

4th Conference on “A Vision of the Order for the 21st Century”

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Dear Fathers and Mothers of the General Chapter,

We could innumerate various factors that affect our time and that could have a certain part to play in our vision of the future: modern means of communication, the ideology of gender identity, extreme fundamentalisms, the loss of credibility of the Church because of sexual scandals, the phenomenon of immigration... I think we are all witnesses of this multicultural transformation, and we cannot stay out of it.

“Genealogy of Jesus Christ, Son of....”(Mt 1, 1-17)

The question about the future of the Order is, for me, a question of the “**transmission of life**” and of the “**present**”. The future are the “sons” and “daughters”. “May you see the children of our children,” says the psalm.

Before I entered the monastery, when I was a catechist en a parish, I heard a priest that gave the talks of preparation for the sacrament of Marriage say this: “You begin to educate your children 20 years before they are born.” That frase made a big impact on me, and was lodged in my heart. That first time I heard it, I thought right away that the children will be what I am now; I thought about responsibility... Invited now to say something about the vision of the Order in the XXI century, that thought has become vary intense in me.

I have started talking about the transmission of life because time, past, present and future, in the Bible is expressed in family trees, genealogies, real human histories in which the important thing is that God intervenes, interacts with fragil, sinful humans; He weaves history with the threads of his plan of love. So history is not a bunch of facts related with each other; history is God intervening, **giving a promise and a blessing**. The promise and the blessing are transmitted by the very transmission of life, by generation. History for the Bible is a chain of generations, of persons who have inherited the divine blessing and who must conserve it and transmit it to thier descendants.

The fundamental thing in the transmission of the promise and of the blessing is generation. The key word here is the verb “to generate”, verb of jewish tradition. This word links one life to another - persons, whole peoples; it unifies and guarantees the authentic transmission of the promise. But the verb “to generate” signifies not only the communication of human life, but also, and above all, as a fundamental value in Sacred Scripture, the transmission of the divine blessing. Generation that transmits the blessing is not necessarily carnal; it can be spiritual or of adoption. The important thing is the participation in the blessing and the sense of belonging –“one is the son of”. In your own case, who has engendered you in faith and in monastic life?

It is impressive how the Sacred Scripture presents persons by way of a genealogy that connects each with an origen, from which each receives a face.

You don't invent identity; nobody gives himself his own identity; you receive it. From the biological ambient we know that in the very act of being generated, of being called into life, each one receives an ADN, a genetic code that is unique and irrepeatable, that contains the whole of what the person will be; this acid also contains the genetic data that will be hereditary, that is to say, that will be transmitted from one person to another.

The same thing happens with the blessing that is the cistercian, monastic charism, with its ADN, which, ever since the Spirit breathed it into the Church, courses thorugh the blood of generations and generations of monks right up until today; it shows us that the future is here in this day... And if we apply the frase of that good priest, “the education of your children begins 20 years before they are born”, we can draw our conclusions and grasp the great challenge of the conversion of

spiritual paternity and maternity that would permit us to connect with an origin and push forward to a destiny.

Analogy are valid. In a world of anti-birth, full of the strangest methods of anticonception... We can see a filtration of this mentality into our spiritual life. To carry a child means time and waiting; the trauma of giving birth, cutting the umbilical cord... It's hard to be parents; we resist; maybe it's because there have been abuses in the exercise of parenthood, transforming it into power that debases the other even to the extent of immorality; and then the terrible fear; abdicating our genuine monastic tradition, we stop being *abba* or *amma* calling ourselves "spiritual guides". Or maybe it's a pendular reaction, swinging between the figure of the authoritarian father of former decades and the modern absent father.

In a world that is living a tremendous existential "orphanity", -not only because of the disintegration of the family and of everything that implies taking roots, but also because of the fall of those certainties that give meaning and form to life, -there is a great hunger and cry for paternity; that might be another way of saying a hunger for meaning, for transcendence, origin and eternal destiny.

The monastic tradition of *paternity and filiation is a focus of light*, a real answer in a world so deprived of roots, and, for that reason, of identity... I have always been impressed that the relation between the houses of the Order, according to the Charter of Charity is so strong that we give it a juridical expression (const. 73) as paternity and filiation. It's the way we say what we are; it is the way our Order is bound together. Each one can think about the lineage of his or her monastery... Can you follow the line of your generation?

