

*Cuernavaca, 29 April 2007*

## Interchapter Mexico

Homily of Fr. Silvio Sassi, Superior General of the SSP,  
at the official closing of the Intercapitular Assembly



Gathered in the Spirit in the name of the Lord, in communion with all the ecclesial community, we celebrate today the **Fourth Sunday of Easter** and the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. As Paulines we conclude with praise to God, our **Intercapitular Assembly**. It is in the context of this moment of Pauline life that we want above all to express our gratitude to God for having prayed, meditated, observed and programmed together for the benefit of our loved Congregation. And from praise we pass on to briefly **meditate** and apply to ourselves the Word of God just proclaimed.

The **first reading** (Acts 13: 14,43-52) presents to us the preaching of Paul and Barnabas in the city of Antioch in Pisidia. The two apostles address themselves first of all to the Jews and proselytes, but in front of the obstacles placed by other Jews who “with curse contradict the affirmations of Paul” they decide to preach to the pagans. Explaining their behaviour, Paul and Barnabas affirm: it is necessary to address ourselves first to the Jews, but because the majority of them refused to believe, God sends us to others: “**I have made you like a light to the gentiles, that you may bring the salvation to the ends of the earth**”.

Seeing that “the Word of God is diffused in all the regions”, the Jews, jealous of the success, set up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas who had to leave the city, “**while the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit**.”

The **second reading** (Rev 7:9,14-17) is a mystical vision of an immense crowd surrounding the Lamb on the throne. The explanation to this celestial scene is given: “**They are those who have passed through great tribulation and have washed their vestments making them shine with the blood of the Lamb**”.

Now they are in a condition completely different from the earthly existence because **“the Lamb who is in their midst shall be their Shepherd and shall guide them to the springs of living water.”**

In the **Gospel verse** (Jn 10:27-30) Jesus speaks of his mission using the image of the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep: the sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd, the shepherd knows them and they follow him, the shepherd gives them eternal life and the sheep do not get lost nor taken away with the strength of the shepherd. A particular relationship as such, that is not exhausted in human experience, is possible because Jesus affirms: **“I and the Father are one”**.

Let us apply this Word of God to that which we have lived together during these days and the consequences which derives from it recommencing with our ordinary life.

Together we have put in practice that which our **Constitutions** foresees for the Intercapitular Assembly: after three years from the General Chapter, to verify what, at diverse levels of responsibility, has been put in practice of the operative guidelines and, according to the task, **treated** the most urgent problems of the Congregation.

The Word of God which we have heard today and thanks to the light of the Spirit, has been present, in an **explicit mode**, in all our prayers, thoughts and works together and now, in an **explicit way**, we must make ours in the phase of re-launch that awaits us.

In the accounting which we have realised together, reviewing the various components of Pauline life, we have not forgotten and, more than ever at the conclusion we must recall, the theme of the VIII General Chapter: **To Be St Paul, Alive Today. A Congregation that strains forward.**

We must observe with attention our reality as a Congregation making ours the spirit of St. Paul and of Blessed James Alberione: we have received a **vocation** and we have responded with a **consecration** to be sent in **mission** as **apostles of communication**.

To be St. Paul alive today, considering the first reading of today, means perceiving as individuals, community and the whole Congregation, to have received a mission: **to preach Christ in all the communication of today: media, multimedia, and the web**. To evangelise in communication is the reason for being of the Pauline charism in the Church and nothing and no one can ever minimize, twist or annul this **unique mission**. Mission in communication is that which gives sense to all that we are and do. If we take away communication, we betray the Pauline charism. Using a paradoxical and audacious image, as Paul passed from the Jews to the pagans, Paulines pass from oral preaching to the written preaching, from the parish to the people of communication. In this comparison there is the continuity from Paul to Blessed James Alberione.

The second reading offers to the Pauline charism a **supernatural dimension** which should always motivate and inspire: it is the gift of faith and the prospective of eternal life in the company of God which is the motor of our evangelisation in communication. Devoid of God at the beginning and end, our existence cannot be called Pauline. We are only true apostles if we have “the thought of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16) and we do not have the desolate pretension to be witnesses without seen nothing and without hearing nothing in the company of Christ. Without communion with God, we are mercenaries of the sacred, caricatures of religious publishing and obsessed by a public success irreconcilable as pastoral preoccupation.

Our witness to Christ through the publishing initiatives must find in the Gospel verse today its pastoral methodology: **“My sheep listen to my voice and I know them and they follow me”**. Evangelisation in communication signifies together in listening, knowing and following. Being the “co-operators of God” (1 Cor 3:9), we must, with the same attention, listen, know and follow God and our recipients. Already in *Notes in Pastoral Theology*, our Blessed Founder synthesized pastoral sanctity with this trinomial: “I-God-people” (no. 2) asking himself thus: “How is it possible to do good to those whom one does not know?” (Id., no. 84).

The Pauline apostolic witness needs a re-launch of its pastoral character: to know our recipients, listen to their needs and follow the changes.

From when our Blessed James Alberione has taught us a sacramental vision of all the phases of our apostolate, the time to preoccupy ourselves in a special way of our recipients, of our faithful, has come, if we want seriously **“To be St. Paul alive today”** and continually desire “to make oneself all to all” (1 Cor 9:22).

We cannot only cultivate right preoccupations of orthodoxy in the faith, but must necessarily be sensible to how to be made understood: good enclosures do not exist, as fortresses. What is needed are shepherds able to form adult Christian faith.

*Cuernavaca, Sunday 29 April 2007, 12.00 pm*

Fr Silvio SASSI, SSP  
*Superior General*