



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with the participants in the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Stigmatines)

At 11.30 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 37th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Stigmatines) and gave an off-the-cuff address.

The following is the address the Pope had prepared for the event, and handed to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers,

Welcome, on the occasion of your elective General Chapter. I cordially greet you all, starting with the Superior General, whom I thank for his kind words. You come from fifteen countries, where you are committed to bringing the proclamation of the Word of God in all its forms, with particular attention to the younger generations and in fraternal collaboration with the diocesan clergy. I thank you for what you do in the service of the Gospel and of the people entrusted to you, and I urge you to revive in you and your communities the fire of the Word of God: it must “inflame” the hearts of those on the periphery of urban and ecclesial contexts.

In the Gospel Jesus announces: “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!” (*Lk* 12: 49). Imitating the divine Master, you too are called to bring fire into the world. But there is a mistaken fire and a good, holy fire. The Evangelist Luke tells that once Jesus, while on His way to Jerusalem, sent before Him messengers who entered a village of Samaritans, who did not want to welcome Him. So the two disciples and brothers, James and John, said, “Lord, do You want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (*Lk* 9: 54). But Jesus turned and rebuked them; and they went on to another village. This is the wrong fire. God does not like it. God in the Bible is likened to fire but it is a fire of love, which conquers people’s hearts, not by violence, but by respecting each person’s freedom and time.

The Gospel is to be announced with meekness and joy, as did your founder, Saint Gaspar Bertoni. This is the style of evangelization of Jesus, our Master. He welcomed and approached everyone and conquered people with kindness, mercy, with the penetrating word of Truth. In this way you missionary disciples, who are evangelizers, can bring people to conversion, to communion with Christ, through the joy of your life and with meekness. Those who proclaim the Gospel are not always welcomed and applauded. Sometimes they are rejected, hindered, persecuted, even imprisoned or killed. This you know well! So we must persevere, be patient, but we must not be afraid of bearing witness to Jesus and His word of Truth.

The good fire is the fire of Jesus, of He Who baptizes in the Holy Spirit and fire: "I came to cast fire on the earth" (*Lk 12: 49*). It is the fire of charity that purifies hearts and which burst forth on the cross of Christ. It is the fire of the Holy Spirit Who descended powerfully at Pentecost. The fire that separates gold from other metals, that is, which helps to distinguish what is of eternal worth from that which has little value. "Everyone", says Jesus, "will be salted with fire" (*Mk 9: 49*). It is the fire of trials and difficulties that tempers us, that makes us strong and wise. It is also the fire of fraternal charity. Evangelizers are born and formed in a community gathered together in the name of the Lord, and are sent by it. "Where there are two or three gathered in my name, there am I among them" (*Mt 18: 20*). The witness of love of a fraternal community of missionaries is confirmation of the Gospel proclamation, it is the "trial by fire". If a good fire is lacking in a community, there is coldness, darkness and loneliness. If there is the fire of fraternal charity, there is heat, light and the strength to go forward. And new vocations are attracted to the sweet mission of evangelizing.

Dear Stigmatine missionaries, bring this fire to Christian communities, where the faith of many people needs to be rekindled, to find the strength to be contagious. At the same time, go, go out to proclaim the Gospel to the poor, to those who do not feel loved by anyone, to those who live in sadness and despair, to prisoners, the homeless and those without shelter, immigrants, to those fleeing from wars. Saint Gaspar Bertoni transmitted to you the love of the spouses, Saints Mary and Joseph. Therefore, pay particular attention to the family; together with the laity, announce the joy of love. Bring the fire of Christ to the young, who need someone to listen to them and to help them find meaning in life. If you proclaim Jesus, they will be attracted; lead them to Him with patience and perseverance. Be joyful and gentle missionaries, well prepared to meet each person.

Saint Gaspar Bertoni conceived of your Congregation to prepare apostolic missionaries to help bishops in the proclamation of the Gospel. Being missionaries, sent by the Church, is not first and foremost doing something, an activity, but rather it is an identity. When God chooses and calls for a particular mission, at the same time He gives a new name, creates an ever new reality. Jesus called to you to stay with Him as missionary disciples. Therefore, you must first of all cultivate and safeguard your communion with Him, the Lord, to contemplate His countenance in prayer, to recognize Him and serve Him with love in the faces of your brothers.

May your faithful adherence to Christ and His Gospel shine forth in the various fields of your ecclesial service. May the Virgin Mary and Saint Gaspar protect you and be a sure guide on the journey of your religious family, so that it may fulfil all its good projects. With these wishes, as I ask you to pray for me, I invoke the blessing of the Lord on you, on the whole Institute and on all those you encounter in your daily apostolate. May the Lord always inflame your mission with the fire of the Holy Spirit!
