Monday, IV week of Easter

Acts 11,1-18; Ps 41 and 42; Jn 10,1-10

Greetings at the start of the Eucharistic celebration

As we observe with supernatural eyes, the Spirit is present in our assembly, suggesting and strengthening our prayer to the Father for the gift of his Son Jesus. We entrust to the Spirit our thanks for having received the gift of faith, the Pauline vocation and the responsibility of participating in the IX General Chapter; for having given to the Congregation holy Paulines who have lived and live with exemplariness our charism.

Spiritually present with us are also all the Paulines of the world who with Him thank God for the good that our Congregation has accomplished in the course of so many years through the variety of her apostolic works: only God knows how the Pauline charism has helped in the salvation of so many people in the entire world.

We are also accompanied by the prayer of the other Institutions that form the Pauline Family. By will of blessed Alberione our Congregation is the "animator" of the Pauline Family and therefore we too must be aware of this our responsibility during our IX General Chapter.

Among the many intentions of prayer that each one carries within himself at this moment, I invite you to also have a special thought for the General Councilor Bro. Francesco Chessa, called to contemplate God "face to face" on 30 August 2007 and replaced in the delicate task by Bro. Giuseppe Galli.

So that the Spirit may worthily inspire our prayer, we renew our desire to collaborate with God in the construction of his kingdom by asking forgiveness for our sins.

Homily

Our Eucharistic assembly is made up of persons coming from the nations of the five continents but all of us have in common the gift of baptism, the Pauline vocation and we are gathered in the Spirit to live together the ninth General Chapter of our Congregation. We reflect on the bible readings just proclaimed to find light for our intelligence and operative audacity for the capitular theme "**Rekindle the gift you have received.** ***Creative fidelity at one hundred years of the Pauline charism.***"

In the climate of the liturgical spirituality of the Easter season, the passages of the Word of God are a constant catechesis that instructs our faith on the meaning of the resurrection presented not only as a personal event of Christ, but also as ecclesial effects that derive from the experience that Christ is alive.

The **first reading** (Acts 11,1-18) is the discourse that the apostle Peter addresses to the "circumcised believers" of Jerusalem to justify his trip to Cesarea, his entering the

house of an uncircumcised man and for having him baptized. The Christians of Jerusalem coming from Judaism were convinced that faith in Christ was reserved only to those who belonged to the Hebrew people.

Even Peter was certain that faith in Christ was an exclusive right of the Hebrew people until the Spirit made him live some experiences that led him to change his idea: the ecstasy while he was praying at Jaffa, the invitation that some persons addressed to him to go to Cesarea and the descent of the Spirit upon the Roman centurion Cornelius and the members of his family.

In explaining what he has done at Cesarea in the house of Cornelius, Peter recognizes with the community of Jerusalem that also the pagans have received the same Spirit of Christ: "*If therefore God has given them the same gift that he has given to us, who have believed in the Lord Jesus, who was I to be able to oppose God? "*

Emphasizing that God has given "the same gift" both to the circumcised during Pentecost at Jerusalem and to the uncircumcised during Pentecost at Cesarea, thanks to the action of the Spirit, the early Christian community commit an historical step for the future of evangelization: "*Therefore, also to the pagans God has granted that they be converted, so that they may have life."*

The theological narration of Luke, that reserves half of the book of the Acts to describe the apostolic activity of Paul among the uncircumcised, emphasizes that they are Peter and the Church of Jerusalem who, through the work of the Spirit, become aware and start the mission among the gentiles.

The description of the universality of the Gospel both for the circumcised and for the uncircumcised helps us to "rekindle the gift" of the novelty that the Spirit through blessed James Alberione has introduced in the Church at the start of the 1900's: "**written preaching side by side with oral preaching.**" In order to realize the desire of Christ: "*Come ye all to me*" (Mt 11,28), Fr. Alberione, a diocesan priest who lives in his ministry the reality of a faith confined in a church where the faithful are getting less and less, through the adoption of the press as a new "priestly ministry" causes the faith to come out from the traditional language and places to elaborate, with divine inspiration and ecclesiastical approval, a project of "new evangelization" that makes use of the press and successively of whatever form of communication.

Using a bold similitude, we can say that as the early Church, through Peter and Paul, opens the Gospel to the uncircumcised, so we Paulines have received the charism of making possible the experience of Christ to those who very often don't come to church, but are constant users of every form and language of present-day communication. The parish of our charism is the world of communication.

In the **passage of the Gospel** (Jn 10,1-10), Jesus addresses the Pharisees, persons who don't accept his way of living and explaining faith in God. Through the words that John places on the lips of Christ to describe the qualities of a good Pastor, the evangelist presents the identity of Christ and the quality of the relations that he has with those who believe in him.

The identity of the good pastor is described first of all in contrast to one who is not a pastor but "a thief, a bandit, a brigand, a stranger," with an aim "to steal, to slaughter and destroy" the sheep. The physiognomy of the good pastor is instead the one to whom the guard opens the door of the sheepfold, whose voice the sheep hear, who calls each sheep by name, who leads them out, walks ahead of them and they follow him because they recognize his voice.

In order to guide the possible interpretations of this image of the good pastor, Jesus affirms: "*I am the door of the sheep.*" The good pastor coincides with the door because he is the way to assure the sheep "life in abundance."

Jesus does not affirm: "**I am the door of the sheepfold, but that he is the door of the sheep**" and with this identification he puts himself in contrast to those who have come before him who are "robbers and brigands." The severe judgment of Jesus on those who have preceded him is a drastic affirmation to make understood the novelty of Christ: he starts a new type of faith where there is no need of "**doors for the sheepfold,**" because there is just one "**door for the sheep.**" Thus is put in place the accent not on the door of the sheepfold and the protective function of the sheepfold for a life that is always at risk, but on the door of the sheep that makes sure for the sheep the freedom to "come and go" and the calm security to "find pasture."

As Paulines we must have the courage to "rekindle the gift received," making ours the consequences of the definition of Christ as "door of the sheep." We must not think of the Pauline charism as **a sheepfold** built in order to be protected from the dangers of changes in communication, in culture and society, but as a **door** concerned with offering "abundance of life" even to one who has lost his faith, to atheists, to agnostics, to those who live other religious experiences, to the new generations filled with the anthropological categories of the communication of today.

The boldness of **creative fidelity** must know how to unite the knowledge of the past, the reality of the present and the projections of the future: rekindling the Pauline charism in the context of Easter time must make us abandon the haste of the women who go with precious spices to the tomb to embalm a corpse, and to assume the determination to put ourselves on the road like the two disciples of Emmaus in order to announce the risen life.

Let us entrust ourselves to the Spirit so that he may rekindle our **Pauline priesthood** exercised in communication on the model of Christ, who is the **door of the sheep** worrying for the recipients for whom to give his life in abundance, not the **door of the sheepfold** who would change the apostles of the 99 sheep that have fled outside into guardians of the single sheep that has remained inside.

Ariccia (Rome), Monday 26 April 2010

Fr. Silvio SASSI, SSP
Superior General