But it's not a question of **paternalism or maternalism**: nor of an ascetic neutrality, nor of a pan-psychological vision by which we try to not dirty ourselves with an affective dependence that would create an infantile relation. It is a question of paternity and maternity that are spiritual and charismatic.

Just as we know Jesus from the Gospel, so can we understand something about the **paternity of God** of which we are called to be a mirror. Jesus, the Son, is the Person that is truly free, that gives without fear and without making calculations; Jesus is the one who learned, by way of suffering, to obey. This is important. We must be instruments of God's paternity; we must love persons "unto God", and not fall into the trap of gratifications, be able to go a step beyond just reciprocity. The sacrifice of Isaac frees us and purifies us from every distorted view of paternity.

"Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your ancients will have dreams and visions".

(Joel 3,1)

At this point I would like to refer to a homily of Pope Francis for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the XXI World Day of Consecrated Life, February 2, 2017. In this homily he cites the prophecy of Joel 3, 1: "*I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your ancients will have dreams and visions.*"

We have received the inheritance of our fathers and mothers of yesterday and today; we are children of their constant, daily dedication, of their praise made flesh; we have received their dreams and visions, and thanks to them we know that they are our guarantee, that "hope does not fail," that "He does not deceive us."

Dream and prophecy go together. The memory of how our ancients -our fathers and our mothers-dreamed; the audacity to carry forward prophetically that dream. **Memory and prophecy go together; maybe it is only by that connection that there is a true transmission, a true engendering.**

This attitude will make us fruitful (because it pertains to all of us in the community, not just to the person directly in charge of formation); but above all it will protect us from the **temptation of survival**, which can render sterile our consecrated life; an evil that can get installed in our interior,

in the heart of our communities. The attitude of survival makes us reactionary and fearful; slowly and silently it shuts us up in our houses and in our schemes.

It's a hot issue for us who for some time now have been reflecting on fragility in our houses. We have to discern when a certain type of simplifying structures becomes simply nailing ourselves down in a framework of survival. It directs us to the past, to the glorious -but past- achievements which, far from awakening the prophetic creativity born of the dreams of our founders, looks for defenses to avoid the challenges that today are beating at our doors.

Pope Francis says that **the mentality of survival** robs our charism of its strength, because it leads us to tame it, sucking out the creative force that the Spirit Himself breathed into it in the beginning; rather than **facilitating new processes**, it makes us protect frameworks, spaces, buildings and structures. The temptation to survival causes us to forget grace; it leaves us rancid; professionals of the sacred, but not fathers and mothers of the hope to which we have been called to prophecy.

This ambient of survival dries up the heart of our elders, depriving them of the capacity to dream, and, in this way, it sterilizes the prophecy that the younger ones are called to announce and to make real. To say it briefly, the temptation of survival transforms into a danger, a threat and an obstacle that which the Lord is presenting to us as a door to life.

Summary

Of all that could be said about the future of the Order in the XXIst Century, my vision of it is in the following:

- **The return to the charism of spiritual paternity and maternity.** The lack of vocations and the lack of spiritual fatherhood would seem to be bound together in some measure.
- **The challenge of memory and prophecy.** Confidence in the prophecies of the younger ones is in risk; they are going to prophesy, and sometimes they will be mistaken. Let them prophesy and open the way to new times. Believe in the memory of the elders that connects us with our roots and gives us our identity. Here too, is the challenge of a new inculcation in our communities, if I may say it that way, where the accent is shifted: we no longer speak so much about founders and the founded, but about the relation of older ones and younger ones. It's a global world; in one same community there is an enormous ethnic and cultural wealth. How we integrate the old and the young. How we live this generative aspect of the community, where paternity and filiation have two-way movement, not only from the old to the young, but also in the other direction from the young to the old; we are sons and fathers of one another.

"I will bless you to the full, and I will multiply your descendants so much that they will be more numerous than the stars of heaven or like the sand at the sea shore... and because you have obeyed my voice, all the peoples of the earth will be blessed by way of your descendants." (Genesis 22, 17-18)

