

Homily by Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse at the Opening Mass of the XIX General Chapter Pentecost Sunday, 5 June 2022

The Word of God that we have heard today provokes many things in me, I would like to present some of them. I would like to pray to the Holy Spirit to give us among many graces, three types of graces.

1. The grace to grow in our love for God, 2. the grace to walk in humility trusting in the Holy Spirit, 3. the grace to understand one another and to understand together, the things of God.

1. The grace to grow in our love for God

In the Gospel of today we have heard Jesus challenging us: *If you love me you will keep my commandments... I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever, ... Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make a home in him...* first of all, to me this Word of God, provokes me to make an examination of conscience at the beginning of this General Chapter, Do we love God as an individual and do we love God as a community? We believe that during the general chapter we will deal with the things of the *Missio Dei*, but how much do we belong to God? How much discipleship, do we live? Through gifts received and mission offered and enriched, we have been walking with God's people for years in mission and serving in different ministries; how much do we live this out of love, which is not sentiment of the moment, but conviction of heart?

I think, looking at the life of our Institute, we can say that there is a lot of generosity with God and with the mission; but every now and then we need to examine our conscience, especially now at the beginning of the General Chapter, we need to ask ourselves if we are people guided by the spirit of the flesh, by the worldly spirit, or by the Spirit of Christ, by the mentality of God? Are we inhabited by the Spirit of God; indeed, do we allow the Spirit to dwell in us?... I am not saying that we do not sin, yes of course we sin, but those who are disciples deal with the individual and collective sin of society in a manner enlightened by the Spirit of God.

Participating in this chapter is a gesture of love to God who has called us and to his mission. I come because I believe that God has invited me to address the things that I believe belong to God and his mission, and because I love our Institute, which I seek to serve in its internal life and external mission in the church and in the world. During the Chapter we will talk about our life as an Institute, but primarily at the centre should be the mission we have received as a gift; we are called to allow ourselves to be improved for the mission, to put our lives, our abilities, and the resources we receive at the service of the mission, in the sharing and in the spirit of walking together with the people of God. We want to live it all as a response to the love received from God and learnt from the Heart of Jesus. From our chapter we want to say, we love the mission and our strength for the mission is that love that God has for all, *because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.* (Rom 5:5;8:11)

2. The grace to walk in humility trusting in the Holy Spirit

In the Second reading St. Paul reminds us who we are: *“for what you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, provided that we share his suffering, so as to share his glory.”*

The Holy Spirit will help us, he will teach us and remind us, again he will put it in our heart. We are on a journey, that is why we do the chapter, if everything is clear and perfect there is no need to do a chapter. The Chapter cannot be different from the institute, which is not perfect but walks with joy and in humility working and serving. Then we must convince ourselves that we do not know everything, we do not remember everything, and we need the Spirit of God to help us, because that is what we are here for. Our general chapter, like all other general chapters, will be a grace and an opportunity to take stock of our realities in the church and the world today, but it is also an opportunity

to start again, because we believe that the Lord of the vineyard who told us I am the vine and you are the branches still wants us to be his disciples and missionaries, and we want to live our call to proclaim Christ with creativity, seeking to know and follow him closely, allowing ourselves to be formed continually, engaging with great creativity where we are called to minister to and participate in the lives of our sister and brothers especially among those who suffer and are on the periphery of society. We also wish to become more organised in administering well the personnel we have, and the resources given to us for the mission. In all this the Holy Spirit will guide us and sustain us even in suffering.

St Daniel Comboni writes to us describing the faith that the great Slovenian missionary Fr Ignatius Knoblecher who served as Apostolic Vicar in Sudan had in his youth, who faced many problems before dying at the age of 39 when he was on his way to Naples in April 1958:

“Dismayed at these terrible blows, the generous soul of Knoblecher did not despair. His spirit which lived only on God, sustained him with faith in the most frightful circumstances; he had put all his trust in God, following the teaching of the Holy Spirit: iacta curam tuam in Domino et ipse te enutriet. (Writings 2087) Unload your burden onto God and he will sustain you.

“The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results. We know only that our commitment is necessary. Let us learn to rest in the tenderness of the arms of the Father amid our creative and generous commitment. Let us keep marching forward; let us give him everything, allowing him to make our efforts bear fruit in his good time. 280. Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is he who “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). But this generous trust has to be nourished, and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavour. It is true that this trust in the unseen can cause us to feel disoriented: it is like being plunged into the deep and not knowing what we will find. I myself have frequently experienced this. Yet there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful!” (EG 279-280)

3. The grace to understand one another and to understand together, the things of God

We want to live our chapter in communion with all, in fraternity and commitment to the common mission in today's world All this we desire for us, for the church and for today's world torn apart by wars, hatred and rivalry. Listening to this word of God presented to us by Luke in the first reading, one sees that the Spirit of God which is a gift of God comes and makes us community, church, and cenacle where we understand each other even if we speak different languages and express ourselves in different ways. We speak in our own languages and others understand us, we understand others and with God's people, we live the mission and walk together.

It is the Holy Spirit who makes me relate to Christ Jesus and helps me in my life of discipleship and the Holy Spirit who makes St Daniel Comboni and his charism attractive to me and the Holy Spirit who provokes me by the signs of the times and the signs of places and realities of suffering to make me of my brothers and sisters not a saviour but one who walks with them, who makes *synodos* with them, following the example of the Good Samaritan who uses all his time and money to facilitate the healing of the wounded brother of the abused sister *For the spirit of the Lord fills the world, and that which holds everything together knows every word said.. (Wis 1:7)*

We are helped by Mary our Mother, by Saint Daniel Comboni and by many brothers and sisters who are close to us and pray for us.