives. We need to acknowledge the joy that rises up in a heart touched by mercy."*<sup>23</sup>  
In this cultural context, we have a task, we are entrusted with a mission: to be a prophecy of the Paternity of God, of His providential and merciful love. This prophecy is expressed through so many other "prophecies". We then will see some aspects that make our prophecy creative and meaningful in the present context.

### **Prophecy of the Lifestyle: Filial trust and abandonment to Providence**

- 70 A fundamental aspect is concerning our lifestyle and the attitude of trust and abandonment. The Opera, born of the pierced side of Jesus and made for the present times, has a special spirit of faith, confidence and abandonment in Divine Providence. This motivates us to live our vocation and mission in an authentic way, in the awareness that the radical experience of the charism leads us to root our life and mission of evangelization not primarily on human designs.
- 71 We know that abandonment and trust in Divine Providence must characterize our way of being, which does not mean lack of awareness and responsibility regarding the economic aspect. While careful economic management is a need, I would like to alert you to a certain attitude that at times, it seems to me that we are risking to assuming: to count, for our service to the poor, on the corresponding funding. This causes us to lose confidence in Providence and overturn our charism. The Opera should be an island *of folly of Providence*, in the midst of an ocean of people or entities that are clinging to security. We Poor Servants have that absolute inner freedom that comes to us from the confident abandonment to Divine Providence.
- 72 There is a discerning factor that spurs us every day to seek accurate management, capable of providing us with key indicators to have, in real time, the concrete data of a mission and activity. We can measure these data with technical elements, but the essential dimension, which cannot be missed in our religious communities and among responsible laity, is the existential aspect of faith in order to be able to live in the daily life this *"madness of abandonment to Divine Providence"*. I call it madness because, when it is experienced in a conscious way, it makes us leap into faith that engages our lives in a marvellous way.
- 73 The miracles that took place at the time of Fr. John Calabria, and of many other saintly brothers and sisters, were nothing else than the wide margin left to Divine Providence to act, using elements of common wisdom<sup>24</sup>. The total abandonment does not detract from rationality, and rationality cannot hide and render us dull with the extraordinary act of providence. Above all, this faith and trust was conveyed to people who were deeply welcoming the Gospel message. I think we must recover this way of being prophets today with the preciousness and timeliness of our *charism*, which brings us to the right equilibrium between abandoning ourselves and

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<sup>23</sup>POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Brother Vittorino, who took small calves and gave them to the peasants to raise them and have the meat for the poor good children (purely a matter of management), also gave way to faith, confidence, and abandonment to divine Providence, in circumstances where the means were least and in any case the Opera was going on.

holding *our heads on the neck*, the clear principles for our Fr. John. How to recover today, in our society that lives on human calculations, for us religious and lay people and for our activities, a confident and charismatic response? We do not realize, the impression and evangelic impact that a style of trust and abandonment to Divine Providence arouses! "*The primary and principal point of this Opera is the absolute, total abandonment in the loving arms of Divine Providence*"<sup>25</sup>.

- 74 The concrete application of this principle, still present and the cornerstone of our charism can be lived to the extent that we believe in the effectiveness of Providence. It is an aspect that frees the heart of the religious brothers and sisters and the laity from so many fears and gives an extraordinary interior peace and serenity. We are in the hands of the Lord! I think it is very important today in our times to manifest this "*madness of Divine Providence*," which is a tender mother, because it is one of the specific points in our prophecy.

### **Prophecy of the prophetic choices and not repetitions**

- 75 The specific mission of the Opera must find prophetic expressions that make it relevant. A reality becomes prophetic and becomes good news to the extent that "*gets its hands dirty*" with the poor and the needy on the streets of the world, and is a warning for the structures of power and domination. Without the specific mission and direct contact with the outskirts, it is likely, as sometimes happened in biblical prophecy, when the prophet ended up in the King's palace, that prophecy dies. To keep it alive, it must continually get involved, addressing the concrete challenges of reality. It should not detach from the periphery, where creativity is solicited by the new challenges that day by day occur, and must be close to the cry of the poor. If not, our mission, though of good quality and success, risks not being prophetic. It will be significant in so far as it goes against the current to a world increasingly attached to money, power and strength, exploiting the poor.
- 76 The Opera has always been characterized, from its very beginning, according to the founder's thoughts, for its ability to go to *places where, there is nothing promising*. "*We must always go where humanly speaking nothing is promising, so the poor, humble; we must seek persons, abandoned creatures, rejected, despised, old, sick, sinners; these will be the treasures, the gems of the Opera, the key that opens paradise, and thus will express meaningfully the Divine Providence*"<sup>26</sup>. Today, it seems to me, that this is a call to let us spur from the challenges of our own charism.
- 77 At times, it seems to me that our presence and activity are reduced to repeating things that we have always done or doing in a certain way. The creativity we need is the one that comes from the Gospel, which invites us to respond boldly to the new poverty of today, according to our charism, even with some inner freedom and adaptation to the rapid changes of society. The charism encourages us to live a freshness of mind and action that frees our heart and life in caring for people and concrete situations.
- 78 There is a shade of our spirit that we must not overlook, the call to go where no one desires to go. "*The outskirts to which we are sent are the unloved, forgotten, or marginalized people whom no one cares; wherever they live we must go with prophetic creativity to be witnesses to the Paternity of God*"<sup>27</sup>. Current culture enhances the situations that show strength, power,

