Columns
Spirituality



Pope Francis shares a moment of silence with members of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the end of a prayer for migrants and refugees in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Oct. 19, 2023. The service took place around "Angels Unawares," a sculpture by Canadian Timothy Schmalz, depicting a boat with 140 figures of migrants from various historical periods and various nations. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



by María Baffundo

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Many years ago, a good man — entrusted with the care of a great household — dreamed of it with its doors and windows wide open to everyone, and to the Spirit of God. And he invited those who worked alongside him to share that dream.

The good man died, and the windows were opened just a little. But fear, heart-closing rules, and old, paralyzing traditions caused people to forget the purpose: that the house should always be open.

In this new century, a great man arrived — he came from the ends of the earth, and he knew from personal experience what it felt like to be ignored by those in power.

When he arrived at this great house, he immediately flung open the doors and windows. He pulled down the heavy curtains. The sunlight burst in and lit up every corner, revealing dust, hidden secrets, and receipts for past favors.

He noticed people were missing — and above all, the Spirit had been unable to find the images of the Father and the Son.

So, he sprang into action. He threw lies, favors, manmade traditions, and fire and brimstone threats out the window. He removed from the walls the messages of hatred and neglect. He swept away the dust that was suffocating everyone and keeping them from speaking on behalf of others.

Then the true owners of the house began to enter: the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, sinners, children, women, foreigners, people of different faiths. In short, all of us — because we are all part of these categories.

> 'Thank you, Francis, for being fresh air — renewing, true and fraternal. We will keep praying for you, and for ourselves, so that this experience of universal fraternity is never extinguished again': Sr. María Baffundo
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We found each other again, and recognized one another as "*Fratelli Tutti*." We were able to embrace each other, and we felt hope reignite in our hearts.

We came from all nations, of every gender and political belief, dressed in different ways and expressing diverse religious traditions. In the end, we were all there.

The best thing that happened when we listened to this great man speak was that we stopped defending ourselves from others, and we grew closer, without division. And when we looked into each other's eyes, we found the truth: in them, we saw the face of the Father — the very same Father — for we are all, without exception, his children. The joy of fraternity returned, and with it, life itself.

There were the roots of the humanity God dreamed of. And there we realized the time we had lost, and the time we now have in our hands to rebuild.

Once, a Francis in the 13th century, a little brother, received this mission: "Francis, rebuild my church." And those words echoed in the heart of this great man who took on the care of this great house in our days. And because we cannot do anything alone, he invited everyone to take part in the mission. He revived the synodality of the early Christian communities, where everything was discerned and decided together.

The care of the great house is not just about walls or structures. It is about the space where life grows and flourishes. It is the earth, the air we breathe, the hands that feed us, the beauty of nature that nourishes the senses, the water that purifies us, the death that unites us ... and together we sang once again, "*Laudato Si*'!"

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We women, in this renewed house, stepped out of the shadows. Our witness — of service, of deep listening, of giving life, of accompanying the vulnerable, of standing firm to support others, of continuing to be the soul of our communities — was finally recognized and valued.

And especially those of us who chose to follow Jesus more closely received a renewed call to serve every form of life and to be protagonists in this reconstruction. Because it is well known that many "ministers" lost their way, thinking that the

rebuilding could be done with more power, more money, more honors, and more laws to control others.

Today, this great man — Francis, or Jorge Mario to many — went to enjoy the presence of God and the well-deserved rest from his great labor.

The church must carry on the dream of rebuilding. The Spirit is with us who remain to continue the work.

We have inherited his tenderness, his open, genuine smile, his hands ready to bless and embrace, his mercy offered to all. Francis was for us, the image of the Father's love.

Today, our hearts may feel sorrow. We can weep freely, knowing we won't hear him say again: "Don't forget to pray for me." But we are sure he continues to encourage us — with his smile and through his presence in our hands.

Thank you, Francis, for being fresh air — renewing, true and fraternal. We will keep praying for you, and for ourselves, so that this experience of universal fraternity is never extinguished again.

And I give thanks especially for that good man, John XXIII, who first cracked open the windows with the Second Vatican Council ...

We embrace you, Francis!