

INAUGURAL MASS OF THE XII GENERAL CHAPTER

MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE

It seems almost deliberate that the readings we have heard today are exactly the right readings for the beginning of a General Chapter.

The first reading affirms 'Say to those who are of a fearful heart, be courageous, fear not'. Perhaps we too, as we begin this Chapter, carry these sentiments in our hearts. 'What will happen, what will occur, whom will they elect, what choices will be made for our Institute...' A little fear, a little apprehension is present in us. But the Lord affirms, 'fear not'.

I believe that one of the fundamental attitudes with which to begin a General Chapter is this sense of optimism rather than a feeling of bewilderment. Of course, there are uncertainties, but these should not make us lose the true optimism that comes from the Lord and the Faith we have in Him.

A chapter must show a way, certainly sometimes strenuous and dangerous, but wide and open for all to enter.

The second reading, on the other hand, is very emblematic in the words 'let your faith be immune from personal favouritism'. Almost as if to say, 'in your meetings, in your Chapters, do not make discrimination'. Sometimes it is just like that, even in our communities, in our meetings can arise these favouritism and discriminations that divide, 'break' our communities, which are no longer founded on Faith in God, but merely on our human calculations and desires. When we start hearing words like, 'I am only for this line, I am only for this group, I am only for this idea...', and all this becomes an obsession, a fixation, and we can be sure that something is wrong, not only in the community, but also in ourselves.

Here then is the second fundamental attitude for living serenely and fully a General Chapter, it is the attitude of one who takes off all prejudices, removes the mask and sees clearly and sincerely the good of others, and not of herself or her group of friends. It is about understanding and making people understand that others, who for various reasons are not like us, are not possible enemies or competitors, but people to be trusted.

I ask myself and I ask you then, what is essential for a General Chapter, when we can say that we are truly living a good Chapter...I believe when we live fraternity among ourselves, when we take care of one another. All this is essential for a General Chapter.

Finally, the Gospel tells us how Jesus heals a deaf-mute, healing first his ears and then his tongue, as if to say that listening is important before speaking. Yes, that's right, listening comes before the spoken word and is the basis of the word itself. I often repeat it, we are what we listen to and our speech is based on our listening. If during this Chapter (but you are all saints...), in the corridors, we listen only to critical words, even in the Chapter hall we will certainly use critical words and judgments... If during this Chapter, before we speak or say something meaningful, we do not listen calmly and carefully to

what others say, our words will have no foundation and no effect on those who listen to us.

Let us think about our own religious life. When we are in difficulty or going through a challenging time and we are alone in absolute darkness, what helps us, above all, at least it seems to me, is not the fact that we just talk or vent to someone, but it is the fact that we can listen to someone who can guide us through a difficult and particular time in our lives.

So, I think of listening as that basic element for a good start to a General Chapter. Moreover, I think that precisely apostolic, fraternal and mutual obedience is the theme of your General Chapter; an obedience that cannot but have as its origin an open and trusting listening to what is asked of me in obedience.

Best wishes for your Chapter and have a good listening.

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