

Community life and fraternal communion

In a previous teaching, I explain how Pierre Goursat received the “gift of brothers and sisters” as a direct consequence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In February 1972, Pierre Goursat and Martine Laffite, who knew each other very little before a weekend spent together in Troussures, and who were very different on a number of levels; age, education, spiritual journey etc. felt they had become “brother and sister”. The Holy Spirit had brought them together in a mysterious way and inspired them with the idea of praying together every evening. From May 1972, others were drawn into this adventure and it was in this way the first prayer groups were formed. The fraternal connection within these prayer groups was palpable and intense.

During this teaching I will address the subject of community life and fraternal communion, in 7 main points.

1) Community; a place of sanctification and mutual support in difficult times

We can sometimes “tie ourselves in knots” in the spiritual life, or have the impression we’re moving backwards instead of forwards. Pierre Goursat says: “We have to keep moving forward, but we can’t do this alone; only together we can really progress”¹. He often reminded us that an isolated Christian is one in danger, and again, of the opposite, “a brother or sister supported by another brother or sister is a town fortified with ramparts” (cf. Prov. 18:19). Pierre honed his conscience with the strength he received in spiritual combat, a battle involving not just the Church but the whole world: “We are involved in a drama of cosmic proportions; there is an intense spiritual combat. Certain among us may not have, as yet, completely understood the intensity of this battle. It is a battle defined by love”².

Spiritual combat is an unavoidable reality of Christian life. The greater our determination to follow the Lord, the more the enemy will attack us. St. Paul writes: “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). As St. Paul explains here, it is not with the weapons of the world we will battle the Adversary, but with the Lord’s.

Pierre Goursat explains to us that the name “Emmanuel”, meaning “God with us”, is the name he received during prayer in 1973. It evokes God’s active and protective presence, walking with his people and fighting for them in the Old Testament.

Pierre realised it is very difficult, if not impossible, to remain faithful to the Gospel **in a post-Christian society like that of France**. To keep marching onward, against the current of ideologies and lifestyles, entirely incompatible with the Christian message. He considered fraternal life to be an indispensable aid in progressing in the Christian life. Pierre brings up the subject time and again in his teachings. He says: “The Lord wants us to live in community, he really wants us to be able to lean on our brothers and sisters”³.

Pierre insists on the importance of concretely supporting each other: “We must carry each other together because we cannot manage it alone; together we can hold on. This is really ‘Emmanuel, God with us’”⁴.

Strengthened by fraternal life, animated by charity, together, it is easier to renounce the temptations of today’s society, the consumerism and individualism enticing us into a superficial universe. From community life we draw the spiritual strength needed to live as Christians in our daily activities and to bear witness to our faith.

Pierre Goursat sometimes uses the **image of a mountain**; he says we are like **climbers who must be roped together** when they take on high peaks. If one of them loses his grip, he’s attached to the others, which stops him falling into a crevasse.

1 Three-week retreat, 15th September 1976.

2 Community weekend, 21st June 1981.

3 Community weekend with the first commitments to the Community, 18-19th June 1977.

4 Community weekend, 22nd September 1979.

Community life assures us this protection, and through its support, enables us to make progress, marching on together to the summit of holiness.

Community fraternal life is above all a place of sanctification, where we dive into prayer and formation. The vocation of the Emmanuel Community is one which enables us to each live **"in the world, without being of the world"** just as Jesus invites us to, in the Gospel of John: *"they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world"* (Jn. 17:14).

From the very beginning of his pontificate, **Pope Francis continually exhorts us to flee "worldliness"** as it takes us away from our Christian vocation and dulls our ability to bear witness.

St. Paul already encourages us in this way, saying: *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect"* (Rom. 12:2).

Living as Christians in the world as it is today, with its dangers and abuses, but also its expectations and aspirations, **requires us to make choices**, sometimes difficult ones, in order to put the Lord first in our life. We have to prioritise, to maintain a regular prayer life and sacramental life, and protect the various Community events which are offered to us: household meetings, formation weekends, evangelisation activities... Sometimes this means we have to give them priority over other events which are not bad in themselves; like family reunions, friendships, hobbies... Pierre insists on the importance of constantly discerning, because it reveals our determination to follow the Lord.

