

Mass with the General Chapter

Monday of the Third Week of Lent– 24 March 2014

Dear Confreres,

The two readings today help us to understand what our attitude towards God ought to be. In order to receive God's gifts we need to recognise that we have no claims on Him and we need to accept His way of acting with docility.

«No prophet is accepted in his own country” says Jesus. Why is he not accepted? Because what is missing is a readiness to be open to God's initiative. In his own country the prophet is known: he is a man like anyone else. It is “natural” to think that he cannot be God's instrument. Nothing extraordinary can be expected from him. And if he is able to do extraordinary things, let them be seen there; his own fellow countrymen have more right to them than others have. It is this attitude that prevents them from receiving the gifts of God, because the divine initiative is gratuitous, totally free in the way it responds to human hopes.

In the story of Naaman, to which Jesus alludes, God in fact reveals Himself to a foreigner, but first of all He leads this foreigner to put aside his way of seeing things and understanding them.

Naaman, a pagan, does not believe that he has any rights before the God of Israel, but in a certain sense he has already made up his mind how his meeting with the man of God is going to turn out.

It must be said that in fact he was not given a very warm welcome. The prophet does not put himself out: when Naaman arrives at his door he sends someone to tell him to go and bathe seven times in the Jordan.

It's not an encouraging welcome for a leper who has come from a country far away! And Naaman is angry, as Jesus's fellow countrymen are angry. He had expected something very different: the prophet would come out, invoke the name of the Lord his God, place his hand on the wounds, and he would be cured. Some form of solemn ceremony, a majestic gesture, some magic incantation perhaps to produce such an extraordinary cure. Instead: to go and bathe! Are there no rivers in Damascus?

A king of Israel had said: «Am I God to bring death or life?» Indeed the old man in Naaman had to die so that he might be reborn a new man. Naaman had to put to one side any former certainties; he had to submit to the divine initiative, accepting with docility God's very simple ways. «And his flesh became like that of a child». God achieves great things with simple means.

The cure of Naaman makes us think about Baptism which is a very simple act. How can it possibly happen that pouring a few drops of water on the head of an infant or of an adult

they become spiritually new creatures, children of God? God could not possibly act like that! Whereas, that is precisely what He does: He uses very simple means to give us His gifts.

Even the Eucharist is something very simple. We have made it a little more complicated in order to highlight its value, but eating a small piece of bread together is something very simple. But that bread is the body of the Lord.

In our own lives too, simple everyday gestures can become the instruments of God's grace, and they are if we perform them out of love for Him.

Let us ask the Lord for that depth of docility that makes us day after day conform to his action with simplicity and trust.

Today in our prayers there is another dimension to our reflection. It is the day on which we are being called to begin the process of discernment to choose the Tenth Successor of Don Bosco.

I think that the most fruitful and effective way to begin is from a starting point in which we place our hearts in the right relationship with the Lord.

Our first attitude therefore is one of **thanksgiving**.

The experience of the General Chapter, through the Report of the Rector Major and what the various members of the General Council have had to say, the Good Nights of the Provincials from the various continents, through informal contacts with so many confreres make us well aware of the greatness of Don Bosco, of how precious and relevant our Salesian charism is, the beauty of our vocation as disciples of Jesus and apostles to the young.

When we become more conscious of all this richness we feel arising in our hearts a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord and at the same time, there grows in us a realisation that it is a treasure to be safeguarded.

The second attitude is one of **listening**

Of listening above all to the word proclaimed, and to the word that the Holy Spirit will whisper in the silence of our hearts and through our reflection. In listening to the needs of the Young and of the Church. Listening too to the needs of the Congregation. All of this in order to choose as Rector Major the person who can best respond to these needs. A confrere who with great spiritual strength, with a steady hand in government and with a truly fatherly manner can represent the presence of Don Bosco among us.

The third attitude is one of **inner freedom**.

This kind of freedom is based on a clear conscience, obedient to God and to His will, not influenced by human, personal or external considerations. A freedom that keeps itself detached from any lobbying or agreements that have nothing evangelical about them. From such decisions based on this inner freedom, on the upright conduct of all of us will come the best choice, the choice made according to the heart of God.

All of this reflects the demands of a religious life clearly rooted in faith in Christ. Our strong and convinced faith in Him will lead to new ways of acting, marked by the radical approach of the Gospel and certainly fruitful from the spiritual, apostolic and vocational points of view.

I conclude, with all of you thanking the Lord for these twelve years of service by our Rector Major Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva. Certainly in our midst, he has been a living presence of Don Bosco. He has loved and been at the service of the young, of the confreres, of religious and of the Church. He has been our guide in a return to Don Bosco and now with joy and confidence he entrusts the task to his Successor. Let us pray for him and for the one who the Lord wishes to give us as the new Father of the Salesian Family.

May she who is at the heart of our Congregation watch over us on our journey of fidelity to God and to our charism. Amen