



**Porvoo Communion of Churches**  
**Meeting of Primates and Presiding bishops**  
**Tampere 11-13 October 2022**  
**Session 3**  
**On Vulnerability**  
**Being Church in post-pandemic times:**  
**What we have learned and what signs of hope.**

*The rediscovery of Baptismal Grace*

First, I would like to start with a word of thanks for your invitation for me to share with you a meditation on the topic of Vulnerability in the context of the Covid pandemic. I express my joy for the possibility to be here on a face-to-face meeting, which is in itself, is a sign of hope and confidence in future.

The time of the Covid pandemic was, and still is, a particular time in our collective and individual history. Suddenly and unexpectedly, we faced challenges and demands that we had never imagined before. We were deprived of freedom of movement, unable to be together. Churches closed and we were subjected to a latent threat capable of endangering our own lives. The Coronavirus pandemic has hit us equally, with no exception of social, economic or religion statutes. It was truly global.

With this pandemic, we understood ourselves as equal in our common humanity, and in need of each other to overcome a challenge that can only be overcome with the efforts and togetherness of us all.

We realize that we are all similar and very fragile and truly, that we do not own our time or destiny. We realize our vulnerability. We understood ourselves to be equal in our feelings, needs and expectations, despite our different cultural, social and religious traditions.

Moreover, because of that, because we understood ourselves as equals, we were able to communicate more with each other and also to pray for each other. Truly, this time of confinement was the time of the Holy Spirit! How can it be explained that, despite being so far from each other, we felt so united, close, and with a feeling of brotherhood, according to the same Spirit? How can it be explained that the Church, despite adversity and closed doors, has been rebuilt and reconfigured itself, and has grown in every home and in every family? St. Paul gives us an answer when he says:

*“Do you not know that you do not belong to yourselves, but that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which God has given you?” (I Cor. 6,19).*

Yes, we are truly the Temple of the Holy Spirit wherever we are and in the face of any adversity that we may be experiencing!

During the period of confinement, we had the Grace to live a spirituality “without Temple and Sacraments”. We were thus faced with the need to assume the truth that is in us and to live and express the total spiritual dimension of our being. Without the mediation of Temple and Sacraments, we assume only what is inside us and makes us Christians, that is, the Holy Spirit. We assumed the Baptismal Grace! Therefore, we were Church in a different way, but no less important and significant, since the Spirit is the same!

This feeling and this rediscovery is a blessing since it confronts us with ourselves and our vocation as Baptized in Christ. No virus, no suffering, no adversity, no matter how intense could be, can erase what is indelibly in us and was granted to us by pure love and pure grace. Thus, we can say that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost were already happening on each day of our confinement. Therefore, I know that we have been reborn to faith, and in this way the Church that we are, has also reborn, because times of strong demands are always opportunities for times of strong spiritual and human growth. These are times rich in various and unexpected experiences, which remove us from our “comfort margin” and security, because they reveal our common fragility and need for each other. In its demand of suffering, full of anguish and pain they are times paradoxically

rich. Rich in the courageous assumption of a freedom and responsibility that we now understand as necessary for the foundation of the increasingly fair and solidary society that we all desire. Moreover, rich in still putting at the service of others, the immense spiritual gifts, and the material resources that God, the Lord of History, always grants us.

### *The memory that promotes hope*

Here is our immense gratitude for this "*uncountable multitude*" of men and women of good will, true saints of our time, who since the beginning of this pandemic and with their own sacrifice, have worked selflessly for the well-being of others and for the saving of human lives. I am referring to health workers, scientists, our government officials, cleaning workers, social workers, church priests and pastors and many others. Amidst of much darkness, there was light and the flame of God's Love for the defense of the sacredness values of life, in particular in the care of the weakest and the elderly. The light of God's Love was always present and radiated in the solidarity work of so many men and women. Through them and their examples, Hope presented itself and it demonstrated, once again, that the human being survives with a collective spirit, and that intelligences do not add up, but they multiply.

In this post-COVID time, our Prayers and our Pastoral concern are with all those who mourn the loss of their loved ones, and with those who live with anguish the demands of the present time.

When looking at the post-pandemic phase,

- we cannot forget the traumatic experience that the last few years have represented for millions of people around the world.
- We cannot and do not want to forget the mortal victims. Most of them suffered alone, died far from their loved ones and without the possibility of a last goodbye.
- We cannot forget their family and friends, especially those who could not say goodbye to the hospitalized or institutionalized patients, and all those who were not even able to have a funeral for them.

- We cannot forget the loneliness pandemic, which affected everyone, but particularly the many elderly people, who lost their lives or lucidity, making us see that the lives of the elderly are no less precious than that of the youth.
- We cannot forget children and young people suffering with the experience of depressions and of psychological problems.

Not forgetting is making memory, and when we make memory of the past, something new happens in the present. The Church that we are is by nature the people of a memory. A memory that is support by the command of Jesus : *"Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19)*.

