

27th General Chapter
Thursday of the Third Week of Lent
“”Listen to his voice today”
Rome: 27th March 2014

Dear Confreres,

The General Chapter in which we are taking part these days calls us to live an experience of unity in diversity. Differences are a richness to be acknowledged and appreciated; at the same time, unity is a treasure to be safeguarded and fostered. We live the charism of Don Bosco in a variety of cultures and a plurality of expressions; but at the same time we experience communion among us confreres and a sharing in the choices we make.

In this Eucharist let us invoke the Spirit of Christ so that he may build among us a unity of hearts and a convergence of minds; we know in fact that it is easier to divide than to unite, therefore we need the transforming action of the Spirit. He is the Spirit of unity, which does not mean uniformity but leads everything to harmony. The Holy Spirit creates harmony; still more, the Holy Spirit, according to one of the fathers of the Church, “is harmony himself”¹. Unity in diversity is a gratuitous gift that we receive and an arduous task we have to accomplish.

In the Congregation we have the gift and the task of safeguarding and fostering the unity of our charism, as all of us look up to our dear Father and Founder Don Bosco, accept the guidance of his successor, and guarantee a formation that is “one in its essential content and diversified in its concrete expressions” (Const. 100). At the same time, we must commit ourselves to drawing advantage from our differences; today, with the election of the Councillors for the sectors, we shall have the possibility of giving our contribution as a Chapter to building up a General Council that will express the richness of the diversity of our Congregation, a Congregation that is becoming increasingly intercultural and transcultural.

“Listen to his voice today”

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah repeatedly addresses to the people the invitation of God himself: “Listen to my voice!” But the people do not listen; they do not pay attention. Instead of turning their faces towards God, they turn their backs on him. Then God, through the prophet, sorrowfully concludes: “Here is a nation that will not listen to the voice of the Lord its God.”

We too can run the risk of being deaf to the word of God. Then our hearts will harden and become stubborn. God speaks to us through situations, through our lives, through the expectation and desires of the young, through our confreres, their joys and sorrows. We must therefore assume a listening attitude. The exercise of prayerful listening to the Holy Scripture helps us to discover how God speaks to us also through the events and the

¹ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, Homily of the Mass on the solemnity of Pentecost, Vatican City, 19th May 2014.

persons he places by our side. In these days he has spoken to us through the election of the Rector Major and his Vicar; today he will speak to us also through the election of the Councillors for the sectors.

In the Congregation we have the opportunity of fostering unity among the confreres in our communities by listening, meditating and sharing the Sacred Scriptures together with them. This will stimulate a deep communication among ourselves. Without listening together, we shall not be able to be prophets in life and in history; nor shall we be able to perceive the questions and the needs of others. Listening together to the Word of God helps us to go out of ourselves, to overcome our self-referentiality (self-centredness) and listen to the needs of others, especially of the young.

“Every kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin”

In the gospel we see Jesus attentive to the needs of a poor sick man. He restores the ability to speak to a man whom the devil possessed and had made dumb. This is a luminous and challenging sign of God’s power which saves us in Jesus. This is the word of God that awaits to be listened to and received; but the adversaries of Jesus refuse to see and to listen; rather they propose an alternative reading of the facts: Jesus, they say, is possessed by a devil and is able to cast out devils because he acts in the name of Beelzebul, the prince of devils.

They are blind: if they see, they are not able to see the signs of God’s presence. They are dumb: if they speak, they say only senseless things. Jesus points to the source of this inability in them to see the signs of God’s presence and to listen to his word. It is the devil, the one who creates division, who makes them blind and dumb.

In the powerful gestures of Jesus there breaks forth the kingdom of God, which puts an end to that of Satan the adversary, the spirit of division. Jesus is revealed as the one who is “stronger”, who eliminates division and conflict as a cause of ruin: “A kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin.”

Conflict and division can be a risk, for which we need to be on our guard. We ought to be aware of them to confront them and overcome them. “In this way it becomes possible to build communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity... Unity is greater than conflict”.²

Let us now ask God to transform our “heart”, that is, our interior being and the depths of ourselves so that we may have eyes to see and ears to hear not what the spirit of division proposes but what the Spirit of unity suggests to us. Let us listen today to his voice and we shall see the signs of the power of God. Amen.

² Pope FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, 2278.