



HOMILY OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING MASS OF THE INTERCHAPTER

15 FEBRUARY 2018

We start our Interchapter exactly at the start of Lent, which is the liturgical period of preparation for the celebration of the Easter of the Lord and, therefore, a favorable time, a time of conversion. Lent is also an opportune time for the rediscovery and deepening of the authentic discipleship of Christ, which presupposes meeting with Him. This meeting, however, cannot be limited to knowing him only from the outside, but must commit us to share life with Him, so as to assume his plan of salvation with all the consequences that derive from it. It is that which we have heard from the Gospel of Luke: *«If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me»* (Lk 9,23).

To take on the burden of the cross of Jesus, means, for the disciple, entering freely in the logic of love which gives itself, which spends its life for others. Jesus, who comes into this world not to do his will but the will of the Father, teaches us regarding life: either you give it or you keep it jealously for yourself: if you give it, you find blessedness; if you keep it for yourself, you find death. This is the sense of the final addition of the Gospel: *«He who wants to save his own life, will lose it, but he who loses his life because of me, will save it»* (Lk 9,24).

This does not mean that the start of following Jesus corresponds to one choosing death. Exactly the opposite is true: it is a choice for love which definitely reveals itself as a choice for life, the same life mentioned by the passage of the reading taken from the book of Deuteronomy which we have heard today (Dt 30,19). In one's option for Jesus there is the fundamental choice for love which leads to life.

Him, Jesus – who for us is the Master, the Way, the Truth and the Life – we are called to love, to hear his voice and to let ourselves be touched by Him. Listening is an attitude of fundamental communication and it cannot be ignored in the process of conversion in order to reach Life in Him. Conversion is the necessary way for us if we want not only personal renewal in our following of Jesus, but also communitarian and apostolic renewal. Let us remember that the evangelical and Pauline concept of “conversion” is: “change of mentality”. It is true that such a process of change can become taxing and transform itself and into a true cross, but it is a pain which purifies, saves and sets free.

It is exactly in this perspective that our last General Chapter finds itself, when it affirms that in order to renew our apostolic thrust in our mission to do all for the Gospel, what is needed is the conversion of ourselves, of our communities and of



our apostolic structures. We note that, as a first step, there is always the person. In fact, it is impossible to change the various areas of life if you don't start from the renewal of the person.

In the first place, it is the person, in the deepest part of his being, that makes the choice of receiving and giving witness to the Gospel. Thus it happened with the apostle Paul, who is our main reference in our mission. The activity of evangelization of saint Paul is closely connected with the person of the evangelizer. Paul is a “converted” person who allows himself to be enlightened by Jesus, as glass that allows itself to be crossed by the light. And to us, what happens? As our Founder says: *«If the sun were even resplendent, but if the glass is dim, the light does not pass through. The Gospel is resplendent: «I am the light of the world» [Jn 8, 12], but if through us it does not pass well because our hearts or our lives are not in the right places, what shall we have? How much responsibility in the consequences of our life, of our apostolate, in the accounting we shall have to give to God!»*¹.

If we allow ourselves to be enlightened by Christ, it will be possible to keep far away the darkness of individualism, of arrogant behaviour, of indifference, of resignation, of speaking ill of the confrere, of seeing only the negative aspects in persons, in the Congregation, in the Church... If we allow ourselves to be enlightened by Christ, it will be possible to enter into a new life, which does not mean ignoring the problems, but facing them with faith and hope, giving our part to make better the quality of our personal, communitarian and social lives.

Truly, we need personal conversion in order to live in reconciled communities, an important condition to carry forward our mission which requires the need to renew oneself – with renewed persons and communities! – so as to respond to the needs of men and women. In this sense, pope Francis² talks of “pastoral and missionary” conversion which cannot leave things as they are. In other words, we do not need a simple “administration”: it is necessary to live in a permanent state of mission.

It is useful to consider the words which Card. Elia Dalla Costa at the *General Congress of the States of Perfection* said long time ago, on 26 November 1950, which however remains very actual and which Fr. Alberione has made his own when considering our specific apostolate using communication: *“Either we look courageously at reality, beyond the little world that surrounds us, and so we see as urgent the need for a radical revolution of mentality and method ; or else in the space of a few years we shall have created a desert around the Master of life; and life shall rightly eliminate us as dead, useless and cumbersome branches”*³.

May the Lord help us, not only to make us aware of this “prophecy”, but also to do something concrete, before it becomes too late. So then there is no other way except conversion. Needed for us Paulines is personal and communitarian

¹ James Alberione, *Explanation of the Constitutions*, 1962, pp. 235, 236.

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 25.

³ James Alberione, *CISP*, p. 807.



conversion that leads us to a “pastoral and missionary” conversion, in the culture of communication, so as to answer the challenge of evangelization in creative fidelity to the charism which we have inherited from our Founder.

The Interchapter is a favorable time and one of grace, a time to deepen our reality (personal, communitarian, spiritual, formative, apostolic, etc.) situated in the world wherein we live. It is also a propitious time to evaluate the institutional journey which we have made until now and to relaunch ourselves with bravery towards the future, confirming again our commitment to live the Gospel and to do all to announce it, an itinerary that we are called to do in continuous conversion, if we want scrutinize a reality that is always new.

Let us entrust ourselves to Mary our Mother, venerated in this place as “Aparecida”, represented by the small statue which has been “fished out” by the net of three poor fishermen from the waters of the river Paraiba. An interesting detail is that inside the Sanctuary the water is portrayed in some panels and also in the ornament of the stairs that rise toward the altar. As we know, water has very many meanings in the area of faith, in the first place in reference to our Baptism, but also and above all to Christ, who has said: *«If any one is thirsty, let him come to me, and let him drink who believes in me. As the Scriptures say: From his bosom shall spring forth rivers of living water»* (Jn 7,37-38). Through the hands of Mary we can drink of this Water to acquire the strength we need to carry forward our life and our mission for the good of the people of God that we are called to love and serve by means of communication and in communication.