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<sup>25</sup>Fr. CALABRIA, *Letter to his Religious* no. 32 of 17-11-1920.

<sup>26</sup>Fr. CALABRIA, *Promemoria – Appunti* \* 8730, 23-07-1943

<sup>27</sup> POOR SERVANTS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE, "*Witnesses in All the Earth*", Final Document of the XI General Chapter, B2 p. 19.



and efficiency. While the Gospel message prefers the logic of tiny seed, yeast, minority and marginal, small and simple, with the power of evangelical transformation.

- 79 The mission to be prophetic must also be incorporated into reality. The mission embodies the prophecy of the charism in everyday situations where the communities live and work in the midst of people and together with the people. There is no prophecy without incarnation in the fabric of the geographical poverty and the existential peripheries.

This nearness manifests itself in actual love, which becomes strength and power, involving the whole person. In addition, when I love someone I feel that my life makes sense only if I can get close to that person. Then the mission is born of Jesus' desire to be close to his beloved brothers, especially to the little ones: "*Jesus wants to use us to get closer to his beloved people*"<sup>28</sup>. By making us close to people, even Jesus becomes closer to his people. Pope Francis emphasizes it a number of times: "*Jesus himself is the model of this evangelizing choice that introduces us into the heart of the people. How good it makes us to see him close to everyone!*"<sup>29</sup>. The choice to be close to people, then, is not an ideological or political one, but it is Christological: the model who inspires us is Jesus near his people. Neighbourhood is the source and goal of mission and this was true yesterday and continues to be true today. Even today, in the face of the globalization of indifference, God proposes us the closeness, a personal relationship. Certainly, in front of so many bigger challenges than we can face, we often feel impotent; we have no immediate answers and may be, we will never have them. Nevertheless, even if we do not always know what to do, Jesus gives us a clear indication of where to stay: today, as we were yesterday, Jesus calls us to be close to the people, close to the poor!<sup>30</sup>

- 80 It is a dream that can become true in our Calabrian Family, perhaps matured in the Councils and shared in the desired "*gathering of the Calabrian Family*" that the Chapter has asked us, enhancing the wealth we have within our family. I believe the Spirit is ripening to start new presences and missions, where Calabrian spirituality is lived in a combined religious and lay presence. The Spirit will awaken opening processes for a new prophecy, with religious and lay people, not to repeat what we already are doing (parishes, social activities or existing activities) but to create new spaces, to walk along with new impetus and significance of presence. The Lord will open our hearts and gaze to discover other ways of living and incarnate our spirituality according to God's will. What does He want from us in the contexts in which we are present? We must be aware that processes are slow, because they involve people. But it is necessary that they take place in the light of the Word of God, in discernment and in sharing.

- 81 Hence, fraternally I invite Delegations and missions to be courageous in discernment with lay people, so that going to the peripheries is not only written in the final document of the Chapter but becomes a precise and concrete choice.

After three years from the celebration of the Chapter we can ask: in this six-year period where are we going? In what peripheries are we investing our forces? Where does our prophecy go, that which prompts us to respond as a Calabrian Family to new poverty? If we do not embrace concrete challenges, it may happen that our prophecy is not alive and meaningful, even if we do good and quality things. I hope that this historic moment also brings to our Opera a new wind and renewed commitment in the different realities where we are present. We must not be afraid to go out of that pattern that often blocks us and takes away the evangelical and Calabrian creativity, saying that "we have always done so," or even worse, believing that in that reality there are no other answers or alternatives to the solutions we are already adopting. I believe that these

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<sup>28</sup>POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 268.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, 269.

<sup>30</sup>Cfr. <http://www.giovaniemissione.it/teologia-della-missione/623/il-cristo-vicino/>

are all alibis not to move from what we have built. Where is the freshness of the Spirit that drives us to other places?