For Pierre Goursat, the Community was not an end in itself, but a way to enable the greatest number of people to advance on the road to holiness, in service of the Church. He says: *"Committing yourself to a non-residential community is not the most important thing in itself, it's just the means! The point, and the most important thing is, union with God"*⁵. For him, both charity and the quality of our fraternal life, were the foundations upon which the Community would build itself and develop. This is why he waited several years before starting a 'community of life', to be sure it was the fruit of true spiritual communion. He describes to members of the Renewal, how to go from a prayer group to community life, in taking the time to establish a solid base:

*"Your prayer groups, he says, really must be warm and inviting, abundant in charity, so that little by little some souls might feel a call to community life in the heart of these prayer groups. But that is all in the Lord's time. We mustn't outpace the Lord, we have to wait" [...]. Adding: "If there's no love, it's like having no more petrol in a car: it won't work"*⁶.

2) A crucial step during the summer of 1976: a trip to the United-States and the "three-week" retreat

In 1976, there was only one "residential household" in existence. It had taken form around Pierre in October 1974 in Gentilly, and having grown in size it was transferred the following year to rue Gay-Lussac in Paris. **At this point Pierre Goursat considered it time to make a new step and open this small community of life, to others.** He had been thinking about it for a while now, but was waiting for the idea to mature in the hearts of his brothers and sisters. He was sensitive to the personal development of each one, and wanted to avoid establishing a community based on human criteria, and be sure it corresponded to God's will. So he proposed the idea to members of the Emmanuel prayer groups and the French Renewal, of **a trip to the United-States to visit several different communities**, and in particular, that of Ann Arbor. Two trips were organised from the 27th July to 23rd August, gathering together about 80 people. Those participating were profoundly touched by the power of praise, the radical life choices made and the charity experienced within these American communities.

Pierre returned to Paris convinced it was possible to open community life to a great number of people. Once back, to ensure it wasn't just a "flash in the pan", he asked more than 40 people to participate in a retreat in Paris. We would meet together every evening after work, from 6pm – 10pm, as well as at the weekend. The evening started with a long time of praise, followed by teachings given by Pierre, Martine Laffitte, and several others among us. Pierre explains to us later on: *"Every day we asked the Holy Spirit to show us what we had to say. We didn't prepare anything. The Holy Spirit gave it to us every day. Different people spoke one after the other. It was truly charismatic: everything was given to us. It really was an amazing experience. It bound us together"*⁷.

After the teaching we would eat a sandwich and talk about things. The men on one side, the women on the other, to share what each of us understood about the Lord's call and what we felt like replying. The evening finished with a time of adoration, all together. We were so joyful at the thought of seeing each other every evening. The two weekends gave us the opportunity to get to know each other better, to pray together for longer and to listen to the Holy Spirit together in deep spiritual communion. Pierre reminded us to go straight to the essential; there was a real urgency in responding to the Lord's call, it demanded a certain radicality, meaning we had to anchor ourselves in the Lord.

At the end of the retreat Pierre made a proposition; for those who wanted it, they could enter into community life. Every one of the participants agreed to it. It was very quickly offered to other people attending the Emmanuel prayer groups, following this. Even though the Community had already started emerging 4 years ago, this retreat constitutes its **founding moment**.

⁵ Session at Paray-le-Monial, July 1977.

⁶ Session at Paray-le-Monial, 5th July 1979.

⁷ Pierre Goursat's testimony, July 1986.

Then other elements were put into place; monthly community prayer and formation meetings, households, and individual companionship. Each of these were considered necessary by Pierre Goursat, for constructing the Community on a solid base and offering mutual support.

3) Household and individual companionship, pillars of community life

A) HOUSEHOLD:

On the subject of community life, Pierre was always clear that families should never live together in the same house, or with other lay persons, apart from on the rare exceptions when it had been well discerned and in the context of a mission. This was to ensure the life of the couple was respected and so parents could fully assume the responsibility of bringing up their children. He showed the same vigilance when it came to the mixing of genders. In the early years, single people, students and young professionals made up the majority. As such, there were numerous 'residential households', ones for the young men and separate ones for the young ladies.

Pierre Goursat was deeply faithful to household meetings, and after leaving his role as moderator of the Community he even maintained two households! In addition to his 'official' household for that year, he also attended one with the parish priests of *La Trinité*, the first diocesan parish to be entrusted to the Community, in 1986.

