

II - HOMILIES

OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY

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Superior General

Ec 4:1-10; Ps 33; 2 Cor 8:7-9; Lc 4:16-22

The Word of God is a two-edged sword, and my heart has been pierced by what the Lord has said to us today in these readings as we begin this 41st General Assembly, invoking the presence of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus .

Our goal: creative fidelity to the mission. It is the Spirit that has anointed **us** to be good news to the poor as the Spirit has anointed Jesus Christ. Vincent de Paul invites his missionaries to do what the Lord Jesus did when he was here on this earth. I was challenged by the comments of the author of the first reading. He speaks about “the tears of the victims with none to comfort them.”

My brothers, as a Congregation, where are we? Are we running to the victims of oppression, war and violence to come to their aid? Or are we among the victimizers? It is easy to determine if we are oppressors from a direct position; it is more difficult to be able to say if we are among those who oppress in an indirect way, either by our protecting our own comfort zones and living a style of life that therefore makes life difficult for others, or simply for sins of omission.

Have we become so entrenched in our apostolic experiences, in our mission, doing the same old thing? Has the salt lost its flavor? Sometimes such is the case. I have seen it in my travels throughout the Congregation, I have reflected a great deal with the Council on different issues and situations throughout. Many times it comes down to the fact that we are only interested in doing our own thing. We are that “solitary man with no companion.” The reading concludes by saying, “Woe to the solitary man, for if he shall fall, he has no one to lift him up.”

Yes, my brothers, let the Word of God challenge us today, because it says two are better than one. "If the one falls the other will lift up his companion." And **I** say that three is better than two. And the whole community united in its support one of another is the best of all. Our Constitutions call us to look at the mission in this way. Community for mission.

The second reading from Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians challenges us to look beyond our own personal interests, testing the genuineness of our concern for others. As Jesus became poor, we are called to become poor, poor with the poor. Not that we are called to share their same misery, but rather to feel their misery, to show our solidarity, and then rather than give them a hand out, give them a hand up. So let us look beyond our own interests, see the situation of the poor today, of those who are oppressed; become one with them and therefore, with Jesus, become rich in His love.

From an historical perspective one might say that Saint Vincent de Paul was led to God by his experience of the poor. Yet when we look more deeply into the life of the Saint, we can say from the perspective of faith that it was God who led Vincent to the poor. And it was God's love that enabled him to experience more deeply in his oneness with them.

My brothers, God continually leads us to the poor. That's our vocation. That's why the Spirit of the Lord has come upon us. We have been anointed to bring glad tidings to the poor. We pray that in this General Assembly we let it be the Spirit of the Lord Jesus that leads us to an ever greater commitment as brothers, united in the evangelization and service of the poor. And may we do so in a way that is creatively faithful.

As we gather around the table of the Lord, to be nourished by his Word and nourished by the gift of the Eucharist, let us ask the Lord to strengthen our love one for another, that love He first had for us, as we go forth to proclaim "a year acceptable to the Lord." May He help us to stretch that year into at least the next six years.