- 82 I think especially of the new openings or projections in the future, in the Delegations or new countries where we will be called to go. We are invited to open our eyes to the whole Calabrian Family in order to begin the processes of realizing, somewhere, a concrete and real participation of all members of the Calabrian Family as an expression of our prophecy: religious men and women with lay people. Also in the last General Chapter of the Missionary Sisters of the Poor, a real collaboration between the various branches of the Opera was desired in the perspective of a new prophecy. May the Holy Spirit helps us to grasp what we need at this moment to grow in the evangelical testimony of the Calabrian Family, open to the mission with the poorest.
- 83 *"The Opera of the Poor Servants, with this poor old priest as its head, I call it the Opera of the Sweepers; they must, better we, must clear the way for Jesus to come to us and we go with him all over the world to save and call souls, all souls."*<sup>31</sup> Within each of us there must be this profound desire of Fr. John Calabria, who invites us to go out looking for new horizons to embody the spirituality of the Opera. I really hope that this thrust will grow within us, that we become evangelically creative in the different realities we are present.

### **Prophecy of fragility**

- 84 Today the world exalts greatly its appearance, strength, exteriority and all that is powerful, beautiful and remarkable; however it hides weaknesses and fragility. The experience of fragility is inherent in our nature and we experience it from the very first moment of our existence. We are vulnerable. Using biblical language, we can say "*earth and dust*". Perhaps for the rest of our lives we strive to overcome fragility, because we believe that the ideal is to be strong and beautiful, to delay death and to avoid the illness. In a sense, science and technology also make us believe that everything can be attuned, replaced, changed, "to look and live better", to be happy.
- 85 However, fragility, just because it is connatural to our human condition, plays an important role in our humanization and spiritual growth. Not knowing everything, not being able to control or dominate everything is a good thing, not a limit or barrier, because it pushes us to create relationships, to implement processes of solidarity, complementary relations and communion in diversity. From our condition of fragility comes the ability to get in touch with others and above all with the Other. "*When I'm weak (fragile), then I'm strong,*" Saint Paul reminds us <sup>32</sup>. *If we were not vulnerable, we could not develop the ability to do something together, accept that we need each other and above all find our strength in Christ Jesus. "In fact, only those who recognize their own fragility can limit their own fraternal relationships and solidarity, in the Church and in society"*<sup>33</sup>.
- 86 By experiencing the vulnerability and fragility typical of the human being, it is indeed important to cultivate an awareness that allows us to stand before ourselves, in front of others, and in front of the Opera, recognizing us humbly limited. In our days, prophecy is not to hide the fragilities, because it is in them that the power of God is shown, as well as all that He can do in our lives. "*But we have this treasure in clay pots so that it appears that this extraordinary power comes from God and not from us*" (2 Cor 4: 7). Prophecy

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<sup>31</sup> FR.CALABRIA, Letter to Fr. Ricardo Lombardi SJ, \*5020, 18-12-1947

<sup>32</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 12: 10.

<sup>33</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Meeting with the Apostolic Movement Blinds and the Little Mission for the Deaf-Mutes*, 03-04-2014.

then manifests itself even through the limit of the prophet who, as we have seen in the Bible, felt incapable and unworthy of carrying on the project God was showing him.

- 87 The Experience of fragility and vulnerability has also deeply marked the life of Fr. John Calabria, who felt very limited with many inadequacies, unable to even carry on the mission entrusted to him. However, he always felt secure and strong in the hands of God the Father, who never abandoned him. "... *It is a great design, a divine assignment that is entrusted to our Opera, which, if on the one hand it is a title of predilection, on the other hand it must fill us of sacred fear, aware of our weakness and fragility ...*"<sup>34</sup>.

Above all, we must overcome the mentality of the number, quantity and magnitude of activities, though it is often an exclusive criterion for assessing an institution, even ecclesial. Fr. John Calabria teaches us very well, recalling us to the smallness, to the "*busetta e taneta*", that the few will do many if these are holy and live the Gospel "*sine glossa*".

It is not the strength, power, and outer power to measure what Opera can do, our communities can develop and our activities can carry forward, this is not to guarantee evangelical witness. True prophecy and gospel guarantee is one that passes through the limit, the vulnerability, the fragility, the weakness, according to the logic of the cross.

- 88 The Opera and its prophecy will no longer be effective if it is based on human calculations, forces, projects, the privilege and prestige of some people on others, the discrimination of the most powerful or "qualified" etc. Nevertheless, the Opera will be effective if the vulnerability and fragility of our people, activities and circumstances will express the presence and the power of God, who does not abandon us and is present with his Providence and tenderness. "*Accursed be anyone who trusts in human beings, who relies on human strength and whose heart turns from Yahweh. Blessed is anyone who trusts in Yahweh, and whose confidence is in him...*" (Jer 17: 5-7).