The time of sharing we have every week in household is there to help us focus on the Word of God, to show how it works in us and how it converts us. Household is there to encourage us in being faithful to prayer, Mass and the sacraments. When household meetings are held in an atmosphere of prayer, mutual trust, and non-judgement of others, they become a place of sanctification and beneficial fraternal exchange. We can seriously share what's on our heart, without going into our life story each time. Household is also the place to entrust our difficulties and the things which discourage us, asking our brothers and sisters for their prayers.

Pierre insisted on the importance of having a merciful attitude towards our community brothers and sisters, saying: *"It's out of his merciful love that Jesus sends us brothers and sisters who pray for us. So really don't hesitate, if you feel troubled or anything, to speak about it in companionship and they'll be sensitive to the right moment, and everyone can pray for you and it'll give you joy and peace"*⁸.

B) COMPANIONSHIP:

Sometimes, it's not always possible to say all we would like to, to our household leaders. Pierre made the following connection between household and companionship: *"When **the household leader** takes a decision, he helps people to find their place. But I worry that he only sees the external forum, when considering a decision for this or that. And [if] someone is lacking in confidence, or a bit shy, they don't dare to say anything, and in the end it hurts them or they feel a bit crushed by it. Or they aren't really where they should be and feel pushed around. This is why **companionship** exists, where we can express ourselves, complain a bit, and we can say: 'Listen, it's meant nicely, but I'm actually completely stuck [...] between things and there isn't a place for me anymore!'. And all this they can say calmly [to their Companion] without resentment."*⁹.

Pierre Goursat believed fraternal companionship, as we live it in the Community, to be essential: *"Spiritual companionship is very important because, alone, we cannot make ourselves holy. Especially in today's world, we'll never make it alone. And if we're not together, we'll stumble and fall"*¹⁰.

Since the very beginning of the Community, Pierre Goursat established the rule that men should be accompanied by men, and women accompanied by women, and married couples by other married couples. **Pierre aimed to separate the functions of authority from companionship**, in order to clearly distinguish between what belongs to the external forum and the internal forum. It was not the case with most American and French charismatic communities at this time, where people with responsibility also had a counselling role, and would administer advice to those under their responsibility.

This important distinction is an essential rule of the Church. The internal forum concerns the assessment of an act in relation to one's personal conscience, whilst the external forum applies to what can be shared and discerned according to objective external criteria: for example, the daily routine, prayer, regular Mass attendance, fraternal life, apostolic commitments. From experience, Pierre was quite familiar with human nature and its weaknesses, but he still displayed great hope in people. He regularly brought together all those providing companionship to form and help them, using examples of various situations they had witnessed during companionship, without of course using names, so as to protect confidentiality.

Pierre was very clear on one specific point; the 'Companion' does not replace a Spiritual Director, but does have a complimentary role. Comparing it to the roles of doctor and nurse, he says: *"The Companion is to a Spiritual Father, [what the] nurse [is] to a doctor. The doctor can write you the necessary prescription, and then leave. Usually, we'll then*

⁸ Speaking during a retreat with the Fraternity of Jesus, Paray-le-Monial, 9th August 1978.

⁹ Retreat with the Fraternity of Jesus, Paray-le-Monial, 9th August 1978.

¹⁰ Session at Paray-le-Monial, 9-14th July 1977.

go and buy the prescribed medicine, because here we have medical insurance and it doesn't cost too much, but then we don't take it [...]. We need a nurse to come and say: "You really have to have your injection, or take your medicine regularly"¹¹.

At the beginning of the Renewal, as certain priests didn't understand the sense of companionship, and the way we offer it in the Community, Pierre used this comparison again, in another teaching: "And so you see your Spiritual Director coming, saying: but what is all this, these companionships? That's not how it works. I'm your Spiritual Director. I don't understand it. In any case it's dangerous" [...]. Pierre carries on like this: "Well, you can say to him: "But Father, it's not like that at all. You are the father of our souls. You are the doctor of the soul". With emphasis on: "the soul". And say to him: "And we are the nurses, we administer the treatment you recommend! Because, between you and I, they don't take their medicine [the people who come to you for spiritual direction]. They come to see you every three weeks for a new prescription. But they haven't taken anything in between time. They throw it away!"¹².

We can see here how Pierre really shows respect for both the spiritual direction of those who have it, and companionship within the Community, and he connects the two together by making the distinction between the external forum and the internal forum.

