

## Richard Baawobr's Homily 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010

### **Magnificat ... to him be glory, in time and in eternity. Amen.**

(2 P 3:12-18; Mk 12: 13-17)

*'Instead, go on growing in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory, in time and in eternity. Amen.'* (2 P 3: 18)

With you, I would like to thank the Lord not only for the new responsibility that has been entrusted to me, but above all for his Spirit which accompanies us during this Chapter. We have wanted all the measures we take to be under the influence of the Spirit of Jesus and in an atmosphere of mutual listening. Let us continue to pray that this listening attitude will be maintained during the time remaining to us for the other elections that are due and for discernment in the major orientations of our Society as Missionaries for Africa and for the African world.

What do I feel in beginning this ministry with which you have entrusted me?

- Initially, I was somewhat confused. I am still a bit like that. There is every reason to be when we recall all that we have discussed over the past few days! When I was ordained and someone was calling me, 'Father', I thought they were talking to someone else and I walked on. Do not therefore be surprised if one day you call me and I do not reply!
- However, with your encouragements, your promises of prayers, etc., I trust you. I know you will not leave me alone! We will soon have a full team. Gérard Chabanon told us how important it was for him to have the team able to work together like a real team. We will have the same challenge to face. I thank you in advance for the proper discernment that will be made. I thank those who will also accept to form the team with confreres they do not yet know. Together, with the rest of the Society, and the Church in Africa after the second Synod that we shall try with the light of Jesus' Spirit to discern how 'to respond to the needs of Africa,' and of the African world today. As St. Paul tells us, we cannot and must not boast of the gifts we have. We are stewards of these gifts in view of bringing our contribution to the building where God is the only builder.
- I count on the intercession of our Founder Cardinal Lavigerie, Mother Salome and our missionaries, men and women, who have preceded us. Yesterday, after the election, in order to find some peace and focus, I went to his tomb for a time of prayer and meditation on the First Reading of today!
- Above all I trust in God who calls and who entrusts each one with a mission. At the end of today's First Reading, the author of 2 Peter (written around 125 and attributed to Peter as his testament), invites us to an inner working that is the challenge and call addressed to any disciple of Jesus. *'Instead, go on growing in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'* Every expression is heavy with meaning.
  - *Go on growing*: we have not yet reached our destination;
  - *In grace and knowledge*: The Feast of the Visitation of Mary to Elisabeth which we celebrated yesterday with the *Magnificat* placed on the lips of Mary our model of missionary discipleship puts things in proper perspective. God is to be glorified and not our own poor selves...
  - *Our ...* Let us think 'Society', our communion with the local Church, with the peoples among whom we are sent... solidarity...
  - *Our Lord and Saviour ...* The mission that has been entrusted to us, as we quite rightly said, finds its source in the Triune God... we are not the masters, but the servants.

Jesus' answer to the tricky question in the Gospel of today about paying taxes to Caesar (Mk 12, 13-17) brings us back to the essentials. The Herodians and the Pharisees were archenemies, but they teamed up to trap Jesus. They had used a long *captatio benevolentiae* to prepare the terrain. We all

know how difficult it is sometimes to be oneself when somebody praises you. If you trust too much the praise, you can try to achieve the impossible and there you fall and people discover who you really are. At home (among the Dagara) we say that *when you praise someone who is dancing well with the help of the walking stick and the person abandons it, s/he falls to the ground!*

Jesus probably knew the trap about the taxes. To answer either way would have landed him in trouble. The Pharisees, for valid reasons, detested the taxes which reminded them, since 6 AD, that they were under *foreign domination*. The Herodians, on the other hand, supported the levying of taxes because it *ensured income* for them and the royal family they supported needed it for different services from which they also benefited.

Jesus spots the hypocrisy and plays on their division and traps them in their own game. *Like other Jews, they also detested the fact that the coins had the effigy of Caesar claiming divine status but here they were in the temple ground, the symbolic place set apart for God, walking around with coins of Caesar, and thus defiling it themselves while fighting against Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God! That is the irony. They pretend to be concerned about the "things of God", which Jesus' message is all about, but their real allegiance is to Caesar and they have already since a long time, planned to eliminate Jesus (Mk 3,6; 8,15) together with the message. This is the last time that the Pharisees and Herodians appear in the Gospel of Mark, leaving the scene to the High Priests and Scribes to execute Jesus (Mk 14,1).*

Jesus sends them and us back to our conscience, that inner voice of God to which we have been listening and which helps us daily to seek ways of responding better to Jesus message about the Kingdom. There is a challenge for us today as we formulate orientations for the Society. We can insist that others live them while we neglect them ourselves. It is when we are true to ourselves that we will *grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory now and to the day of eternity. (Amen.)* (2 P 3, 18).

We have been trying to listen to this voice as manifested indifferent forms and places in our Society. May our Lady of Africa inspire our answer to God's voice as we move closer to the final phase of our Chapter.

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