



## **Messa di apertura dell'XI Capitolo generale (29 maggio 2022)**

### **INITIAL GREETING**

Dearest Brothers,

With joy we welcome each of you, coming from every part of the world, to participate in the XI General Chapter of the Society of St Paul. It is an event which we start in front of the Eucharistic Celebration in this Sunday of the Ascension of the Lord, the day in which we commemorate the 56<sup>th</sup> World Day of Social Communications.

We thank the Lord for having given us the grace in this synodal event in a time in which the world still suffers the consequences of the health crisis caused by Covid-19 and assisted also by some situations of conflict, among which is that in Ukraine.

At the beginning of this Chapter, which opens a new page in the story of our Congregation, we want to thank the General Councilors, the Officials and the many confreres who have made their contribution in these last seven years of service of the General Government that is now ending its mandate.

In communion with all persons who have accompanied us with their prayers, among which are our confreres of our communities (in a particular way the sick) and the members of the Pauline Family, we pray for a good outcome of this XI General Chapter. We entrust our works to Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life, font of every good.

### **HOMILY**

Dearest brothers,

In the readings of the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, we have listened twice (in the first reading and the Gospel), to the story of the ascension of Jesus in heaven. Jesus has been taken from heaven to reach the presence of God the Father, to live in full communion with him and show us that our destiny is to thread the same journey and reach the same finish line. At the same time, the return of Jesus to the Father does not mean being taken away from his disciples, but a more profound presence in their life – by means of his Spirit – to continue his work of salvation by means of their testimony. In fact, Jesus promised: “If I do not go, the Consoler will not come to you, if instead I go I will send it” (Jn 16:5-7).

Jesus returns to the Father and the disciples remain in the world not to linger and “look at the sky” (Acts 1:11), as the Acts of the Apostles narrates, but to “put themselves on the journey” as “missionaries”, as communicators of all that which they have learned

living with Jesus who died and rose again. They begin as testimonies of all that has happened (Lk 24:48). In this sense, they become the first ring of that long chain which will unfold through the ages from testimony to testimony, to faith announced, listened to, and transmitted until it arrives in our days.

Now we are called to make the experience of love in Jesus' measure and to announce to all peoples the conversion and pardon of sins (Lk 24\_47). We are called today to live in communion with Him, who for us is Master, Way, Truth, and Life, and to give witness to his Gospel. And we do it as consecrated persons, in the footsteps of the apostle Paul, in the light of the charism of communication that we have inherited from Blessed James Alberione.

In the same way, at opening of our XI General Chapter, in this Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, we celebrate the 56<sup>th</sup> World Day of Social Communications which invites us to deepen the reality of communication under the aspect of listening.

The message of Pope Francis on this occasion, affirms that listening is a dimension of love and is truly an essential attitude in the process of communication and carries the same activity of evangelization. In this prospective, we can affirm that the disciples of the Resurrection – from the past to the present – journey in the word to announce the Gospel. They are called to be persons who listen.

In every way, in a time when we are losing the capacity to put into practice this decisive dimension of the grammar of communication – and immersed in the variety of relations offered by digital technology -, we are exhorted not simply to “listen”, but – insisted the Pope – “to listen with the ear of the heart” and assume an attitude that does not concern only the sense of hearing, but involves the whole person.

This aspect of communication obviously regards all persons, but particularly those who follow Christ, and more so directly us Paulines who for institutional charism are called to be men of communication of the Gospel by means of our personal witness and with the diverse technical languages of communication. “Penetrate all thought and human knowledge with the Gospel” (AD, 87-88), as our Founder would say.

The message of this Day, rich in significance for our life and mission, is very much opportune for us who are beginning our General Chapter. It is a strong invitation to make this synodal event a profound experience of listening and of dialogue. It is an “opening” of the ear and the heart to God, to the needs of persons and of our communities, to society with its richness and scarcity, to the desires of the interactants and receivers of our apostolate (where and how they live!), to the actual cultural reality of communication, to the signs of the times. In fact, “only giving attention to those we listen to, to things we listen to, to how we listen, can we grow in the art of communicating. Its center is not a theory or technique, but the capacity of the heart which renders proximity possible” (Pope Francis).

In this Chapter we are particularly called to listen with the ear of the heart to the appeal that comes from its central theme. It is expressed in the title inspired by Rm 12:2,

that invites us to not conform ourselves to the mentality of this world with its attraction but to leave ourselves transformed and renew our way of thinking. It is interesting to note that the apostle Paul did not say “transform” the world – obviously in the light of the Gospel – but “transform yourselves”. To transform, the world, yes, but first and above all the world that is inside of us. This way we can work to transform the world outside of us. To transform ourselves renewing our way of thinking “to be able to discern the will of God, that which is good, pleasing to him and perfect”.

It is with these objectives that we are called to live the XI General Chapter, to listen to the spirit and all the realities which involves us in plotting the road we must take as a Congregation. It will bring us to be true artisans of communion to prophetically announce the joy of the Gospel in the culture of communication.

I end remembering the words of Pope Francis addressed to us Paulines and to readers and collaborators of *Famiglia Cristiana*, during the audience give last May 21, which was inspired by the Letter to the Hebrews. The author affirms that “we are not persons who go back” (Hb 10:39), rather, “we go forward with the strength of the Gospel, with the communicative strength that creates communities, not to go back creating small groups of self-preservation, that ends in transforming our souls to museum pieces. Be attentive to this”.

Jesus Master lives in our midst to illumine us that in a synodal way, we listen to each other. In the footsteps of the Pauline charism we can look ahead, attentive to the signs of the times, and in search of the best roads in the “sweet and soothing joy of evangelization” (EG 10). This was also the longing of St Paul VI, great connoisseur, and admirer of our mission, of which we are commemorating today.

May Mary Queen of Apostle, St Paul, Blessed James Alberione and “the saints of the Pauline Family” be with us. Amen.