

CLOSING OF THE ASSEMBLY

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“To be or not to be, that is the question?” so wrote Shakespeare. And what is our question? From the perspective of this General Assembly, from the motivation of its theme Creative Fidelity to the Mission, I would dare to say that our question is to do or not to do? Yes, that is our question, my brothers, to do or not to do the mission that the Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted to us as missionaries, priests and brothers, in the Congregation of the Mission.

“He went about doing good.” Our historians claim that this is the *first motto* that Saint Vincent de Paul chose for the Congregation of the Mission. In imitation of Jesus Christ, focused on the Word of God, Vincent de Paul was struck by this phrase from the Acts of the Apostles. It was Peter who proclaimed how God had anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and “he went about doing good.”

My brothers, “doing good” is what we have focused on in this General Assembly: how we have done good, how we can be better at doing good, and in what ways we might be able to accomplish that good, being faithful to our heritage and yet ever creative in its expressions. In my report to the General Assembly on the state of the Congregation of the Mission in these past six years, I said simply but clearly that one of the most important developments, not only for the Congregation but also for the Vincentian Family that we had worked on with much intensity, was and is the question of systemic change. Systemic change, as I said, is a contemporary way that we live out that which motivates us to do good, the charity of Jesus Christ crucified.

Fears have been expressed, saying that with such a focus on systemic change we might become like another NGO. Such is not the case when we have clear what it is, Who it is that motivates us to do what we do. The need is for us to make that connection, that integral relationship between contemplating the goodness of the Lord, deepening our knowledge of His love for us, and transforming that to loving action for the poor both by word and by deed, through evangelization and service of the poor.

Gentlemen, let me recall for you what Saint Vincent has said to the Congregation about the *Common Rules*, Chapter 1, Art. 1.

“If there are any among us who think they are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their suffering, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others, if we want to hear those pleasing words of our sovereign judge of the living and the dead: ‘Come, beloved of my Father; possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you, because I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was naked and you clothed me; sick and you assisted me.’ To do that is to preach the gospel by words and by works. That is the most perfect way. It is also what our Lord did, and what those should do who represent Him on earth.”

The basis of our renewal, that is of our Creative Fidelity to the Mission is tied into our love of God, being men of prayer; our love of the Congregation, being men who work at community life, that is participative and unifying; and men who draw close to the poor in order to listen to them, to be moved by their requests of us, being their servants with a desire to be obedient to them as our lords and masters and therefore to open our hearts to that transforming experience of God’s love that takes place in our interaction with those who are poor. And we do so as a community. We do so motivated by God’s love.

As we are nourished by God’s word let us be nourished by God’s Body and Blood and go forth bearing the Good News. Let us do so as bearers of peace with a humble confidence that it is God who works in us, He who gives us the courage to break with our fears, being made afresh and moving forward, being only concerned to do what Jesus Christ did, “going about doing good” for these the least of our brothers and sisters. So be it for the Congregation of the Mission as it embarks upon a new era, a new period of six years of following Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the Poor.