

THE RESPONSE IS IN YOUR HANDS

Words of Br. Emili Turú SG at the close of the XXI General Chapter

Good morning, Brothers. At the end of this Chapter, rather than a speech, I would simply like to offer some reflections - some understandings about what it has been like to take part as a member of this XXI General Chapter. And I am going to dwell on it under four aspects.

1. THE COLD CHANGES THE FISHES' COURSE

This phrase is inspired by a novel I read some weeks before the beginning of the General Chapter and which had this very title. The author is Pierre Szalowski, of Quebec. It is a beautiful work, full of tenderness and optimism. Basically, the novel looks at reality through the eyes of a child, and tells how the circumstances of a terrible freeze - something that happens frequently in Québec- causes a whole series of encounters which radically change the types of relationship between many people in the same district.

This reading made me see a parallel with what we have lived in this chapter hall. Doesn't this have something in common with what we have experienced among ourselves? I have heard many times how the configuration of the hall: the round tables, the system, the method... has led us to establish a type of relationship and dynamic very different from other General Chapters. At the end of the Chapter, it appears to me very beautiful to state that we agreed to enter a dynamic, with which we were not familiar and of which we did not know very well how it was going to end. We decided to opt for audacity and journey in haste with confidence. And now that we have finished, I believe without a shadow of doubt that many of us recognize that the method of brotherly dialogue, which we chose, corresponds very well with our experience and life as Brothers.

One day a journalist came to interview me. One of his comments drew my attention. He said to me: *"I have been following the Chapter on the web page, I have read the chronicles, and I have been very impressed by the type of methodology, including the attitude they have in the hall"*. And he asked me: *"Do you think that this fraternal dialogue could also be adapted to other ecclesial circles?"* The truth is that, then, when we were speaking personally, he commented to me: *"I am putting this question in very delicate terms, because these days the Synod of Africa is being held and it would not appreciate comparisons being made"*. In fact, they were being made.

It seems to me that, at times, without being aware of it, simply by our manner of acting, our choices, our ways of relating, we are showing the Marian face of the Church for which we are really looking. In an ecclesial context, someone pronounced these words: *"Today the Church has turned itself for many into the main obstacle to faith; in it can be seen only the struggle for human power, the wretched theatre of those who, from their observation, want to absolutize official Christianity and paralyze the true spirit of Christianity"*. That is what was written, in the 70s, by a theologian named Ratzinger.

Today the Church has, for many, been turned into the main obstacle to faith. The dream of the Church which we share is that of Vatican II; John XXIII reflects it in a very beautiful image when he said: *“the Christian community is meant to be like a fountain in the middle of the square”*. In the Mediterranean context, the fountain in the middle of the square is the place where everyone congregates. And not only to drink; it is a place for meeting, sharing, sitting down, feeling at home: adults, children, old people... It is an image of the Marian face of the Church.

What can we learn from this chapter experience? Have we some tasks to take home? I would say yes.

a) CREATIVITY

First, creativity. It seems to me that the experience we have lived is an invitation to break with inertia and to make use of the most appropriate of our strengths. Someone commented to me at the beginning of the Chapter, that more than once he had thought that at Provincial Chapters something did not work because of the type of methodology; but that no one thought they could do it any other way. We need creativity.

b) PATIENCE

Second, patience: we are learning. I believe that all of us were happy with the experience of the methodology adopted at the Chapter, but at the same time, we recognize that we can improve. I think it is necessary to carefully evaluate the development of the Chapter and pass on this evaluation to whoever prepares the next General Chapter; although I am sure that we are not going to have to wait long. I imagine that, in a short time, throughout the Institute, we will be starting to see rooms with round tables...

c) DIALOGUE

Third, although we are still apprentices at it -at least, I am- is dialogue, dialogue, dialogue... I remember that a few years ago there was an international event in which young people from all over the world were connected by Internet and held dialogues with some world famous person. When it came to Stephen Hawking, he had a very pessimistic view of the future of humanity. During the chat conversation, one youth asked him: *“Then, what future is there?”* The scientist’s response was: *“Keep talking”* ... That was what the young people were already doing.

I believe that this is an invitation to build on our differences, not evading them, because we are really different. Remember the questions we used to ask ourselves: How can one who thinks differently from me be right? What part of truth does someone possess if he has a different way of thinking from mine? Dialogue, therefore, is an invitation to learn to resolve conflict -which will always be there, since any human group always has conflicts- from sincere and brotherly dialogue and not from avoidance. You will remember that in the Report coming from the Council, on one occasion we recognized that, more than once, in the presence of conflict, we had chosen to avoid it, instead of facing up to it in a sincere dialogue. Therefore: apprenticeship in dialogue.

d) THE RESOURCES ARE IN THE GROUP

Let us not forget, moreover, that the resources are in the group; it is necessary to believe in it. At the beginning of the Chapter, we had our doubts about whether it was going to work... All the possibilities were there. What happened is that we took the

opportunity to open the door and let these possibilities operate. It is an invitation today to draw out the best that each person and each group has within them.

e) INTERNATIONALITY

And, lastly, the apprenticeship in internationality. I believe that we lived, as never before, this factor of internationality in an open and profound manner. I believe that it is a prophetic sign that another form of globalization is possible. We are also taking home this task of internationality. The question is if you are ready to pay the price, so that our Institute may become each day more global, more internally given to solidarity, with greater interaction among all.