- 89 How deeply we can change the world and the background around us, if we live the awareness of this fragility that is part of our human being! [How deeply we can change the world] if we allow ourselves to be filled with the strength and the presence of a God who approaches us and freely invites us to be His instruments in the world! When our personal frailties, the limits of our communities, of our presence and activity in the world are filled with the presence of God the provident Father who does not abandon us, then we live a profound serenity, trust and joy that spread out to the people who approach us.

- 90 Brothers and sisters let us not be seduced by the logic of the world, nor let us seek to hide our fragility; instead let us live joyfully our weakness, which is God's strength to make his projects. But, we have to distinguish well between fragility and sin, which are part of human life, and the attitudes of injustice, corruption and malice, justified by the fragility. These attitudes do not express evangelical prophecy.

Experiencing and assuming our fragility makes us more human, closer, less judging to the fragility of others and full of joy, able to smile with tenderness. Let us try, and we shall see how beautiful can become our Calabrian Family!

### **Prophecy of the mission with the poorest**

- 91 After reflecting on the vulnerability and fragility, we must immediately turn our gaze to the last, the fragile and forgotten of the society, to those who do not count, indeed, who are a burden to

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<sup>34</sup>FR. CALABRIA, *Letter to his Religious*, Pentecost, May 25, 1947.

the current capitalist and economic system: “**the poor**”. To them our attention and mission as Calabrian Family is addressed, and it is in the mission with the poorest and abandoned that the Opera today, more than ever, expresses its prophetic outcry. *"Let us seek souls, and always the most abandoned ones. If Providence sends [= assigns] missions: where Providence invites us; let us seek the poor, the abandoned, the underprivileged: it is our field"*<sup>35</sup>.

- 92 The poor, so called commonly, are not a social category to care for and attend, sharing with them what we have while they remain anonymous. The poor are real people, each with a particular face and story. Poor is like God! God's flesh is the poor. Their eyes are the eyes of God, their hunger is the hunger of God. If a person suffers and is ill, He also suffers and is ill. Unfortunately, we have reduced the poor to a social category to care for, keeping them anonymous, so indifference is often the answer to people and poverty. For the Gospel, however, the poor is not anonymous, but the one who bears God's name. A God who has linked salvation not to exceptional actions, but to everyday's works, simple, and possible to all; not to works of worship toward Him, but to the worship of the last in the row, through the works of mercy. *"All you did to one of my little brothers, **you did it to me**"!* (Mt 25: 40).
- 93 Solidarity with the poor acquires a dimension of salvation to the extent that we recognize in them the face of Christ. In this way, a transcendence motivation is given to human solidarity, which protects it from any exploitation. In reflection, it is clear that true religiosity consists in concrete and active commitment to the poor, marginalized and oppressed.<sup>36</sup> It is then evident that Christianity and the religious life we are called to live and witness within the Opera cannot be reduced to external practices, simply doing good in some way, to silence our conscience, thinking that we serve the Poor. True prophecy we are asked is that of *vicinity*, which transforms our lives first and then brings so much joy to the people we approach.
- 94 So that an activity or presence of the Opera at the service of the poor is prophetic, it cannot be any activity, doing something useful for them as well. It is very important to ask continually how it is done; what are the deep motivations that drive people to do it. Either there is a deep bond with the Gospel and with the Charism, or it fails and communicates nothing. It must then be exemplary in the manner and use of resources (providence) set for these activities. We need to be aware and transparent, not only to make sure that these providences come, but above all to understand how and where they come from, so that they do not bind our hands later on. Without this transparency, though we do well and our activities are fine, they will always respond to human criteria and a non-evangelical worldly mentality. *"The House of the Good Children is not like any college, it's totally a special thing. God rules it with His Providence. Of human means and human protection it [the Opera] does not know what to do"*<sup>37</sup>.
- 95 The Lord has delivered us a Charism and an extraordinary mission, of love and service to the poorest. We have the responsibility to carry it forward with evangelical, charismatic criteria and in the total transparency of the means at the service of the poorest. Let it never be that in the end of all our efforts, programming and activities, we are *"stealing"* the poor, missing our concrete love toward them, as well as the resources which Providence places in our hands for them: *"... everything the Providence sends will be spent for the poor whom the Lord entrusts to us or assigned to the charity for the needy"*<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Fr. CALABRIA, *Esortazione ai Religiosi*, \*2560 (dateless).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Fr. MIGUEL TOFFUL, *"Reflection during the recollection to the Religious on the occasion of the Holy Door at San Zeno in Monte"*, October 1, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Fr. CALABRIA, *Lettera agli ex-allievi*, 7037 (senza data).

