

Homily Opening Eucharist, Visitors' Meeting

Monday, 4 June 2007, Mexico

Readings: Tobit 1:3; 2:1a-8; Mark 12:1-12

"I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life," so says the author at the beginning of the book that tells the story of Tobit. "I _____ also walk in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life and I perform many acts of charity for the members of my province and for the people of God whom our province is called to serve."

My brothers, today we begin our meeting, the meeting of all the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission, together with the Superior General and his Council. Hopefully, there will be an opportunity in the course of this two-week period to share our stories with one another. And hopefully we can do so in order to encourage one another to be more faithful in the service that God has called us to do for the well-being of each of the members of the Congregation of the Mission and especially for the Poor.

It is interesting that both the readings, that the Universal Church presents for our reflection today, are about responsibility in carrying out what God has entrusted to the leaders of his people. On the one hand, in the Book of Tobit, even in face of defying the orders of the so-called civil society, Tobit carries out his responsibility, showing utmost respect for the dead, whose bodies had been discarded, and giving them proper burial. It is evident that he thinks more of his duty toward others, and toward his people, than his own concerns. Before he reclined to eat, he sent his son to invite every poor person to eat with him together at table. He was even able to mourn, to express the full depth of his sorrow, weeping as he buried those who had been assassinated. His fear was in the Lord and not of those who tried to determine or limit the exercise of his responsibility. In the Gospel, on the other hand, we see the irresponsibility of those to whom the vineyard of the Lord had been entrusted.

In these days, all of us, Visitors, Superior General and Assistants, will have the opportunity to reflect on the carrying out of our responsibilities. The meeting is, as you know, divided into two major parts. One will be a section on ongoing formation. Among the priorities of the Visitor, as our Constitutions state, is providing for

the ongoing formation of the members of his province. This is done in order to guarantee that the quality of service, as shown to God's people on the part of the confreres, is the very best that we can give. The other part of our time here together will be spent in dialogue: the members of the various Conferences of the Congregation among themselves and the Superior General and his Assistants with all the Visitors in discussion about the different services that we are called to provide for the well-being of the entire membership of the Congregation of the Mission. I certainly hope that, in this way, we might support each other, as well as encourage one another in the deepening of our responsibilities in the service of the Congregation of the Mission.

Tobit looked not first at his own needs, but at the needs of his fellow men, even those in the most desperate situations, doing his utmost to care for them. That is certainly how we must understand our role as servant-leaders in the Congregation of the Mission. We should have an attitude of caring and of openness. We need to listen to those who are our immediate responsibility, the confreres of the different provinces. We must also have a real concern for the care of those in our service, especially the Poor.

One of the underlying themes in both readings is the utmost respect that we, as human beings, are called to have for one another. Now we have the opportunity to reflect on that respect as shown to our brothers, to the Poor, to other members of the Vincentian Family. In respecting them, we encourage them to come to know more deeply the love that Jesus Christ has for them and we animate them to walk faithfully in his footsteps.

Let me point out a number of ways in which we might check on our responsibilities and also highlight some of the more significant areas where we are called to be responsible.

First and foremost, given that we are members of the Congregation of the Mission, whose mission is to be faithful in following Jesus Christ, evangelizing the Poor, we, as servant-leaders, must do our utmost to guarantee that our apostolates are in the midst of the Poor and that all of us, in growing close to the Poor, live our vocation in a responsible way, with a special concern for those most marginalized and abandoned in our societies. We, as servant-leaders, can even become prophetic witnesses, leading the way, so that those under our charge might be encouraged and animated to do the same.

Secondly, we are encouraged to foster the spiritual well-being of the members under our responsibility. As Saint Vincent encourages us, we are called to be men of prayer, praying in an open way and from our own experience of God as he speaks to us through our experience of the Poor.

Thirdly, we must be coherent, so that what we say, we also do. We practice what we preach. We have to be at the forefront in encouraging more by action than by words.

Finally, we have responsibility for the formation of our local communities. That is prophetic and gives tremendous witness to the society in which we live. The world today is torn by division, violence, lack of respect for one another. Peoples of different cultures, races and even creeds are unable to live in harmony and peace with one another. So, as servant-leaders, we are called to encourage that living together in mutual, supportive communities, which pray together, share significant moments with one another, recreate together, relax with one another and do so without making distinctions among one another. We must be, as Saint Vincent encourages us, good friends, who love one another.

The responsibility of servant-leadership in our world today is certainly not easy. In fact, humanly speaking, it is impossible. But, as men of faith, we know that for God, and by his grace, all things are possible.

As we gather around the table of the Lord, the source and sign of our own unity, as brothers in the Lord Jesus and with one another, let us partake together of this meal so that we might be nourished, refreshed and reenergized, in order to walk in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of our life, performing those many acts of charity for our confreres and the Poor, whom we are called to serve.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
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