

Missionary because of being a disciple of Jesus

Here we are at the conclusion of our 27th General Chapter.

Nevertheless, we could say that it is only now that the Chapter is beginning for all the confreres. In fact, our Moderator, Sister Micheline Tremblay, told us at the outset that it would only be at the end of these 5 weeks that we would really feel ready for the Chapter. She was absolutely right! Today, we see more clearly on certain issues and we have taken firm orientations on many. As Sister Micheline and Fr. Dominic Apee reminded us, I feel that we are now ready to be ambassadors for Christ and his message of thoroughly renewed hope received in the course of this Chapter.

During what is known as her second conversion, Teresa of Avila had asked for three graces: to be visited by God; to be able to recognise him; and to be able to speak about it (to another). This has been our prayer and our experience throughout these 5 weeks of community discernment. Countless people and communities have carried us in their prayers so *that the Spirit of Jesus may enlighten us to discern together the means to respond to the needs of Africa and the African world*. We have done our best to be attentive to where the Spirit blows. Let us ask for the grace to be able to share this powerful and enriching time with our sisters and brothers.

I will only dwell on a few points of our Chapter in line with the Gospel and on the symbols that accompany this celebration.

In relation to the two aspects of our Mission - ***Justice and Peace and Encounter and Dialogue*** - it is clear that we are all convinced ambassadors and I dare to hope, convincing as well! This aspect of our mission is not a novelty for our missionary family and we are not the only ones either in the Church to shoulder this concern. If we have revisited together these profound expressions of our charism, it is to implement what our founder, Cardinal Lavignerie passed on to us.

Today's Gospel reminds us that our message, in our role as disciples of Jesus, should be, following in his footsteps, good news for the poor, the marginalized and life's casualties (Lk 4:16-30).

By placing the account of Jesus' preaching at Nazareth at the start of his public ministry, Luke is making a programmatic discourse. I detect there a double programme brought together by the Evangelist.

In the first instance, there is the '***programme of performing an action***'. The action of Jesus is in favour of the poor, the excluded, the outsiders, and it is progressively verified in Luke's Gospel. This concern of Jesus for the casualties of life represents the entire missionary and apostolic programme that he wishes to pass on to his disciples.

The second instance demonstrating the dynamic is what I shall call ***the 'programme of being a disciple'***. The personalities of Elijah and Elisha seem to me to describe the relationship that should exist between a master and his disciple. Just as Jesus will remind us, '*The disciple is not greater than his master; the fully trained disciple will always be like his teacher.*' (Lk 6:40). Because Elisha was able to spend time at the school of Elijah his master, he was able to succeed him and was able to operate the same type of miracle as his master. The good news, when we take the care to interiorise it correctly, compels us to go out and meet others, different from us in religion, faith and culture.

Just as Elisha continued the mission of his master, ***we are today*** like disciples of Jesus invited to continue his mission. Without this identity as disciples of Jesus, our mission would have no foundation.

At the end of our General Chapter, we reassert that our missionary vocation finds its roots in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit who loved us first and sends us out as witnesses of his love to our sisters and brothers of Africa and elsewhere. In spite of our human frailty, it is together that we shoulder this mission in ***interracial and international communities***.

Fathers ***Gérard Chabanon, Raphaël Deillon, Georges Jacques, Jim Greene and I*** today pass on the torch to a new team. We all appreciate how much the former team has been able to keep the missionary enthusiasm very much alive at the heart of each one of us during these last 6 years. We express our heartfelt thanks to them.

On behalf of the New General Council Team (Jozef Van Boxel, Sergio Villasenor, Emmanuel Ngona, Peter Welsh and I), I repeat our gratitude for the trust which the confreres, through you, have placed in us by calling us to this service. We continue to count on God's help, your cooperation and prayers.

The history of the people of God shows that Jesus' Spirit goes before us and activates our trust in God and in others. May he bring to fulfilment what he has begun in us, even if sometimes it means that he will disturb us in our comfort zones in order to broaden our horizons to the parameters of the heart of God himself. Let us be, as the Holy Father invited us to be – *docile to the action of the Spirit in continuing to work for the Kingdom of God in patience and hope, in Africa and in the world.*

Africa remains our missionary rooting and point of departure, but we are hearing appeals, within and outside the Society, to share this love and the vitality of our faith with other peoples. Let these appeals trace their pathways within us so that, with time, we might be able to respond to them as best we can through reinforcing our bonds of brotherhood and solidarity.

On this Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we share in the openness of our Mother to God. May her courage, humility and reception of the Lord inspire us to fully welcome God's plan for our missionary family at this turning point in our history. Let us have confidence in the God who journeys with us and with our brothers and sisters.