



Brotherhood

By Bro. Marreddy.

Many of us might have faced this question often, why Brotherhood? especially when we live in a society where people give more priority to the other catholic vocations than Brotherhood. Thus, I had a kind of reflection going on to express what this life is for me. Unfortunately, we have very less resources on understanding this Great Gift of Life of Religious Brotherhood.

Western monastic communities had their origins in the fourth century and received their more formal structure under St. Benedict in the fifth century, but the beginnings of the lay Brotherhood are less clear. Most men of St. Benedict's community were not clergy, and all shared in the manual labor as part of their discipline of prayer and work, *ora et labora*. He distinguished three types of monastics—*oblato*, children who were being taught in the monastery; *nutriti*, adult monks who had been formed there since their youth; and *conversi*, adults who had joined the community later in life. At Vallombrosa, in Tuscany, around A.D. 1038, St. John Gualbert is often credited with first having formally designated the *conversi* as servants, thus tacitly establishing lay Brothers, but other religious communities perhaps a century earlier almost certainly had separated some community members from the choir Brothers in order to perform the manual work of the household.

The need for lay Brothers had grown by the eleventh century for three primary reasons: First, the time devoted to monastic study had greatly increased; second, the percentage of monks who were preparing for priestly ordination had increased; and third, the religious life was beginning to attract more and more people who felt called to the life of prayer and service but did not have the education or health necessary to tackle monastic studies or priestly formation. In addition, monasteries

generally had hired servants who had become de facto members of the community, and their roles needed to be clarified. Before long, many of the major houses of religious communities across Europe had established lay Brothers.

Over time, lay Brothers generally became known for their exemplary piety and their tireless labor; they found joy and fulfillment in their contributions through their toil. Many became known for their outstanding skills in agriculture, art, craftsmanship, and administration. The renown of many religious orders for their retail and gift products can be traced historically to the well-honed talents of their lay Brothers.

The vocation of the Brother is part of the answer that God gives to the absence of brotherhood which is wounding the world today. At the root of a Brother's vocation lies a profound experience of solidarity that essentially matches that of Moses before the burning bush: he discovers himself as the eyes, ears and heart of God, the God who sees the oppression of God's people, who hears their cry, feels their anguish and comes down to liberate them. In this intimate experience, the Brother hears the call: "Come, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt." (Ex 3:7-10). Therefore, the dimension of communion is closely linked in the Brother to a fine sensitivity for everything that affects the least privileged of people; those oppressed by various forms of injustice, abandoned on the margins of history and progress, those who, ultimately, are less likely to experience the good news of God's love in their lives. We are invited to be part of this least privileged family by Jesus '**you are all brothers and sisters**' (Mt 23:8b) and to break our body and shed our blood to restore the dignity of the people.

The first ministry that Brothers develop in the Church as religious is "to remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel" and "the need to respond with holiness of life to the love of God poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5)". All other services and ministries offered by the various forms of consecrated life make sense only when rooted in this first ministry.

This purpose, of being a sign, is essential to consecrated life and determines its orientation: it does not exist “for itself”, but as a part of the ecclesial community.

Religious consecration itself, which presents life as a witness to the absoluteness of God, and also as a process of openness to God and people in the light of the Gospel, is a call to all the faithful, an invitation to each person to orient his or her own life along a radical path, in different situations and states of life, open to the gifts and invitations of the Spirit.

Religious Brothers have emphasized the dignity of services and ministries related to the multiple needs of human beings. They carry out these ministries from the unity of their consecration, making them the center of their experience of God and performing them with quality and competence. (Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church, 4 October 2015)

This experience of God comes only through **ardent prayer**. We were only formed by others (our formators, wonderful men of God), but we are not forming ourselves. The transformation takes place only when we begin to form ourselves. There is not much learning after 1st vows in many of us. We need to be committed to our prayers that our spirituality deepens and that we may be committed our religious values. The spirituality is to live your own experience with God. When you formed completely only, you can give fully yourself to the world. Remember, your life is an offering that you make it to God, so it needs to **BE BEST**.