

Interview with the Superior General,* Tomaž Mavrič, CM

First of all, I would like to extend a cordial greeting to all the confreres of the Congregation of the Mission, to the Daughters of Charity, and to the Vincentian Family throughout the world. I wish to express the great joy I feel for the many messages I have received promising me their prayers. This gives me great security; it helps me and gives me confidence. In this way, we can do something beautiful for God and for the poor.

How do you feel after your election?

I would say that I am still somewhat in the clouds. I still feel that way. But I also think about the peace I feel in the presence of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit who is in our midst and who accompanies and guides us; it is Providence which guided the General Assembly and also created that beautiful brotherly spirit which is alive among us. It is one more support I can mention at this moment for the journey which Providence will show us.

When you left the Vice-Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius, on your way to the Assembly, did you imagine this could happen to you, that you would be named Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission?

One never knows beforehand how the Spirit will guide us. But it is like this: here and there, there were whispers, but one cannot say that he knows, that he is completely sure. So the best way to be is to be open to the Spirit. What I hoped for before arriving at the General Assembly was that the Spirit would guide us, and that what Providence would show us, we would know how to accept.

* Interview with Luis Chavez, CM, for Radio Vicentina in Chile

Father, this interview has the purpose, among other things, of getting to know you better. Could you tell us something about your personal history, your family, your vocation, and about your missionary experience?

I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina on 9 May 1959. My parents emigrated from Slovenia with other family members, fleeing from communism in 1945. In the beginning they were in a refugee camp in Austria and they arrived in Argentina in 1948. That is where my parents met and married. In my family there are five children, three boys and two girls. My father died in 1989, but my mother still lives in San Carlos de Bariloche in Southern Argentina. We Vincentians have the Miraculous Medal Parish there.

I went to elementary and high school in Mary the Queen School, in Buenos Aires province; it was founded by the confreres who came from Slovenia. Next to the college was a boarding school, a kind of missionary school, and I spent a few years there. We went home more or less every two weeks; but sometimes we were there full-time.

After high school, I asked to enter the Congregation of the Mission and I entered the Province that was at that time the Province of Yugoslavia formed by confreres from Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia.

In 1977, I made my Internal Seminary in Belgrade, Serbia, and I began my philosophy studies in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia; I also did my theology there. I was ordained in 1983. Afterwards, my superiors sent me to Canada, where we have a parish in Toronto, and I worked there for ten years. Then I worked for three years in Slovenia. Afterwards I asked Father Maloney, the Superior General, to allow me to go to the international missions. Just at that time the Congregation was contemplating the possibility of opening an international mission in Russia, in the Urals. Father Maloney assigned me to that mission with a Polish confrere. That was in 1997, and I spent four years in the city of Nizhniy Tagil, in the Urals. During those years, specifically in 2001, the province of Saints Cyril and Methodius was founded. It encompasses three countries: Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. My Visitor sent me to a formation course in Dublin, Ireland and I was there for one year. Then I spent another year accompanying our Internal Seminarians in Slovakia. In 2004, they sent me to the central house, which is known

among us as the “Gift of God House.” That was an idea of our first Visitor, that it not be called the provincial house or the central house, but rather “Gift of God.” That is where I have been until now. In the beginning I was sent to the Internal Seminary and I was later elected Vice-Visitor in 2009.

What dreams do you have or what do you wish for the Congregation of the Mission? Have you formed any ideas about what you would like to highlight during your term as Superior General?

A few days ago I shared a reflection with a confrere from Italy who has begun to develop the idea of Vincent as a Mystic of Charity. In recent years, another confrere, Hugh O’Donnell from the United States, has deepened this idea of Vincent as a Mystic of Charity. I think it is a wonderful opportunity for us as Vincentians, as a Vincentian Family, to develop this idea. The theologian Karl Rahner at the end of the last century, wrote these words which (now) sound prophetic: “the 21st century Christian is going to be a mystic or he will not exist at all.” I see this as a wonderful invitation for us as well to think about our Founder, his charism, his spirituality, and to deepen just this phrase: Vincent de Paul, Mystic of Charity and how we also can be (mystics of Charity) in our own lives.

Every Superior General has his own style. Some have been outstanding for their teachings and spiritual practices, others for their administrative and organizational qualities, others, like your predecessor, for his missionary spirit and simplicity. What do you think will be the mark you will make in this service to which you have been called?

You asked me before if I have a plan, if I had some concrete ideas for these six years. It is the same that one could say with regard to this question about the style I am going to follow. I want to follow Providence. I want Jesus to guide us and to be open to Providence. I think that is the best plan: to give priority to God, to Jesus, so that we travel together discovering the mission he wants to confide to us from today onward. One thing I want to share with the confreres and with the different branches of the Vincentian Family, the Daughters of Charity, and other religious communities and laity is that there are so many gifts and talents! Just looking at what I experienced in the

Assembly, so many gifts! There is a tremendous potential to construct and develop the Kingdom of God for this world in which we live, for the poor whom we are called to serve. The idea of collaboration — we just finished the Year of Collaboration in the Vincentian Family. The year is officially over, but we must follow this way more and more; this is where I see our future.