Pierre uses **an image of pebbles swirling in the sea**, to illustrate how God moulds us in community and fraternal life, through bumping against each other, chipping off the sharp edges. On the subject of companionship, he says: "It's the **sacrament of brothers and sisters**, leaning on each other and helping each other to exercise self-control. It's also a source of holiness, as St. John of the Cross says, as brothers and sisters we are put together to bump into each other like little pebbles in the sea, to smooth each other off. And we manage to be pretty smooth in the end!" (he laughs) and adds: "It's not [human accomplishment], it's a grace"¹³.

Pierre had a great sense of humour and often made a play on words. For those who don't speak French, I will explain the one used here. In French, **the word "smooth"** chosen by Pierre, to mean a "smooth" stone whose rough edges have been rounded off by rubbing against other pebbles in the sea, can also be used to mean a "polite" person!

4) Fraternal love is both the foundation stone and the cement of every Christian community

On the day of Pentecost, St. Peter addresses a long speech to those who were present in Jerusalem for the great Jewish feast, which St. Luke relates in the Acts of the Apostles. He invites them to live a conversion and be baptised in the Holy Spirit. Here are the fruits of his time preaching that day: "and that day about three thousand persons were added" (Acts 2:41). We really see them, the first visible fruits of Pentecost, entering into the Church. And just after this, St. Luke adds: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching **and fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers [...]. All who believed were together and had all things in common [...]. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2: 42-47).

Then in Acts 4:32, it is written: "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul". As such, fraternal communion was the distinctive mark of the first Christian community, manifesting itself through their unified hearts. So then, it must also be the sign that characterises and authenticates every community, ours included, transcending the diverse nature of the people constituting it.

During the Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35). All those who joined the early Church were touched by the unity of the first Christians. Tertullien, living at the turn of the 3rd Century, witnesses how the pagans converted when they saw the love that reigned between the Christians. They said: "Just look at how they love each other"¹⁴.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Missio*, (The Mission of the Redeemer), published on the 7th of December 1990, John-Paul II writes: "Even before activity, mission means witness and a way of life that shines out to others" (n° 26). It really is this fraternal communion, which is at the source of unity and which makes a community attractive and evangelising. We can bear witness to Christ with all the assurance in the world, but if the testimony given with our words is not founded on and confirmed by the testimony proclaimed by our life, then it means nothing. It is this testimony which shines out first, revealing what we are living with Christ, and then our words will have an impact on those who listen.

Pierre Goursat was well aware of this, and motivated us by saying: "**The Community, is in the first place, a community of love and spiritual affection between us**. And that is what's essential, because if we don't have love for each other, we are liars. We cannot love God if we do not love our neighbour. You all know this, but we must never forget it"¹⁵.

5) Community life; a place to learn humility and charity

¹¹ Speaking during a retreat with the Fraternity of Jesus Paray-le-Monial, 8th August 1978.

¹² Session at Paray-le-Monial, 9-14th July 1977.

¹³ Retreat with the Fraternity of Jesus, Christmas 1980.

¹⁴ Tertullien, Apologétique, n. 39 § 7.

¹⁵ Community weekend, 1st April 1979.

St. Paul gives us this useful advice for living the fraternal life: *"clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other"* (Col 3:12-13). I like the "bear with one another" part, because it's not just about accepting the less agreeable things about community life, but really it's about encouraging others. He also says: *"through love become slaves to one another"* (Gal 5:13).

Pierre Goursat thought of the Community precisely as a school of humility and charity. He invited us to experience charity, self-sacrifice, and the gift of self in the many opportunities given to us through community life. In the services that may be asked of us: *"it is important, he says, to accept these little services here and there that are asked of us, because it generates love in the community, and joy, a real charity"*¹⁶.

Pierre was always encouraging us to be of goodwill, to have kindness, and a positive regard towards others, to rejoice in the gifts and qualities that our brothers and sisters have received, without looking to compare ourselves with them. He knew how to bring the qualities of others to the forefront, and bring out the best in the people around him. A married man wrote: "Pierre had the gift of fellowship [...]. He always brought out the best in his brothers and sisters". An unmarried woman said: "Pierre is an example of humility... His love for all those whom he helped see their own value; he never took the first place, [...]. He wasn't a crushing leader type, he led by putting all those who were entrusted to him, first".

