

How do you see the situation of the Church?

The Church is tired, in prosperous Europe and in America. Our culture is out of date; our Churches are big; our religious houses are empty, and the Church's bureaucratic apparatus is growing, and our rites and our vestments are pompous. Do such things really express what we are today? ... Prosperity weighs us down. We find ourselves like the rich young man who went away sad when Jesus called him to become his disciple. I know that it's not easy to leave everything behind. At least could we seek people who are free and closer to their neighbors, as Bishop Romero was and the Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador? Where among us are heroes to inspire us? We must never limit them by institutional bonds.

Who can help the Church today?

Fr. Karl Rahner liked to use the image of embers hidden under ashes. I see in the Church today so many ashes above the embers that I'm often assailed by a sense of powerlessness. How can the embers be freed from the ashes in order to rekindle the flame of love? First of all, we have to look for those embers. Where are the individuals full of generosity, like the Good Samaritan? Who have faith like that of the Roman centurion? Who are as enthusiastic as John the Baptist? Who dare new things, as Paul did? Who are faithful as Mary Magdalene was? I advise the Pope and the bishops to look for twelve people outside the lines for administrative posts [*posti direzionali*]-people who are close to the poorest and who are surrounded by young people and are trying out new things. We need that comparison with people who are on fire so that the spirit can spread everywhere.

What means do you advise against the Church's weariness?

I have three important ones to mention. The first is conversion: the Church has to recognize its own errors and has to travel a radical journey of change, beginning with the Pope and the bishops. The scandals of pedophilia are driving us to undertake a journey of conversion. Questions about sexuality and all the themes involving the body are an example of this. They are important for everyone, at times they're even too important. In this area is the Church still a point of reference or only a caricature in the media?

The second is the Word of God. Vatican II restored the Bible to Catholics. ... Only someone who receives this Word in his heart can be among those who will help the renewal of the Church and will know how to respond to personal questions wisely. The Word of God is simple and seeks as its companion a heart that is listening. ... Neither the clergy nor Church law can substitute for a person's inwardness. All the external rules, the laws, the dogmas were given to us in order to clarify the inner voice and to discern spirits.

For whom are the sacraments? They are the third means of healing. The sacraments are not a disciplinary instrument, but a help for people at moments on their journey and when life makes them weak. Are we bringing the sacraments to the people who need a new strength? I'm thinking of all the divorced people and couples who have remarried and extended families. They need a special protection. The Church maintains the indissolubility of marriage. It is a grace when a marriage and a family succeed. ... The attitude we take toward extended families will determine whether their children come near to the Church. A woman is abandoned by her husband and finds a new companion who is concerned for her and her three children. The second

love succeeds. If this family is discriminated against, not only the woman, but her children, too, will be cut off. If the parents feel external to the Church and do not experience its support, the Church will lose the future generation. Before Communion we pray: "Lord, I am not worthy..." We know we are unworthy. ... Love is grace. Love is a gift. The question whether the divorced can receive Communion would have to be turned upside down. How can the Church come to the aid of complex family situations with the power of the sacraments?

What do you do personally?

The Church is two hundred years behind. Why is it not being stirred? Are we afraid? Afraid instead of courageous? Faith is the Church's foundation—faith, confidence, courage. I'm old and ill and depend on the help of others. The good people around me enable me to experience love. This love is stronger than the feeling of discouragement that I sometimes feel in looking at the Church in Europe. Only love conquers weariness. God is Love.

I have a question for you: "What can you do for the Church?"