

SUPERIOR GENERAL'S ADVENT-CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2018

My dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,

The liturgical season of Advent is a time of preparation for the great feast of Christmas... 'great feast' because it is the celebration of God-becoming-human in the birth of the person of Jesus. How wonderful to contemplate this mystery of the Incarnation! This preparation time needs to be in a planned way and calls for commitment. Its aim is **renewal** of our commitment to follow Jesus. However, it is not our place to measure what happens. Whatever 'happens' will be what God does; it is beyond me. We must create the conditions and wait in hope; God will make the tree bear fruit.

Advent is a time of **WAITING**... for what? For an encounter with the Lord who is coming and whose presence we eagerly expect. This is not something that one can control or make happen by following some simple steps. Like Mary (an important figure in this Advent time), one must adopt a contemplative stance of **LISTENING** to all aspects of one's life. One must just **WAIT** – in anticipation with **PATIENCE** and **HOPE**. But, to wait is not something which we like to do. It seems empty and a waste of precious time. Especially today, we live in times of "the instant"... we want answers and a response immediately, otherwise we become impatient. After all, we live in the age of Google, Instagram and Twitter which provides immediate and instant results by the mere press of a button. Waiting is not productive; too much valuable time is lost.

One can almost say that in today's technologically advanced world, we are in danger of becoming some kind of 'automated being' to the detriment of what we really are and created by God to be: **human being** – a sensate being in relationship with the natural and spiritual world, created in the image and likeness of the Divine. And, in the birth and coming of Jesus, we are celebrating humanity in its fullness and goodness... God-becoming-human.

It is a month since we concluded the 47th General Chapter, at the end of which I said some things which I want to repeat here and encourage you to give it personal and communal consideration....

The gathering and journey of the Chapter that we have just finished, or perhaps, are just beginning, is not just about what we have produced. It is about the **experience** of what has happened in each one of us. Reflect on the **experience**!

From the beginning we reflected on **renewing our mission** in the light of **renewing ourselves**. I hope and pray that each one of us in this time has come to some newness – a renewed growth in ourselves.

How have I turned back to the Lord? How am I leaving today committed to listening more to the Lord?

In this Chapter there were times when we heard very prophetic words and prophetic exchanges – especially those times when we had the opportunity to share from our hearts.

And some of the prophetic words/phrases I remember are these:

- ***“We want to be welcoming, hospitable communities, schools of prayer.”***

How are you, with your community of brothers and sisters going to make that effective and real?

What does it mean to be a ‘school of prayer’?

Is it only about what happens inside our house, our building, when people gather for common prayer at certain times of the day? Is it just about that?

And **what is prayer?** Is it just a performance, carrying out an obligation, or is it truly **an encounter** with Jesus? With God?

How do we open our communities, our houses, our monasteries, our retreats so that they are at the service of the mission?

Can we perhaps think of every community, every house being a ‘Shrine’ to the Passion of Jesus? A place where people feel welcome and hospitality – where they are allowed to enter in and not just stand at the door; a space where they truly **experience and encounter the presence of Love** which comes from the Passion of Jesus.

- ***“We want to go to the peripheries, to the margins, to the places where no one wants to go.”***

How will we translate that to be practical in reality?

Will we just leave it to the Major Superiors?... it’s their problem.

Will the Major Superiors encourage us to follow the call of the Spirit, or will they say: “No, no, no – there is too much else to do right here? We have enough to do.”

What is the charism asking of us? The charism is the gift of the Spirit, the grace of God for the good of the community, for making God’s kingdom come.

In his address during the audience, Pope Francis spoke prophetic words to us. He challenged us to respond with ***“a creative fidelity to the charism.”***

The charism is not something which is limited, contained in a box. It is the life-giving force of the Spirit and blows where it wills. We must not control it, but listen to the Spirit.

- ***“We need to listen.”***

So many times we have heard that said at the Chapter.

From listening, we need to discern: “What is the Lord asking of us? How is the Lord calling us to make our charism alive today – to live it with fidelity and in a creative way today?”

Yes, I believe we can do it! But we need courage. We need to be bold. We need to take risks, even if it fails, it doesn't matter.

Let us be prepared break out from just sticking to what we ordinarily do and how we do it.

- ***“Listen to the signs of the times.”***

What is happening now? What is happening in the church, in the world and in our lives? And, how do we perceive this? How are we to respond?

These are the prophetic things that we spoke about, we shared about, particularly in the three areas we want to focus on: **community life, initial and ongoing formation, and revitalization of solidarity in the Configurations.**

During our Advent preparation we will hear the call from the greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist imploring: *“Prepare the way of the Lord!”*

In what ways will we listen? How will we respond – both personally and communally?

We need to be prophetic. To pray for courage. To pray for boldness. To pray that we not be imprisoned, paralyzed by our fears which keeps us bound within limits. But prophecy demands that we break out and be freed to speak and witness **for God and with God and in God.**

Like the wise gardener who says: “Don't cut that tree down; it hasn't given it's fruit – **as yet.** But give it time; be patient”, we must rest in the hope that the Lord will come when it is right. We wait; we listen.

So, let's not be discouraged, without **a sense of hope** - not a hope that everything will be fine. But with a **hope** that is **trust in God.**

Let us be patient. Let us wait. Let us continue to listen, to reflect, to pray, to encounter the Lord...and God will show us the way in Jesus whose coming we are preparing during this time.

Let us continue to struggle and search and not give way to discouragement. But, **trust in God – WAIT and HOPE.**

In this season of Advent, inspire us to be a people of hope.

Encourage us not to be greedy for material possessions, but for justice and truth.

Enflame us with a love for others, which crosses boundaries of race, religion and nationality.

Stir within us an appreciation of the immense beauty of the earth.

Be with us, Lord, at this time, that we may be a people of hope.

AMEN.

~ Fr Joachim Rego CP (Sup. Gen.)