<sup>38</sup> POOR SERVANTS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE, *Constitutions*, no. 10.

This is our true prophecy towards the poor and abandoned and it becomes a testimony to the world and is an amazing fact. We must always be very careful, so that our "doing well" is not overshadowed by attitudes that say the opposite of what our charism indicates as a way of evangelization and fundamental mission of the Opera.

- 96 In addition to all these considerations, we must have a particular attention and sensitivity to the new poverty in this era of great change, because the charism itself spurs us to a constant change in our doing. Today, because of the constant changes of the society, we have to form a mental agility, a charismatic and operational alertness to change the front lines of action, pursuing an evangelical action seeking the poorest and abandoned, that our consumer society continues to produce.

### **Prophecy of the proximity to young people:**

#### ***"I am of those who care about me"***

- 97 Today in our societies, two sectors are the most fragile and vulnerable: *young people* and *families*. These are the two areas where the Opera has always tried to respond engaging in work and mission.

**Young people**, for various reasons, are orphans and suffer from loneliness. We live in a society that has lost the "paternal-maternal" figure or other reference figures that the teenager and the youth need to develop in his or her identity. Being these figures missing – or being actually absent, even if physically present – there is a worrying educational crisis. Young people are generally good – Fr. John Calabria called them "good children" – because they have all the potential to grow and to be fully accomplished. At the same time, they are lost when they lack values or points of reference. In this regard, Fr. John Calabria said that it's written all over young people, "*I am of those who care about me.*" Unfortunately, today's society attracts the most vulnerable subjects.

- 98 The prophetic mission of the Opera in the field of youth is manifested especially in three areas: in education, in social work, and in the promotion of the culture of care for vocations.

In the *field of education*, we have a small tradition and we still have to invest our strengths and formative engagement with young people, trying to grow them according to Fr. John Calabria's teaching as good individuals, as good Christians and as good citizens. "*Be in good spirits; join with the Lord to do some good in your holy mission as teacher; form good citizens for our dear Nation that needs it so much, and for Heaven, our Homeland, good faithful Christians; if they are good Christians, they will certainly be good citizens*"<sup>39</sup>. It is not enough to have young people and teenagers in our homes or pastoral activities that have been entrusted to us, we must work to make it a choice of priority and a passion for every religious men and women as well as laity involved in these areas.

- 99 We must live the prophecy of education, which has as its strength the charism of God's paternity and the spirit of family as spirit of "home" that the youth cannot easily find in today's society. In addition to educational work, I see the utmost importance of organizing an adequate pastoral care that supports educational activity. I hope the Calabrian Family will never arrive to neglect this educational field. Maybe in some places the institutional education through vocational schools was ended, but the educational sensibility to teenagers and young people must remain alive in the heart of each member of the Opera.

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<sup>39</sup>FR. CALABRIA, *Letter to Pasetto Paolo*, \* 1423, 28-04-1948.

- 100 As for the *social work*, the strengths and energies to invest in the promotion of the weaker sections must not fail. Our work and our presence is not only a social service of "welfarism", but it is a commitment to offer the new generations and their fragility our presence and loving care, according to our charism. Young people can be trapped by drugs, injustice, violence and lack of family support, can be displaced and immigrated. They are all victims of a system that makes the younger a "user" of consumer goods, of a much more violent society than the same war, [a society] that makes innocent victims with occult weapons of indirect killing.
- 101 The prophecy of the Opera in this area is a cry of justice and the voice of those who have no voice, of those who represent the unwanted of society. The Evangelical choice for young people in distress must move our hearts to true confidence and compassion, omitting speeches that do not touch those innocent victims with your hands. The Opera has always worked with children and teenagers in prevention, trying to get them out of a system that threatens the future of their lives. In other words, we must take care of them creatively in order to offer a better future to those whom the Providence sends us and are in need. Let us remember that this is one of the primary fields of activity, the first-born in the Opera, and there should not be houses and activities without care for young people<sup>40</sup>.
- 102 Finally, in the context of the *culture of care for vocations*, the Opera must be committed by presence and following up young people to make them discover the beauty of this life and the potentialities each represents in society and in the Church. Particularly get close and accompany them to help them discover "God's project", so-called *God's will* or *dream* for each one. This prophetic mission of the Opera must be able to enter the world of young people, their dreams, language, and expectations, motivating them, in the light of the Word of God, to give a generous response to change humanity.
- 103 The youth has in their hearts an exceptional potential and a willingness that, well oriented, is capable of transforming the world; a particular sensibility for various forms of volunteering and engagement with the poorest. They are not afraid; they risk their life for love for their neighbour; with a specific sensitivity and openness to transcendence. It is also true that, in addition to all these potentials, young people live very much the fragility and fears of the historical moment, of a liquid and globalized society; they are immersed in the internet working world of social webs: twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp etc., with which they are constantly "*connected*". Nevertheless, this does not prevent them from hearing and accepting the call of God.  
To these youth we should address the message of God's love so that they can understand with what project they have to respond to this love.
- 104 In the field of education, social work, and especially in the field of a culture of care for vocations, we have to put about young people so many questions to find prophetic answers together. We have a deeper question: why do young people today admire our consecrated life and what we do? They feel very good working with us, but why are they not attracted to our way of life and being? I do not know if we have seriously asked this question to us. It may be that they fail to grasp the meaning of our consecrated life, but perhaps we must also check whether our way of life does not attract them because we do not manifest the true joy of being consecrated persons, realized by our vocation and mission.
105. In the Preparatory Document to the Synod of Bishops on Youth we find some of these questions about our work and approaches to the world of youth. There are also some criteria to get closer to the young and to grasp the riches present in each of them. "*The youth today lives his/her condition*