Pierre acted like a brother amongst his siblings. In the way he carried out the government of the Community, he helped us to give the best of ourselves, in the service of others. He had a refined discernment, knowing which services and responsibilities to entrust to whom, and how to push us to develop hidden talents. Through his humility and radical openness to the Holy Spirit, Pierre taught us how not to take ourselves so seriously, not to count on our own human strength, nor **to take possession of the mission entrusted to us,** but instead to abandon ourselves in all things, to God.

Since childhood, Pierre had suffered from fragile health and limited physical strength. He leant on his community brothers and sisters. He was often behind the inspiration of which projects to make happen, the fruit of numerous ideas and intuitions he received in prayer, but he knew how to delegate and put his trust in fellow collaborators.

I would like to highlight a description of Pierre mentioned earlier, in my teaching on humility, which manifests itself plainly in the context of fraternal life: **Pierre's discretion and simplicity.** Today, the Emmanuel Community is well known, and even recognised officially by the Church as a universal good, yet few people know the name of its founder! This is because Pierre Goursat never wanted to put himself in the limelight. So many brothers and sisters can testify to this. One said: Pierre "never wanted to look like a guru". Another confirms: he was "a delicate and humble man, who never played the role of a patron, making himself feel superior, but he was always hidden, efficient, and sought to put himself in last place". This was just as true for community business, as in daily life. When he was invited to visit families, he was so attentive to each person, taking interest in what the children had to say, and sharing the meal in great simplicity.

A priest from the Community said: "There was zero 'personality cult' surrounding our founder, just a great affection displayed by those who knew him". A young lady who was discerning with the Community was rather surprised when she met Pierre for the first time, aboard *La Peniche*: "I was struck by the simplicity of Pierre, she said, who was living there in just a few square metres. I said to myself: 'He can't be a guru if he lives that simply!'. A French bishop was also profoundly struck by the first time he met Pierre, especially by "this image of simplicity, diminishment, self-deprivation". He said: "He didn't have the look of a leader, he was detached from himself, abandoned to grace".

6) Do everything to preserve the precious gift of unity

Pierre concerned himself with the idea that once everyone had found their place, we could become "living stones" in the spiritual building God was constructing out of the emerging Community. He says: *"These living stones can only be correctly placed if we put the corner stone – who is Jesus, rejected by the builders – as capstone. And so we need this stone to build anything, because it unites everything, unifies everything. And if the Holy Spirit is not there unifying the community, there'll be an explosion. An explosion and the community will be stunted in its growth"* and he adds: *"that is the grace of the Community"*¹⁷.

Pierre stressed that fraternal charity, fruit of the Holy Spirit, makes up the cement of this unity: *"Loving each other as God has loved us, might not appear to be easy [...], but the Holy Spirit loves us and we are unified through him. So it's easy!"*¹⁸.

He was surprised to see the Community holding its own, growing and establishing itself, when everything was against it humanly speaking, and amongst those accompanying him there were some strong characters! He marvelled at the unity the Holy Spirit operated between us, and he thanked the Lord for it. He explains: *"Through Pentecost, we dive [with the Lord] into love for one another [...]. It's wonderfully surprising to see the Holy Spirit uniting us. I have the impression we are a wreath and this wreath is bound together; if ever the wreath comes undone, everything will fall, but with the Holy Spirit, everything holds"*¹⁹.

Pierre Goursat's 'Golden Rule' was no criticising. In order to preserve the precious gift of unity, he took great care in diffusing any beginnings of discord. Born into a family of comedians, he knew that irony could deeply wound people and,

¹⁶ Retreat with the Fraternity of Jesus, Easter 1982.

¹⁷ Community weekend, 20th September 1981.

¹⁸ Community weekend, 27-28th November 1976.

¹⁹ Interview, 23rd May 1976.

if it degenerated into maliciousness, could have harmful and lasting consequences. Pierre invited everyone to “*bridle their tongues*” (cf. James 1:26) and he banned gossip, source of discord and division. He made the distinction between having “**an eye for critique**”, which is a positive quality enabling us to analyse situations, and “**a criticising spirit**”, which negatively judges people. The only rule he ever imposed on members of the Community was **to never criticise... even jokingly!** He was uncompromising on this point, and would not hesitate, when needed, to practice **fraternal correction**. But what does this consist of? Commenting on Chapter 18 of Matthieu’s Gospel, Pope Benedict XVI explains: “*Fraternal love carries a sense of reciprocal responsibility, so that, if my brother commits a fault against me, I must be proof of charity towards him and, before anything else, talk to him privately, making him realise that what he said or did is not good. This way of behaving is called fraternal correction: It is not a reaction to the offense suffered, but is an expression of love for your brother or sister*”²⁰.