It is the memory of the Dedication, Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we celebrate every Sunday in the Eucharist. Celebrating the Eucharist today is to commemorate the Passion of Christ who today also assumes the passion of all those who suffered and continue to suffer from the Covid pandemic. In every Eucharist celebrated, we too are call to be with those who suffer and in the action of the Holy Spirit to give a sense of resurrection to their suffering. The Eucharistic memory always generates a solidarity presence that leads us to offer our lives for others.

The Sunday Eucharistic memory is always a new breath of the Holy Spirit that relaunches us in our historical journey and prevents us from wanting to go back, and return to the normality of a past that was already in need of renewal.

In this post-pandemic time, it is also necessary to affirm Hope. Hope in the strengthening of fraternal, fair social relationships that bring a future for all, however always aware of the risks of a return to the "old normality"!

Hope because we are more prepared to face together the challenges of the post-pandemic, and others risks that can arise.

A Hope founded on the acts of solidarity, dedication and attention that we have been actors and witnesses throughout this long 'winter'.

The great lesson we learned, was the ability to spread Hope that comes from the good example of generous and loving acts in our lives. What others have done well for us, and continue to do, gives us a sense of Hope and confidence in the journey of life.

## *A Spiritual and Solidarity Communion*

It is true that our meeting takes place in a very difficult world context. The pandemic has increased poverty and social inequalities worldwide, the climate crisis has gained enormous proportions from year to year and we now have the war in Ukraine, here very close to us.

Then it's true, as St. Paul says: "The current days are evil", but it is also the same St. Paul who in his letter to the Corinthians says :

*"Now is the time when God gives his help and the day  
in which salvation can be obtained" (2 Cor. 6:2).*

For him, the time of Faith, the time of the Messiah and the time of building the Kingdom it is not in a future time, but rather at present time, that already gives us the meaning of eternity. In other words, and as has already been mentioned,

*«in St. Paul, true eschatology is perhaps nothing other than the  
transformation of the experience of penultimate things<sup>1</sup>»*

What moves St. Paul and should move us too, is the trust and hope in a present and future time in which God is always present. Because God is the Lord of History and Time, our commitment is expressed in the here and the now of our own existence, without ever losing the horizon of Eternity that Faith in the divinity and Resurrection of Christ gives us.

We live, then, in a time of Kairos, a time of opportunity in which our future, and the future of the next generations, are played out in a very decisive way. The urgency of the present time and the future consequences of what we are doing or not doing now can only be framed in the warning that St. Paul gives us in the letter to the Ephesians:

*"Don't do things in any way, but try to understand well, what is the will of  
the Lord". (Ephesians 5, 17).*

The Church's contribution to the present times is, therefore, to contribute to a culture of individual and collective responsibility in building a better future for future generations.

Porvoo is a Communion of Churches that, in the current context of post-pandemic, war in Europe, and climatic disasters, sees its "raison d'être" and its mission reinforced. "No one is saved alone", only together

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben, at the Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, March 2009

are we able to face the challenges that are offered to us and the answer to these challenges cannot be left just to politicians.

Our Churches have immense human and spiritual resources that must be offered for the service of society. We all realize that the current crisis is not just a health crisis, but also and fundamentally, a spiritual and a crisis of meaning. What each Church knows to develop in a good and beautiful way, will naturally motivate the others. The culture and spirituality of communion and interdependence that underpinned the creation of Porvoo is revealed today to be the correct and a path to be followed.

We are living together as Churches of Porvoo the «Ecumenism of suffering». The suffering caused by the pandemic that does not respect the borders between Christians. The suffering that brings people together and creates unity. The Mission challenge that God offers us as Churches of Porvoo is that we can offer faith, hope and charity together.

We must give special attention and trust to our young people who are already the protagonists of our history.

I recall here the pilgrimage that 30 young people from the Churches of Porvoo made together to Santiago of Compostela in the Summer 2015, with the theme *"Jesus, the fountain of living water in our pilgrimage of life"* (St John 4,5-42 ). They were able to face the demands and dangers of the path together. The hope and joy they felt in being together turned obstacles into paths and paths into new opportunities. Jesus Christ also walked with them in the midst of their difficulties and together, united in Christ they all came out reinforced in their confidence to face the crises and pandemics of life. This pilgrimage of our young people, made in the past, shows us the way forward in the present, and gives us hope for our future and pilgrimage of life.

In order to face the future and the history of salvation that is offered to us, I recall the thought that says:

*"God does not offer us security, but rather the vulnerable love in the child of Bethlehem. It is the Love of God with us that can eliminate our fear»<sup>2</sup>.*

Knowing how to live with our vulnerability and trusting in God, is the greatest lesson and change we learn from the pandemic.

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<sup>2</sup> Konrad Raiser – Christmas 2002

May God bless you all. Thank you!

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