



**CONCLUDING MASS OF THE XXXV GENERAL CHAPTER OF
THE SOCIETY OF MARY
ROME, 29 07 2018**

1. In many cultures, there exists the tradition that before beginning a long trip, you ask the blessing of an elder. He or she will bless you and give you words for your travel. In fact, not only for your travel, but also for your life!

That is somewhat similar to what we are doing now.

Concluding our work, after taking a long time of reflection about the situation of the world and of the SM, after making many decisions, we're ready to go home to begin the work now called for. After seeing and judging, we're ready to act.

So this is the moment to receive the blessing of God and his words of wisdom to ready ourselves to go and act! And, as we have already been invited to remember, being faithful, we'll also be happy and fruitful! So, let's accept the blessing and the words of God!

In the Gospel of John, God is offering us some beautiful words. They fit perfectly with the conclusions of our General Chapter.

Jesus is in the midst of a large crowd that had been attracted by his miracles. Jesus teaches and feeds the crowd spiritually, but now comes another problem: how to feed also their bodies!

After working in education and in religious life, Jesus is now challenged by problems of temporalities!

In a similar way today, we are impressed to see that the crowd of our "disciples" is growing continuously: they are so many: how can we respond to their needs?

In the Gospel, there are three ways to look at this situation: from the perspectives of Philip, or of Andrew, or of Jesus.

PHILIP says: those people are too many ... what can we do? How can we manage so big a crowd? It's impossible.

ANDREW responds: the situation is not so bad: there is a child with five loaves and two fishes... but they are so few! We don't have enough... it's impossible to feed them all! For both of them, the conclusion is the same: "please, Jesus, tell them to go home! And give us a restful evening..." In fact, they want to abandon the mission.

It is exactly what we may be tempted to say today, like Philip and Andrew.

The work is too big ... it is too difficult ... there are too many problems ...

We don't have enough ... we're too few ... we're too old ...

But, just as in the cases of Philip and Andrew: "JESUS wants to test us." That is the important thing to remember...

For Jesus, there are two problems: that the crowd is hungry, but also that his disciples don't believe enough! And he faces both problems at the same time!

He feeds the crowd and he teaches his disciples.

He expresses his response, not with words, but with deeds.

He does it associating his disciples to the action, so that they might see and learn.

They learn that nothing is impossible to God! With five loaves and two fishes, Jesus feeds more than five thousand people... So: where is our faith? They learn that faith is expressed through acts: because it is the will of God, you won't ask people to leave, but to recline... and then, effectively, a solution comes from God ...

They learn that Jesus finds a solution by praying to the Father, thanking him for his gifts ...

Collecting the fragments left over, they learn about the generosity of God and that it is so important not to waste the graces he offers us!

2. AND US?

The crowd that we need to feed spiritually, intellectually and sometimes even physically, is so big ... we are so few ... we are so old ... we are so inexperienced ... we are so ... *(here you may complete the thought by adding characteristics of your Unit, country, culture ... ☺)*

But, like Jesus, Fr. Chaminade says to us: Where is your faith?

Where is your faith in action (Fr. Chaminade liked very much the expression: "foi pratique" "practical faith")?

Is our faith not only in the Chapel, but also inspiring our decisions, our actions and our behavior?

Are we able to act before receiving 100% of the guarantees that everything will work?

Do we believe that God might give fecundity to even an old man?

Do we believe that a small light might illuminate a big hall, and a small flame enkindle a big fire...?

Do we believe that? ... *(here each of us may complete the list with a response of his personal doubts... ☺)*

And then Fr. Chaminade thanks God and begins to "multiply Christians", - as easily as if they were loaves and fishes –:

and from a small group of 12 lay men and 9 young women comes a group of hundreds of lay missionaries with all sorts of commitments;

and from a small group of five young ladies and five young men come two religious congregations;

and from all those groups comes a Charismatic Family...

and Fr. Chaminade continues...

are you not seeing how, today, at the same time that you are diminishing, the number of persons you are impacting is growing continuously...?

don't you understand that you are called to multiply Christians? Or to form multipliers of Christians? ("des multiplicateurs de chrétiens")

Don't you see that today, lay Christians and lay members of the Marianist Family and even young people are those "multipliers of Christians"?

We can be very happy and proud that the response of our General Chapter has been very clearly:

"YES, we do know it!"

"YES, we want to do so!"

"YES, we believe it and we will act accordingly!"

This Chapter has been a great grace for us! It will be so for all the SM!

Our work and our chapter documents are clearly messages of hope for us, for the SM, for the Marianist Family, for the Church and for the world!

They express that we want to have a "practical faith", that we want to act as Fr. Chaminade did,

they express that we are not blocked by the difficulties and the challenges!

Let rejoice in it! And let's go! And let's share this message with our brothers!

3. I want to finish now with two considerations that we have to keep in mind today. I won't develop them too much... it is only to keep them in mind after the Chapter in our life and work.

The first one was expressed very well by Fr. Charles Klobb.

In 1904, Fr. Klobb received from the General Administration the mission to begin a new bulletin: *L'Apôtre de Marie*.

It was a terrible time. The preceding year, hundreds of brothers were expelled from France and almost all our works there were closed, because of the antireligious attitude of the French government. The GA had just been settled in Belgium. Many brothers had left the SM, probably around 500. And Fr. Simler, the second Founder of the SM, had died the same year

But the first article of the new bulletin, written by Fr. Klobb, is entitled: "Spes nostra", "our hope", using the words of the *Salve Regina*.

In that article, Fr. Klobb gives a summary of the history of the SM, remembering all the problems that it had faced during its history:

internal problems like divisions, misunderstandings, lack of money or personnel, doubt about the definition of the mission, problems with mixed composition ...

or external problems like revolutions, political oppositions, indifference, ...

And his message is very simple, but very important for us:

In all those circumstances, Mary always helped us to win through the difficulties ... always! In 1904, she would do the same! And we know that she did it! And the SM continued to grow and to serve in new countries and cultures.

Today, in 2018, she will do it again. She will always help us to win through the difficulties!

Remember those words when we sing the *Salve Regina: Spes nostra, Salve!*
Let us keep those words in our heart!

The second and last idea comes from the Gospel that we heard on the day of the installation of the General Council: the image of the vine that unites us with Christ and through Christ with his Father, and unites us with one another.

The more we are united, the more we will receive abundant life and the more we will give abundant life.

It is not only within our community, but within our Unit, within the whole Society of Mary and within the entire Marianist Family.

Be one and you will receive and give abundant life!

One like the Jerusalem community gathered with Mary, and then sent out everywhere in mission!

At the end of our Chapter, let us forget to be auto referential, focusing merely on myself, or within my community or my Unit or my branch.

Let us be open and attentive to the other communities, Units, branches, Charismatic families...

Let us be "one body and one soul" through our union with Christ as new sons of Mary.

And let us thank God because, as men of hope,

he is calling us, together, to multiply loaves and fishes

he is calling us, together, to multiply Christians,

to be "a man who does not die".