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<sup>40</sup> Cfr. POOR SERVANTS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE, *Constitutions and Directory*, n. 28 a.

in a world different from the generation of his/her parents and educators. Not only does the systems of restrictions and opportunities change due to the economic and social transformations, but are also altered unconsciously even desires, needs, sensibilities, and the way of relating to others”<sup>41</sup>. As Calabrian Family we want to be present in this fundamental Church event and seek to accompany the youth that the Lord sends us or to whom we are sent, with the conviction that for each one of them God the Father has a loving project.

### **Prophecy of the family promotion, nursery of humanity**

106. **The Families** are another reality in which the Lord calls us today to be especially present as Opera, to live the prophecy of nearness, evangelization, and attention to the fragility. *"In our crucial days it seems to me that the family, the base and the living cell of society should be given the utmost importance ... because if the family is healthy, the society will be equally healthy"*<sup>42</sup>. Fr. John Calabria considered the family as the living cell of the society. The Church dedicated a Synod to the Family. Through the attractive Apostolic Exhortation *"Amoris Letitia"* she has reiterated the sacredness of the family, the context in which it is today, and the evangelization field that is the Church's concern. But primarily she [the Church] showed us the need of a particular proximity to the fragility the family is experiencing in this precise moment. In the light of what Fr. John Calabria has taught us and the Church asks us today, it seems to me, that the Opera has in this context a great mission of prophecy.
107. Pope Francis, in addition to exalting the beauty and sacredness of the Christian family, addresses the issue of family fragility and how important it is to "accompany, discern and integrate". The Synod Fathers claimed that the Church, despite considering any breaking of the marriage bond contrary to the will of God, is also aware of the fragility of many of its children. She needs to accompany with kindness and care her most fragile children marked by the wounded or lost love. She can do this by restoring trust and hope, such as the light of a beacon or a torch, brought in among people to enlighten those who have lost their way or are in the midst of the storm<sup>43</sup>.
108. The outlook suggested to us is to be hospitable, transforming all preceding pastoral setting. Every family is a living reality, in which we must learn to see the good and accompany it to grow. It is a major leap that we are called to do: not to classify but to accompany. This is much more challenging because, while classifying is a mental operation, accompanying is a psychophysical, affective, profoundly spiritual activity, and it is an evangelical operation. To involve ourselves with the working day apron, confronting, caring carefully and respecting such delicate situations, requires preparation, listening, and sensitivity. We need discernment, not ready recipes but an attitude of genuine charity<sup>44</sup>.
109. The Calabrian Family must express itself close by and prophetic in a special attention to the families. Those we find daily in our pastoral activity and those whom the Lord sends us and we encounter in the Opera for the suffering that they bring in, for the situation of their poverty, discomfort for children involved in drugs, disability, irreversible diseases, and internal divisions. Family sufferings, separations and divisions leave great open wounds. The prophetic prophecy of the Opera is to express the nearness and paternity of God, who does not abandon his children

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<sup>41</sup> SYNOD OF THE BISHOPS, XV Ordinary General Assembly, *Youth, Faith and Vocation Discernment*, Preparatory Document, Ch. I, Youth in today's world.

<sup>42</sup>FR. CALABRIA, *Letter to Msgr. Ferdinando Baldelli*, \*9848, 03-03-1953.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Letitia*, Ch. VIII.

