We are not better

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Dear friends, guests, and all who follow us from afar,

As a testimony of the fraternal ties that unite us in various ways, in these last weeks many of you have asked us — with discretion and respect, insistence and preoccupation, disconcertment or a few even with anger — for a word about the recent event that has involved the Community and is a cause of many and profound sufferings. We have been silent for a certain time so as not to further hurt anyone and to be able to say a word of peace and clarity, aware of our responsibility of giving an account both of the hope that inhabits us and of the scandal that we have provoked in so many Christians and persons who follow us…

First of all, we are grateful to you for remaining close to us, as your messages, phone calls, and visits have shown, for your prayers that continue to accompany us, for the friendship that, although tried by the events, has not been wanting. And we also wish to ask forgiveness for the scandal that we have given rise to and for the counter-testimony that we have given.

So that this gratitude and this request for pardon do not sound like empty rhetoric, we would like to help you and help each other to understand in depth both the suffering that we are going through and of which we have made you participate as well as the hopes that we nourish for the way ahead.

The apostolic visit was initiated by the Holy See because of various reports about profound suffering in the fraternal life in Bose and after having verified that this was true. The Community received the visit in obedience, as a sign of the paternal attention of Pope Francis and as a help in discerning the profound causes of a grave unease regarding “the exercise of authority, the handling of governance, and the fraternal climate” in Bose.

The choice of the persons to carry out this delicate task was a sign of regard for our peculiar nature of a monastic community of brothers and sisters, constitutive of our life from the beginning: besides a religious expert also in problems connected with human relations (fr Amedeo Cencini), a Benedictine abbot (fr Guillermo Arboleda) and a Trappist abbess (mother Anne-Emmanuelle Devêche) were called on for this service. The presence of the latter, who, together with fr Michel van Parys had conducted a precedent visit of the community, guaranteed also the possibility of drawing on what was seen and heard on that occasion. The visit of 2014, the first after almost fifty years of monastic life in Bose, was of a different nature; at that time br Enzo had called an abbot and an abbess in whom he had confidence, who already knew well the brothers and sisters of Bose, because he considered them the persons best suited to favor a fruitful community procedure towards the change of prior. That was a fraternal visit, which could give advice and suggestions, but without the ability of intervening concretely. Some critical points emerged, but these did not impede the unfolding of events that culminated with the resignation of br Enzo, who had announced it long before, and the election of br Luciano by the Community, according to the mode set out in our Statute.

Between December of last year and Epiphany of this, even if not in continuation, the visitors sent this time by the Holy See were able to listen at length and more than once all the brothers and sisters, both those living in Bose and those in the different Fraternities, and to collect as well written testimonies. At the conclusion of the visit, they submitted, as was asked of them, their final report to the Holy See, which evaluated it over a period of four months, presumably verifying also how founded and how comprehensive it was, and considered that the elements gathered were necessary and sufficient for formulating a letter to the prior and to the Community and for emanating a “singular decree, approved by the Holy Father in specific form”, which contained a series of indications and dispositions that regard, the first, the entire Community, and the second, the founder, br Enzo, two other monks and one nun. To notify the decree and set in motion its execution, the Holy See nominated fr Amedeo Cencini pontifical delegate with full powers, not an “administrator”, that is, it did not consider necessary to remove the prior, br Luciano, who was legitimately elected in 2017 and reconfirmed by the Community two years later, as requested by our Statute, but rather to support him in his ministry of presiding over the Community’s unity. This unity the visitors had been able to verify as being seriously compromised, seeing the profound daily suffering, discouragement, and lack of incentive in many brothers and sisters.

The dispositions that have caused the greatest impact both on the Community and among its friends and in public opinion are undoubtedly the request to br Enzo and to other three members to separate themselves from the Community and from the Fraternities, remaining brothers and sisters of Bose, to live for a certain period each in a separate place, not necessarily monastic. There was no expulsion, only a temporary removal of some members from the Community to which they continue to belong. The specific motives of this part of the provisions were communicated by the pontifical delegate confidentially to each of the brothers and sister involved. These dispositions do not regard in any way questions of doctrinal orthodoxy: there is no prohibition for them to exercise the monastic ministry of listening, of accompanying, of preaching, of study, of teaching, of publication, of biblical, theological, patristic, spiritual research…

As for the dispositions that regard the entire Community, they were communicated to all the members of the Community by a letter of the cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin to the prior br Luciano, which indicated also what needs to be done to guarantee the continuation and the development of the foundation charisma of Bose in the coming years, with

explicit and repeated references to our most precious peculiar traits: the choice of monastic life in celibacy and common life, the presence of brothers and sisters in the same community, the ecumenical composition of its members and involvement in the ecumenical movement, an ecumenism not only spiritual and of intentions, but of a concrete daily common life among brothers and sisters who belong to different Christian Churches.

How should this event of the apostolic visit and its conclusions, which on the one hand was necessary and on the other is a source of disconcertment and of further suffering among the brothers and sisters of Bose, be read with eyes of faith? We believe that the reply cannot be found in casting the blame or the responsibility on these or those, but rather in the lucid acknowledgment that “we are not better” and that the Divisor has not spared us and we have not been able to confront him with enough faith, hope, and charity. Indeed, “we are not better” is not only an adage coined by br Enzo at the beginnings of our life in Bose and used by him also as a title for a book on the monastic life. It is rather a reality that we have always experienced and that now you also, friends and guests, are aware of with pain. This crisis too, which now has exploded in such an undisguised way, in a manner completely unexpected for many of you, has in fact more distant roots.

In this painful situation of our history we seek to continue daily in our life of prayer, of work, and of hospitality, such as many of you have known in all these years, in spite of having to take into account the consequences of the pandemic and the remodeling of the Community after the results of the visit. We can do this only by invoking the Lord’s mercy and pardon, which passes through the pardon that we will be able to offer to each other. We ask you to continue praying for us, so that all of us — in Bose, in the Fraternities, and in other places where we may be living — may continue to seek to be disciples of Christ, may start out again on a path of conversion and of following the Lord, may listen to and put into practice the Gospel day by day. Only in this way can our testimony be credible and we will be able, also together with you, to trace some lineament of the face of the Lord Jesus, so as to render it visible and lovable to our brothers and sisters in the entire world.

The brothers and sisters of Bose
Bose, 19 June 2020
Saint Romualdo, monk