This is the first point, and the five aspects which come to me as tasks.

2. SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF A POOR CHILD

I come back to the point where Sean began, at the start of this Chapter. It appears to me that it was very inspiring. It has been a great motivation for our Chapter, and we have repeated it more than once: "seeing the world from below".

I remember something which happened more than twenty years ago. It was an initiative in Madrid in which people were invited for a day to live like beggars, as poor people asking for alms. Various Brother scholastics took part in the experience of making a home in a passage of the Metro and begging. It was very interesting to analyze the reactions of people, some approaching, others saying a word... For a day, they were able to see the world from below.

In the General Council Report, you will recall that we spoke about the victims of globalization and how children are the first victims. And the present Pope, in his homily for Christmas Eve, made mention of these children denied their parents' love; he spoke of the street children, the child soldiers, the child victims of pornography and other abominable forms of abuse. And he said literally: "*The Child of Bethlehem summons us once again to do everything in our power to put an end to the sufferings of these children, to do everything possible to make the light of Bethlehem touch the heart of every man and woman*".

What new ideas, what tasks can we take home?

a) To respond to this invitation from the Pope to **do everything possible**. To do everything possible to keep on advancing along the road of putting the Institute, first and visibly, at the service of poor children and young people, whatever type of poverty they suffer from. In our current works, in the new ones... to do everything possible. And when we look at the world through the eyes of poor children, we also recognize the echo of the question I encountered in the famous book "Who moved my cheese?" -a book for businessmen, very famous in its time-. *What would you do if you were not afraid?* That is, probably, a good start for doing everything possible.

b) Experts in evangelization and defending the rights of children and youth

It appears to me that there are two closely linked aspects to these options for the future. Br. Sean, in his Circular on apostolic life, says that he hopes we will be able to be recognized in the future as experts in the evangelization of children and young people. In Marist Youth Ministry, but also in our new centres, let us be models of what

we are: be experts in evangelization. And I would also add: be experts in the defence of the rights of children and the young. Let us hope that in eight year's time, when we look back, we will be able to say that the Institute has taken very significant steps in that direction.

We are encouraged in this by Janus Kostka, a celebrated Polish child psychiatrist, writer, teacher, defender of the cause of children, who died in the extermination camp of Treblinka, where she had been deported with the children from her orphanage, whom she refused to abandon. She wrote: *"You say that working with children is tiring; and you are right. And add that it is tiring because we have to get down to their level: we have to stoop down, bend, bend over, make ourselves smaller... But there is something in which you are mistaken: What is most tiring is not this, but being obliged to lift ourselves to the height of their feelings, to lift our spirits, to stretch ourselves, to place ourselves on tiptoes, to approach them without hurting them"*.

3. LIKE MARY OF THE VISITATION

The experience of Mary of the Visitation has also been a reference point in our Chapter. We could underline various aspects of this image, but I want to dwell on the figure of Mary herself. And at once, I would emphasize the fact that she is carrying Jesus with her. It appears to me that this has also been an important theme: Mary is pregnant, Mary carries Jesus in her womb. There is a personal, intimate relationship between the two; the relationship only a mother can have with the child she bears inside her. It is a relationship of silence, of listening, of astonishment before the Mystery. It is, perhaps, the mystical dimension of our life.

We have talked during the Chapter about prophecy as one axis of our life; I believe that the other should be mysticism. An Abbot General of the Cistercians said: *"With the armour of the holy Rule, the helmet of holy obedience and the sword of holy tradition, I can hardly succeed in defending myself... from Jesus!"* Beyond an external fulfillment of superficial practices, then, there is a personal encounter with Jesus.

At the XIX General Chapter I had the good fortune to be in a discussion group which included Br. Basilio Rueda. I remember that, on more than one occasion, when we were speaking about Marist apostolic spirituality, he said: *"True, true: apostolic... Marist... but spirituality, spirituality!"* Some people, when we say that our spirituality is not monastic, seem to interpret this as meaning it is easier, more "light". To me, it appears that to say our spirituality is apostolic means that it is more demanding. How can I keep my life centred in the middle of so much activity, so many relationships? It seems to me that, like Champagnat, like Mary, we are invited to be 'contemplatives in action'.