Is there anything you would take away or add to the Congregation?

At this moment it is difficult to speak concretely about what I would add or subtract. I think Jesus with his Spirit, through the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and Saint Vincent, is going to guide us. They are going to point out concretely the path we should follow and give us signs about what to improve and what does not correspond to our charism or what we should add. I think we must look to the future with great hope, precisely because by giving ourselves to Providence I think we are not going to go wrong.

Recently much has been said about reconfiguration. What do you think is the model that best fits us for reconfiguration: the joining of provinces or collaboration?

Surely, if by reconfiguration we understand only the fusion of provinces, that is not enough. At the end of the day, that does not give positive results, because the idea is to collaborate. If some changes are made in a province as it is now or among provinces as they are, it is for the spiritual good, in the first place, for the good of the people we are called to serve, to go to the poor. This must be our aim — to serve them better. It is for this reason that in our Congregation — and not just in ours — this same process is going on in other congregations — we are trying to collaborate. In some places there is a scarcity of vocations, fewer confreres or they are becoming fewer; this is the reason for making these decisions. Collaboration is the basis of serving better.

What would you say to the Daughters of Charity? You are their Superior General as well. What message would you give them?

I thank them with all my heart for their prayers; many houses and provinces have sent messages of congratulations in which the promise of regular and daily prayer is the first consideration. So to all the Daughters of Charity a grand and affectionate greeting, an embrace

for each sister. As you said, you owe your vocation to the Daughters of Charity, and this too is a concrete sign of collaboration, that we help one another. We are all joyful, if we are developing our collaboration more and more; and, without doubt, God gives this to us through our brothers and sisters. The Daughters of Charity are doing great work and have done for so many years, for so many decades and centuries, from the beginning of our charism whose 400th anniversary we are celebrating next year. I wish that they, just as all our confreres and all the members of the Vincentian Family continue giving an example of service with great hope. Then God is going to give us vocations so that we not continue to decrease, but, just the opposite, grow and develop. God willing, we shall see each other soon. In a few weeks or months, I will probably begin my visits, and with great joy I hope to meet you all.

Next year we celebrate the 400th anniversary of our charism. What do you think would be the greatest sign we as a Vincentian Family could give to today's world?

Our spirituality is centered on Christ, the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Eucharist, the love for the poor, and the Virgin Mary. These are the foundations of our spirituality. To immerse ourselves in this spirituality which we are called to live — that will take us to the poor more and more. Immersing ourselves in our spirituality will draw us ever closer to them. More and more we will find the answers to the needs of today's world, especially the poor. That is what I see as a sign of our times; and, once again, Providence will point out the needs to us and to the people around us, those we will encounter this year as we celebrate our 400th anniversary. Without doubt, the people who have moved away from God will be able to see, through us and our way of acting, that it is something that truly comes from God and they too will be attracted to this path. And so our circle will become ever larger. We can include more people within our circle so that the Family continues to grow, and, of course, with God's grace, we will do this.

Father, in our days, technology has opened many areas, especially the area of communication. Many young people use social media and have had the opportunity to know the Vincentian Family in that way. I would like you to send some encouraging words to all those young people, who are willing to become involved in service.

I am so happy to hear that, that young people are living with their hearts open, that they are using social media and different forms of communication for good. I see a great possibility and I think we must develop this means of communication more and more. We have the means; we have the tools; we can use them for ill or we can use them for good. The media, in themselves, are not bad; they are just means. It depends on us, and I see a great potential. More people are going to see and hear about examples like you, my dear young people: what you are doing, the service you are rendering, your open heart, and the help you give to the poor in many different ways. It is to be hoped that some be committed and that others have their hearts opened to making such a decision. They too can do something like that, helping in one way or another.

I tell you with all my heart, go forward, try to invite others to follow you, that they may draw near and that their service be based in Jesus, in our God, in our brother, who gives us a solid foundation, the most solid of all, because there will be difficult moments. When one sees that things do not go as one wished or planned, that there are so many needs, one can begin to lose hope. It is precisely then that we need the accompaniment of Jesus; that we need to go with an open mind and heart, knowing that Jesus is with us; that it is He who opens the doors for us; that it is our Mother, the Virgin who goes with us and leads us to the poor; that we never go alone. May God grant, among you young people, that Jesus is calling some to follow him as missionary priests or sisters in religious life. You yourselves will feel it. If your heart begins to beat in that direction, open your hearts, and say yes with all humility but with great confidence, because it is God who is calling you.

Many thanks, Father, for granting this interview. So again, many thanks; may the Lord bless and accompany you in this ministry you are beginning.

I too wish to thank you wholeheartedly; and I ask everyone for his/her prayers for me; pray for our General Council, for the Assembly that still continues, pray for the Vincentian Family throughout the world. We pray with great confidence that together we can do something beautiful for God and for the poor. Thank you very much.