Fraternal correction should be done out of love, to help our brothers and sisters convert, and to live in truth. It is not about judging them or condemning them, but loving them with the same kindness and mercy Christ has for each one of us. It requires a lot of humility and charity, patience and mercy, on our part. I will give you here an example showing **how Pierre practiced fraternal correction**. Having heard that a sister had a tendency to criticise a lot, he called her to *La Peniche* and said: “*If you continue like this, your place is not in the Community!*”. The firmness displayed by Pierre was beneficial to the sister who later testifies that it helped her in changing her behaviour.

The kindness and charity Pierre wanted to install **at the heart of the Emmanuel Community**, he sought to make **other prayer groups and communities emerging from the Charismatic Renewal** experience also, in a period where tensions were starting to appear. To promote goodwill between everyone, and to avoid competition and jealousy, he suggested the creation of a “charity charter”, so everyone could commit to not criticising other communities, but speak well of them instead.

In an article published in *He Is Alive!* entitled *Exercising Charity*, Pierre lays out a spiritual process which will enable us to rejoice in the gifts that others receive, and progress on the road to unity. It was the fruit of long times of prayer. I strongly recommend you read the whole article, published in July 1978 (no. 19), which I believe will be made available online on the website “Pierre Goursat and his brothers and sisters”.

Here are just a few extracts:

“More often than not, we sin by exaggeration, rather than through direct errors or lies. We see the truth, but we exaggerate the details unreasonably to the detriment of what’s essential. Let us not forget that lucidity without love is the Devil’s view of things, and not Jesus’ [...]. The Holy Spirit [...] teaches us to see others with eyes different to those of human reason [...]. In this way, little by little, we start to love watching our brothers and sisters, happy to discover grace working in them more deeply every day [...]. It relativises their weaknesses, puts things back into perspective, where it doesn’t block our sight anymore, if we still see these weaknesses at all... It really is the Lord that we perceive, little by little, in our brothers and sisters, expressing himself through them. And so, as we ourselves are miserable but forgiven, we can indulge the misery of others: we become merciful. And when we are tempted time and again to glorify ourselves over our successes, the clear realisation of our unworthiness and sin should immediately calm us down [...]. An overabundance of love fills us with joy and thanksgiving because it opens our heart [...]; but we cannot follow it if we harden our hearts through criticism and by fixing our attention on everything around us that doesn’t go so well [...]. Interior exultation [...] erases all marks of fear or jealousy from our hearts, it makes the need to compare ourselves with others disappear [...]. In the Holy Spirit, competition disappears: and it’s replaced with loving encouragement and emulation [...].

The time we used to spend on vain words and on criticising others should, from today, be spent in praying for our brothers and sisters [...]. And so we won’t be tempted anymore, like the apostles were before Christ’s Passion, when they tried to find “who is the greatest among us?”; which community does God prefer. On the contrary, we can rejoice with each of them, in the graces the Lord gives them, for what he accomplishes in and through them”.

Next, Pierre provides us with concrete suggestions, applicable to everyone, under the sub-title **making a commitment to not criticising anymore**. He writes:

“Here is a list of concrete points, from which we can all take inspiration:

- *Do not criticise a brother or sister, or another community, even jokingly*
- *If something is not going well in my community:*

- 1) *Consider myself responsible and pray that the situation gets better*
- 2) *Do not needlessly trouble others, by talking about it to people without solving the underlying problem.*
- 3) *Pray to know who to talk to about it, when the right moment to do it is, and what to say.*

*- If I fall, and start criticising again; I will write to the brothers or sisters, or the community concerned to ask their forgiveness, whether they are aware of my criticism or not*²¹.

²⁰ Benedict XVI, Angelus, Castel Gandolfo, 4th September 2011.

²¹ Pierre Goursat, *L’exercice de la charité*, *He Is Alive!*, n° 19, July 1978, 12.

Conclusion

Fraternal life is a grace given to us to support and encourage us, and help us advance together on the path to holiness. Community life is demanding, and can sometimes appear to be limiting also. We must go further, to understand and desire this demanding programme, which is in fact a programme of love. St. Paul invites us to walk the path, in his hymn of charity:

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends" (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

Pierre Goursat
and his brothers and sisters