<sup>44</sup> MSGR. ERIO CASTELLUCCI, Archbishop of Modena and Nonantola (Italy), *Lettera Pastorale per l'anno 2016-2017*.

in these particular moments of life. Nevertheless, it opens to hope and remains near, although, through suffering and wounds.

110. I think it appropriate that besides the personal commitment of each person to accompany these individual situations, there are in the Opera such spaces where families can find non-judgmental, understanding, fraternal listening, and a word originating from the Gospel message that helps to meet the person of Jesus, who is near every situation of suffering. In these places, one should offer, as the first approach to wounded people and families, a welcome that makes them experience a nearby and merciful God. I am also convinced that this is not enough, especially in the most complex situations, where psychological and spiritual help is to be given, besides a kind welcome and listening. As Bro. Enzo Biemmi, a theologian pastor, while speaking of separated or divorced persons, puts it: "*... psychological and spiritual help do not cancel each other out; rather, they integrate and support each other. I always see that the common task for both of them is prophecy. Prophet is the one who sees in favour of someone what the person involved at that moment cannot see. The prophecy is just the security of hope in the place of those who at this moment are not able to hope ... Each of the two competences respects the other and makes use of the other for the good of the entire person*"<sup>45</sup>.
111. The welcome and accompaniment of so many broken families, couples marked by wounded love, grief-stricken parents, children who no longer have reference points or they have too many (extended families), teach us how prophetic is the invitation of Fr. John Calabria work for the well-being of the families at the centre and as a priority for our pastoral action. Working in this area means discovering and making every person discover the beauty and the deep sense of being a Christian family.
- I wish that the Calabrian Family in the world might welcome the provocations that come from the real situations of humanity. Moreover, may it become a sign of hope and expression of an outgoing Church that, according to our charism, is able to show the face of the "Father" in all realities marked by great discomforts, and disappointments of relationships, due to the crisis of evangelical values.

### **Prophecy of an evangelic and charismatic management**

112. The subject of a prophetic, evangelical, and Calabrian management has always been underestimated. The last General Chapter has invited us to reflect and put into practice a way of management that is an expression of the Gospel and Charism. It is important to remember briefly the context in which we live and work. Understanding where we are is necessary to clarify what can be the result of the Kingdom and what harms God's plan.
- Unfortunately, the economy, being a particularly globalized and transversal aspect in today's society, overlaps and influences all other dimensions of human life. Competitive marketing dynamics causes everything, including human relationships, to be prized on the basis of values such as efficiency and productivity. We can state that these values are rendered "*absolute*" by the law of the market, becoming more important than any other dimension.
113. Current society has made the economy a process that promotes iniquity and injustice. This type of economy does not consider the values that go beyond the market, and thus excludes all aspects that are actually more important in human life: truth, justice, love and especially the dignity and the rights of the persons, including those living on the margins of the economic system. Concisely,

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<sup>45</sup>BROTHER ENZO BIEMMI, *Accompagnare persone separate e divorziate, Relazione nella Formazione di operatori di pastorale familiare*, 9 aprile 2017 [Report on the pastoral activity with separated and divorced people].



we live in a society dominated by the dynamics of an economy and finance lacking of ethics. This causes a "*scrap culture*" – as Pope Francis says – which unfortunately tends to become a common mentality that affects everyone<sup>46</sup>.

It is in this society, defiled by the "*scrap culture*", that the management of the Calabrian activities must be a sign capable of enhancing people as children of God. To realize a prophetic management in our time means to swim against the flow, opposing the economic culture of domination. Thus, the prophecy in the management consists in placing human being in the first place, making him/her protagonist in the realization of the mission. In this context, the method of management for any organization born from a charism could be the true prophecy today, as were the monasteries many years ago.<sup>47</sup>

114. Pope Francis, in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and in the encyclical *Laudato sii*, leads us to consider another type of economy and organization. According to him today, we have to do something to promote an inclusive economy, beginning with the recovery of human roots. Today, the "works" and the activities that we do have to be prophetic even in the field of economy and transparency; otherwise they have no reason to exist. Small or big, they must become places of innovation and creativity, capable of bringing to the present society and the territory that hosts them a humanized method of management, where our collaborators and our "beneficiaries" (our masters, as Fr. John Calabria used to say) become the protagonists. Only such a method of management can become prophetic and witness the Charism of St. John Calabria. [That is true] if we consider above all, that in the society in which we live, the first prophecy is to live the abandonment to Divine Providence, which does not exclude "*having the head on one's neck*".
115. In the General Administration of the Congregation, we have considered and shared a path that leads us to identify management models for our activities and missions that can more clearly express the principles of the Calabrian charism. These models, besides being particularly coherent with the institutional charism, bear significant results in terms of quality of services. These models are perfectly feasible in the contemporary context and useful to create **a Calabrian method of collegial managing**, capable of putting the charism into practice<sup>48</sup>.
116. Ultimately, the first prophecy we are called to witness is the one that is handed over to us and taught us by Fr. John Calabria. That is the involvement of the people, who together look for God's will, so that the charism is conveyed also by the way of guiding and managing the activities. Fr. John Calabria himself worked with the "*family councils*," he got himself helped by people close to him, that is, he tried to work in collegial form, clearly according to the forms of his time. In essence, he also asked for somebody's advice before making a decision, and this assessment enriched him, and above all those people who welcomed the Gospel message, the same message that inspired every initiative in favour of the poorest and abandoned. Even today, the evangelization and prophetic mission of the Opera must bear in mind these fundamental elements to highlight the charism.

