

The Rector Major
Concluding Homily for GC27
12.04.2014

“I shall take my sons from the nations to which they have gone and I shall gather them together from all parts and I shall lead them to their homeland again...” (Ez 37,21)

My Dear Confreres, The Lord has called us here from almost all the nations on the earth and has granted us the gift of a rich spiritual and charismatic experience: the General Chapter, “the principal sign of the Congregation’s unity in diversity” (C. 146). And now He sends us back, and leads us back to our homelands and **to our homeland**. I say “to our homeland” because we are not just returning to our own countries, but to our holy land: the work for/with our young people, our own communities and our respective educative pastoral communities.

Like a heart that beats and makes the blood flow round, so our Chapter has caused our specific identities and our differences to circulate so as to ensure the unity and the life of the whole body. This is the beautiful experience we take with us. We have received so many gifts in these days, but the most precious of all is our experience of fraternity and our sharing, the work involved in our searches and discussions, our discernment and contemplation of what the Spirit is doing with us, with society and with the young, the hard work in the commissions and in the assemblies... Each one of us is being invited to thank the others for this gift.

The heart beating in the Congregation so dear to us is very much alive and healthy and now we want to share this good news with everyone.

“I shall be their God and they shall be my people” (Ez 37,27)

The Promise of a Merciful God who has wanted our lives to be intertwined with his.

The Fulfilment on the part of a God who *goes before* (precedes), anticipating us gratuitously so that we might have life and have it to the full; the God of Creation and of Easter, of the rainbow after the flood and of the wine turned into blood that is shed.

«With a feeling of humble gratitude we believe that the Society of Saint Francis of Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God » (C. 1). That God of the covenant who has called each one of us to form part of this Society (cfr. C. 22) to draw us even closer to him in a loving encounter which becomes a profession of faith and of a life given, accepted and sent out. We are his branches! How is it that so often we do not remain in Him? How is it that it appears to be so easy to sometimes forget our covenant in which we give him the first place in our lives, a *primacy of mutual exchange and cooperation* which is so life-giving for us and for the young people to whom we are

sent? It was good to see the effort of the Chapter to reinforce our “remaining in Him”. Only in this way can we bear abundant fruit.

“The nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies my own, when my sanctuary is in their midst for ever.” (Ez 37,28)

Our confreres are awaiting our return, our news... also our “document”..! However, above all, more or less consciously, they are waiting for our experience of God, of the gift received. And ours is the precious task of taking Him, and together with them, making our local and provincial communities real “sanctuaries” filled with His presence: the life of holiness shared with the educative pastoral community, as at Valdocco in the days of Dominic Savio and so many other young saints like him. We too can make our houses and centres a real workshop of holiness.

Our proclamation of Easter will go far beyond the Easter season and will spread out in the places we live and in our cities with a new Good News not simply announced but above all lived, and lived in community. Then indeed “the nations will know that it is the Lord who sanctifies his people”.

We are finishing our 27th General Chapter and we have come to the time for thanks and for farewells. Who knows perhaps we shall all begin to feel a little nostalgic. Certainly in the next few weeks our thoughts and our hearts will return to these Roman sites.... Even though I think no one for a single moment will have the temptation to return immediately... Please take to the confreres the cordial and fraternal greetings of the Rector Major, of the members of the General Council and of all of us. Take to everyone the great experience of the community we have formed together. Take to everyone our realisation, faith and commitment that: ***we want to remain in Him and bear much fruit because apart from Him we can do nothing!***

May Mary our Help and Mother accompany us always!