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# **BOLLETTINO**

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## **Message of the Holy Father to the participants in the General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor**

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor, taking place from 3 to 18 July in Rome on the theme: “Renewing our vision, embracing our future”:

### **Message of the Holy Father**

Dear brothers!

I greet all of you who are participating in the General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor with affection. My grateful thoughts go to Fr. Michael A. Perry, who has concluded his service as Minister General, and I offer my best wishes to Fr. Massimo Giovanni Fusarelli, who has been called to succeed him. I extend my greetings to all your communities throughout the world.

As a result of the pandemic, we have found ourselves living in emergency situations of isolation and suffering for many months now. On the one hand, this critical experience encourages all of us to recognise how our earthly life is a journey to be made as pilgrims and strangers, itinerant men and women, ready to lighten our load of personal goods and demands. On the other hand, it is a favourable opportunity to intensify our relationship with Christ and with our brothers and sisters: I am thinking of your communities, called to be a humble prophetic presence in the midst of God’s people and a witness to fraternity and a simple and joyful life for all.

In these difficult and complex times, when there is a risk of being “paralysed”, you are nevertheless experiencing the grace of celebrating your Ordinary General Chapter, which is already a reason to praise and thank God. In this Chapter, you propose to “renew your vision” and “embrace your future”. You are guided by the words of Saint Paul: “*Arise... and Christ will give you light*” (Eph 5:14). It is a word of resurrection, which roots you in the Paschal dynamic because there is no renewal, and there is no future except in the risen Christ. With gratitude, therefore, you open yourselves to welcome the signs of God’s presence and action and to rediscover the gift of your charism and your fraternal and minor identity.

Renewing one's vision: this is what happened to the young Francis of Assisi. He himself attests to it, recounting the experience that he places at the beginning of his conversion in his *Testament*: the encounter with the lepers, when "what was bitter was changed into sweetness of soul and body" (*Test* 1-4). At the roots of your spirituality is this encounter with the least and the suffering, in the sign of "doing mercy". God touched the heart of Francis through the mercy offered to his brother, and he continues to touch our hearts through the encounter with others, especially those most in need. The renewal of your vision can only start from this new gaze with which to contemplate the poor and marginalised brother or sister, a sign, almost a sacrament of the presence of God.

From this renewed gaze, from this concrete experience of encounter with our neighbour and with his wounds, can come a renewed energy to look to the future as brothers and as minors, as you are, according to the beautiful name of "friars minor", which St Francis chose for himself and for you.

The renewing strength you need comes from the Spirit of God, from that "holy operation" (*Regula Bullata* 10, 8) which is the unmistakable sign of his action. That Spirit, who transformed the bitterness of Francis' encounter with the lepers into sweetness of soul and body, is still at work today to give new freshness and energy to each one of you if you allow yourselves to be stirred by the least of our time. I encourage you to go out to meet the men and women who suffer in soul and body, to offer your humble and fraternal presence, without grand speeches, but making your closeness as lesser brothers felt. To go towards a wounded creation, our common home, which suffers from a distorted exploitation of the earth's goods for the enrichment of a few while creating conditions of misery for many. To go as men of dialogue, seeking to build bridges instead of walls, offering the gift of fraternity and social friendship in a world that is struggling to find the path of a common vision. To go forth as men of peace and reconciliation, inviting those who sow hatred, division and violence to conversion of heart, and offering the victims the hope that comes from truth, justice and forgiveness. From these encounters, you will receive an impetus to live the Gospel ever more fully, according to that word which is your way: "The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Regula Bullata* 1, 1).

As much of the Order faces the challenges of declining numbers and ageing, do not let anxiety and fear prevent you from opening your hearts and minds to the renewal and revitalisation that the Spirit of God brings about in you and among you. You have a spiritual heritage of inestimable riches, rooted in the Gospel life and marked by prayer, fraternity, poverty, minority and itinerancy. Do not forget that we receive a renewed gaze, which can open us to God's future, from our closeness to the poor, the victims of modern slavery, the refugees and the excluded of this world. They are your teachers. Embrace them as Saint Francis did!

Dear brothers, may the Most High, Almighty, Good Lord make you ever more credible and joyful witnesses of the Gospel; may he grant you to lead a simple and fraternal life; and may he lead you on the paths of the world to sow the seed of the Good News with faith and hope. For this, I pray and accompany you with my Blessing. And please do not forget to pray for me too.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 15 July 2021

FRANCIS

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