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<sup>46</sup>Cf. <http://www.sanfrancescopatronoditalia.it/notizie/expo-2015/papa-francesco-viviamo-la-cultura-dello-spreco>, cons. 20\03\2017.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. LUIGINO BRUNI e ALESSANDRA SMERILLI, *L'altra metà dell'economia*, 2014, Città Nuova Ed., p. 31. (The other side of the economy)

<sup>48</sup>In this regard, and to standardize a Calabrian management method in the Opera, the General Administration of the Congregation has individualized paths and management procedures presented in 4 handouts that are available to all members of the Opera. These management procedures are designed to make the management of the Opera efficient, effective, and prophetic.

## CONCLUSION

117. In the awareness that we have only presented some concepts of reflection and provocation, we conclude, leaving the theme of prophecy open, so that each of us, every community and reality of the Opera may question and deepen their reflection and become aware of the great mission we have as the Calabrian Family.

Every day of our lives, we are encouraged to seek new forms of creative fidelity to our spirituality, and the theme of prophecy will help us to implement them according to God's plan. As we have already said, the prophet is the person and the community that can interpret the will of God in the historical context in which one is immersed. We must always have an ear tuned to God and another ear tuned to the people/history. Thus we will be able to grasp the deepest desires of both and seek together a response. Our response should be given not only through a concrete activity, but above all, in the proclamation of hope and joy, in the understanding and transparency of our charism.

118. In this sense, I am indeed impressed, and I think it is of extraordinary timing, what *Luigino Bruni* wrote about the prophetic vocation of our time. *"So that a prophetic vocation can bear its typical and essential fruits, there is a need for prophets who are not afraid to ask questions to the voice that calls them. They should not be afraid to bring into their vocational dialogue the deepest wounds of the people, to touch and heal them. Usually, however, the prophets, even true and honest ones, stop too soon in crossing the deep sorrows of their own people. Therefore, prophecy is epidemic, cosmetic, only says small words, and cannot shout, then does not save anyone. Missing the Yes of the people, prophecy does not convince, is not spousal, does not become flesh, hope is too easy to be credible. So that in the time of trial the cry of the prophet may be the cry of the people, prophets have to "descend to the hell" and there meet their dead and raise them up. This is how the prophets console their people. They do not know any other true consolation. Nahamùnahaù àmmi: "Console, console my people"<sup>49</sup>.*

May the Lord give us an ear and an open heart, so that we can welcome this deeper cry and the Opera become today a place of joyous and credible prophecy. I pray that in all our realities and presences of the Opera in the world we can awaken the prophetic cry of our Don Giovanni, who today as in those days tells us with the prophet: *"Console, console my people"*.

119. Finally, true prophecy sprouts from the holiness of personal life and from a community that hears the Word and tries to live it in everyday situations, sharing the joys and anguish of the people. The world is tired of words, believes the witnesses. Moreover, if one believes in words, it is because behind the words there is a living witness that guarantees with life what one says<sup>50</sup>. I wish that in our Calabrian Family there are lesser masters and more disciples, that there are less persons, communities and activities that tell what they are doing, and more living witnesses of the love and nearness, because at the end of life love will gain victory, not words.

120. May Our Lady, the Mother of the true Prophet, intercede for us and help us on the path we undertake. May the voice of the Charism that St. John Calabria entrusted to us and has been conveyed by many of our brothers, sisters and lay people to the world, shout, in words and deeds, that God is Father and loves us.

I remember you all in my prayers. Pray for me. Fraternaly,

P. Miguel Tofful

Verona, September 8, 2017  
Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary

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<sup>49</sup>BRUNI LUIGINO, *In ascolto della vita* (Listening to life) / 20. *Le consolazioni della profezia*. "Avvenire", Saturday November 5, 2016.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. POPE PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.

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