We asked ourselves in the Report of the Council "Why does living in depth this mystical dimension of our life cost us so much?" Thomas Merton wrote in his only novel: *"If you want to know who I am, you don't ask me where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair... You ask me for what do I live and you ask me if I think of devoting myself to living in full the thing for which I want to live. From the responses to these two questions, you can determine a person's identity"*. That is to say, ask me what do I want in my life and then ask me if I'm ready to pay the price to have it. Relating the answers to these two questions, you will discover this person's values.

Tasks I am taking home

It seems to me, then, that the only lesson or task that I am taking home is that I **have to pay a price**; and I do not get a reduction, there is 0% discount. To make progress on the mystical journey, the journey of identifying with Christ, is not automatic; it is a journey, and I have to make it: step by step and stage by stage. I have to pay a price. In this case, it seems to me that the price is calculated in the currency of 'time'. I think that if we calculate the space my personal prayer occupies, the time I devote to cultivating my interior life, we would be able to estimate the importance we give to spirituality in our lives.

4. WE ARE ALL ONE

The image with which we started the Chapter was a beautiful one: a heart, which is a sign of life, with our desires, our dreams... and uniting them all together, the names of each of us, the names of each person at the Chapter.

We are part of a living body. And this means that we are members dependent on one another. *“Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ. Nor is the body to be identified with any one of its many parts. Now you together are Christ’s body; but each of you is a different part of it”* (1 Cor).

We are dependent upon one another. I cite Merton once again, in this case his autobiography, entitled “The Seven Storey Mountain”: *“Because no man can or could ever live for himself or by himself alone, the destinies of thousands of other beings are seen to be affected, some remotely, but others more directly and at close quarters, by my own choices and decisions. In the same way, my own life is seen to be reshaped and modified by those of others”*. In other words, what happens to one member affects the whole body. The decisions each of us makes will have consequences, for good or bad, for many other people.

Some days ago, Benedict XVI, on his visit to the Czech Republic, made a statement that I find very important: *“Normally, creative minorities determine the future”*. He was speaking to Catholics in the Czech Republic, where they are a minority. Normally, it is the creative minorities which determine the future.

Tasks I am taking home

Someone in this hall stated that “to change hearts is more than to change the Constitutions; and we need to know how to change hearts”. It seems to me that, in one way or another, we have already stated how it is necessary to change hearts. When we stated that the best message of the Chapter is ourselves, we were saying that there was no question of changing others, unless we started with ourselves.

The Pope recalled this: creative minorities determine the future. Let us be convinced that what happens with me, with my life, with the decisions I take, will affect my surroundings, my community, my Province, the Institute and the Church. We are part of a body, and what happens in one member affects the whole body.

Brothers, are we able to begin the change with ourselves? Are we able to announce today to the Institute not only decisions referring to structures, boundaries or organizations, but all the decisions that affect us personally? Are we able to say that there is a group of 84 Brothers -or more- who decided to take seriously the call of God received at the Chapter? Once more, what we decide ourselves to do with our own life will have consequences for the life of the Institute.

CONCLUSIÓN

And so I finish. I began by saying that the cold alters the course of the fish, remembering the experience we have lived during these five weeks of Chapter. I recorded Sean's invitation to see the world through the eyes of poor children and to commit ourselves accordingly. I referred to Mary of the Visitation, as an invitation to deepen the mystical aspect of our life. And, finally, I repeated what many have already said in this hall: that we ourselves are the first message that we have to transmit to the Institute.

To continue the tradition of my immediate predecessor, Br. Sean Sammon, I end with a story Elie Wiesel tells in one of his books. You know that he was a survivor of the Nazi extermination camps and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize:

“A king heard that in his kingdom there was a wise man, one who knew all the languages of the world; who understood the songs of birds; who knew how to interpret the appearance of the clouds and understand their meaning. He also knew how to read the thoughts of other people. The king ordered him to be brought to the palace. And here the wise man was presented to the king.

So the king said to the sage: ‘Is it true that you know all languages?’ ‘Yes, Your Majesty’. ‘Is it true that you know how to listen to the birds and understand their song?’ ‘Yes, Your Majesty’. ‘And is it true that you understand the language of the clouds?’ ‘Yes, Your majesty’. ‘Is it also true that you can read the thoughts of other people?’ ‘Yes, Your Majesty’. Then the king said to him: ‘In my hands I am holding a little bird; tell me, is it alive or is it dead?’

The wise man was afraid, for he took into account that, whatever he said, the king could kill the bird. He remained a long time in silence, then looked fixedly at the king and finally replied: ‘The answer, Your Majesty, is in your hands’.

It appears to me that there can be no better way to end this Chapter: ***the answer, Brother, is in your hands.***

Thank you.