

Homily for the Closing Mass of the 35th General Chapter

May 25, 2012

“The word of the Lord came to me? Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” Can these words apply to me? Could I be a prophet? Do I consider myself chosen by God to be salt and light in the world?

There are a collection of words that we’ve heard so many times, in the course of our religious life, that they hardly mean anything or barely evoke any form of emotional response. For example, if I say the “**M**” word you instantly think of? **Mission!** If I say the “**E**” word? You immediately think of....? **Evangelism!** If I speak about the “**C**” word, right away you think of.....? **Compassion** or **Charism**,--correct! Or if I mention a “Pedagogy of Trust” it conjures various images. And in the past year we have become more sensitized to the “**P**” word or **PM** words? Straight away, we identify it with....? **Prophet** or **Prophetic Mission!** All beautiful words which roll off the tip of our tongues, but have yet to become incarnated in the lives of many of our brothers. In many instances these words have become so familiar and such “household names” that we have lost our passion, our zeal, and our dynamism. Consequently, these wonderful images are no longer good news. The fire has been reduced to embers. Jesus says: *“I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already,”* (Lk 12:49)

To my astonishment, and I don’t believe it’s by sheer co-incidence that the Gospel reading of the day is about Jesus offering Peter three occasions to re-affirm his love for Jesus. That was the Gospel of the last General Chapter. It re-echoes the decisions of the General Chapter of 2006 which invited us to embark upon a pilgrimage of Hope. As part of the SIR Team we tried to implement its resolutions with the brothers attending the sessions. Initially, I applauded the General Council’s choice of the theme Prophetic Mission, but the more I reflected about it, the more I realized we’re still in the early stage of our pilgrimage. As already mentioned, Jesus asks Peter three times “Do you love me?” Similarly our last chapter attempted to replicate these triple questions to affirm our love for God.

“Brother, do you love me enough to discover daily in the events and persons as well as in your life of prayer the extent to which I love you?” How many of us here and how many of our brothers at home know and feel loved by God? This has major implications for the future of our Community. How many of us can honestly and boldly assert like Peter: “Lord, you know I love you.” Just as Jesus loves Peter, he also loves us. This is at the heart of all we profess and believe as a Brother of the Sacred Heart--to love God, to love our brothers and to love ourselves. To be ambassadors of God’s love is very prophetic.

The second question: ***“Brother do you love me enough to share with your brothers your wounds, your deep desires, your hopes and your encounters with me?”*** When we receive young brothers here in Rome preparing themselves for Perpetual Profession, we remain dumbfounded to discover the serious wounds and deep hurts inflicted on them by people in authority or by brothers in various local communities. And so if we have young men who

are seriously wounded and fearful of sharing these hurts with their brothers, how are we EVER going to be prophetic to neglected youth and to those who have no one to care for them? Our young brothers are very enthusiastic about living community, but sadly they bemoan the fact that many of our local communities are like hotels, where brothers seldom pray together, share meals together or attend Mass together. "It is not enough to have communities with prophetic 'refounders'; we must refound our communities themselves as prophetic." says Paul IV.

The third question: "**Brother, do you love me enough to share the charism with partners in mission and to open your community so that it may be sign of my Father's Kingdom?**"

Some areas of our community still hold on dearly to the pyramid model of Church and authority. In some parts of our Institute, once in power, many still maintain a strong authoritarian model so that any brother who does not hold positions of responsibilities has virtually no voice or say within community. Let us not forget that by virtue of our religious profession we are all brothers. That is a prophetic witness.

So where does this leave the lay people we work with? Do they remain subservient to us? When addressing this topic with our young brothers, they give 101 reasons why sharing our charism with the laity is virtually impossible. However John Paul II "**On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World**". made it very clear that: "The call is addressed to everyone:(*not only religious men and women*) but lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world. To embrace, and willingly choose to pass on our charism to them is in itself very prophetic. Jesus prays for unity and communion: "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17: 21).

I would like to recount a true story: one day Fulton Sheen, a famous U.S. Catholic bishop was in a leper colony in Africa, and he was nauseated by the open ulcerous sores that he saw all around him and the lives of everybody there laying in the dirt. He walked by one man laying there who not only had leprosy, but other skin diseases and open wounds. And as the bishop leaned over to talk to him, the cross that he was wearing on a chain around his neck broke and the cross fell into the wounds on this man's leg. And he said "*For a minute I was repulsed. I wanted to step back, but then all of the sudden by the power of the Holy Spirit I was filled with overflowing love for this man, this individual who had nothing, and so I reached into the sore and I took up the cross.*"

That is what Christianity, or even more a religious dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is all about. At times it's messy. It's not easy. It can be frustrating and sometimes it's scary. It may hurt or place numerous demands on our time. And like Fulton Sheen, we have to pick up the cross. Initially it may repulse us, but by God's power and by God's grace, hopefully, we will be able to embrace these values and get past our self-centeredness and our own comfort zone. But eventually, perseverance and faithfulness brings consolations and blessings from God.

Consequently, we should not be surprised that during this past month we experienced frustration, resistance, disappointment, desperation or even defiance at trying to formulate

proposals or trying to envision creative ways of responding to a Prophetic Mission for our Institute. If we found it a challenge, consider for a moment the brothers back home, who have not had the opportunity to ponder, or wrestle with these issues nor have they experienced the Spirit's movement here at the Chapter. You will require tremendous courage, willpower and fortitude to convince and motivate the brothers in your Province or Delegation to view the situation within your country with the eyes of God. I believe all of us are in agreement that Coindre was prophetic and that he loved needy children with the eyes and the heart of God. One of our challenge is to internalize Coindre's way of looking upon needy children and unmet needs.

If we desire to be Prophets of God's love, and aspire to be prophetic, i.e., speaking for God, we have to examine some key attitudes in our daily lives that are ant-prophetic. We may have to go home and be prophets in our own province or community by challenging these destructive attitudes. But before we challenge anyone, we must pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit and never forget to tell the brothers and our partners over and over again how much God loves them and how much we love them. God is love, so his truth must always be spoken in love.

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