



HOMILY

47th General Chapter Opening Mass Rome, 6 October 2018

As we gather here to begin our General Chapter in faith and prayer, and as we celebrate the Eucharist (the *Memoria Passionis*) in which we recall with greater love the Passion of Our Lord Jesus - the celebration of our charism - I ask myself, and I ask you these questions for your personal reflection:

- How are you feeling at this moment? What is in your mind?
- What thoughts and feelings are preoccupying you at this moment?
- What is the disposition with which you come to the Chapter? Free, open, rearing to go, afraid, armed with answers, seeking inspiration, listening heart, troubled, nervous, calm and peaceful, show my competency, better than others, filled with questions, hopeful and positive, cynical, tired, empty...?

I am reminded of the story of the young man seeking enlightenment/God.... "*like this glass, you are too full of yourself. And until you empty yourself, there is no room for God to fill you.*"

The figure of Job is given to us to gaze upon as we begin our Chapter. As you know, Job was a very wealthy, righteous and upright man who was blessed with everything anyone would want and certainly sufficient in himself. But the story leads us to see that his 'true blessedness' really came after he was brought down from the heights by persecution, great suffering, trials and temptation. Job's response to his miserable situation is what we can learn from. Ultimately, it was his **perseverance, openness and trust in God** that allowed God to fill Job's life with true blessings. As we hear in the first reading today: "*Thus the Lord blessed the **latter days** of Job more than his **earlier ones.***"

Let us listen to the words of Job as he acknowledges his **nothingness** and God's **all** (the same concepts that St Paul of the Cross used):

*"I know that you can do all things
and that no purpose of yours can be hindered.
I have dealt with great things that I do not understand;
things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know.
I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you.
Therefore I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes.*

I want to emphasize that our gathering at this Chapter is more than a meeting; it is an **event of faith** in which we call upon the guidance and light of the Holy Spirit.... "*Lord, let your face shine on me.*" (Resp. Ps.) We are not an organization or a corporation holding its 6-yearly business meeting with its shareholders. Rather, we come together as a community of disciples gathered around the Cross and Passion of Jesus. We gather as a people of hope in God's promises who are listening, searching and discerning the will of God. As such, we must come to the celebration and process of the Chapter, not full of ourselves, but **empty of self** with a lot of room for God to intervene and fill us with wisdom and blessings. And so, like Job, we too want to disown every attitude of self-possession and self-sufficiency and we desire to repent – turn to God - as we keep on praying: "*Lord, let your face shine on me.*"

We learn, further, from today's Gospel the disposition which Jesus wants us to have as we come to this Chapter: "**childlike**" – open, honest, truthful, obedient, humble. When the disciples return from their mission and proudly announce to Jesus: "*Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name*", Jesus responds to them with these words: "*Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*" In other words, Jesus was saying to them that they were only able to accomplish what they did, not because of their own power or strength, but because they were open, willing and trusting to be instruments that God used **in the name of Jesus**.

And so, with joy in the Holy Spirit, Jesus prays:

*"I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned
you have revealed them to the childlike."*

We are all "wise and learned" in the eyes of the world and sometimes this can trap us in that sense of self-sufficiency, power and control. And we know of the

consequences from this way of being. But, as evangelizers, we are to be “wise and learned” in the mission of the Gospel, i.e. to be “child-like”. In the present “signs of the times” this is a call to **authenticity** which Pope Paul VI said exudes truth and honesty especially among young people, while the inauthentic smacks of artificiality and falseness.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* #150, Pope Francis writes: *“people prefer to listen to witnesses: they ‘thirst for authenticity’ and ‘call for evangelizers to speak of a God whom they themselves know and are familiar with, as if they were seeing him’.”*

It is interesting that in the pre-Synodal meeting of young people in preparation for the Synod of Bishops which is taking place right now here in Rome, the young people had this to say: *“Today’s young people are longing for an authentic Church. We want to say, especially to the hierarchy of the Church, that they should be a transparent, welcoming, honest, inviting, communicative, accessible, joyful and interactive community.”*

Job died “old and full of years” because he persevered throughout his suffering with hope in the promises of God. Jesus blessed his disciples because of their child-likeness: *“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see...many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”* The young people today are pleading and throwing out a challenge to us to be authentic witnesses and evangelizers of the Gospel. All these dispositions are what is required in us for the fruitfulness of our Chapter and renewal of our mission.

Finally, as we begin this General Chapter we are strengthened by the spiritual presence and prayers of our Passionist brother: **Isidore de Loor** whom we commemorate today. Brother Isidore lived a life of humility and simplicity as a Passionist religious. In the midst of much suffering through illness and in great pain, he was totally committed to and dependent upon God’s providence and care which, in turn, motivated him to forget himself and minister humbly in a service of welcome and hospitality to the poor and needy.

As we begin our General Chapter, may Blessed Isidore inspire us to accept our challenges with a listening and discerning heart and, with confidence, may we allow God’s spirit to fill us with courage and wisdom to live our mission anew: *“to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate.”*

~ Joachim Rego CP
Superior General

Readings

Job 42:1-3,5-6,12-16

Ps. 119

Luke 10:17-24