

Homily Closing Eucharist, Visitors' Meeting

Friday, 15 June 2007, Mexico
Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Readings: Ezekiel 34:11-16; Romans 5:5b-11; Luke 15:3-7

On this Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I think it is most appropriate that we concentrate on the meaning of the heart, not only the heart of Jesus, but our own hearts. It might seem an obvious statement, but for us, that is, those of us who are men, for the most part we deal with issues more from the perspective of the head, rather than the heart. Perhaps much of what we have done this week has been head-work. It is obvious that they do not need to be in opposition, that is, the head and the heart, but in collaboration, one with another. Our challenge is to allow what is in our head to filter through our hearts.

Having said that, let's move on to the heart of the matter. As we heard in the opening prayer, when we focus on the heart of Jesus, we are focusing on the Father's gift of love, not only to Jesus, but to ourselves. God the Father's love comes from the heart of Jesus. We are called to receive that love in our hearts and, in turn, share that love with others. The heart is the symbol of love's triumph.

Although the Solemnity is called the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it is interesting that the Word of God, which the Universal Church presents to us, focuses on the image of the Good Shepherd. The relationship between the two is obviously the compassion of the Good Shepherd for his sheep. He seeks out those who are scattered. Those lost are brought back by his mercy. He heals their wounds, gives strength to the weak and nourishes them with justice.

Our Constitutions, particularly 97, which has been cited in this meeting on a number of occasions, invites us, who exercise authority, to have always before our eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be ministered to, but to minister. The Constitution reminds us to be conscious of our responsibility before God, considering ourselves servants of the Community for furthering the spirit of Saint Vincent in a true communion of apostolate and life.

As Visitors, you are called to seek the lost, to bring back the strayed, to bind up the injured, to give strength to the weak and to

nourish those members of your province with justice. My Assistants and I are called to do the same in communion with you in and through the services we provide for strengthening the true communion of apostolate and life among the members of the Congregation of the Mission.

Our attitudes toward those under our charge should be, first and foremost, the attitudes of the Good Shepherd, filled with that compassion, which flows from the heart of Jesus. This primary way of dealing with others places the emphasis on love. We have to believe that true love for others, especially those under our care, is the best way to solve whatever difficulties or challenges we might face. That is why we confirm that the heart is the symbol of love's triumph over all that speaks of evil, speaks of sin, speaks of woundedness, division and hurt. The love of Christ's heart brings healing and peace.

Our role as good shepherds, as men filled with compassion, is directed primarily to those under our care, the members of our different provinces. We are called to encourage them, as well, to live this love of Jesus. Brothers together as a province and provinces together as a Congregation are called to live that compassion especially for the poor.

I know that, as a Visitor, sometimes lots of your attention, energy and care has to be directed inwardly, toward the members of the province. Yet we cannot allow that care to absorb us completely. We are called to move outward with our care and concern for, with and from the reality of the poor. Encouraging our confreres in the province to do the same can bring about much healing and renewal of heart, because, as Saint Vincent clearly reminds us, it is among the poor that we discover true religion. It is in union with them, in solidarity with them that we find the way to salvation.

I urge you, as Visitors, together with the members of your province, to be continually concerned with the poor about issues of justice and peace. I urge you to either establish or to guarantee that you or members of your provinces are involved in Commissions of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Such commissions exist on the international and national levels. I also encourage you to have greater contact with our representative before the United Nations, Father Joseph Foley. Joe, as you saw in the report and in other reports, as well as on his website, encourages us to be involved in many initiatives for the good of the poor, with the poor. I encourage you to reflect on these materials, elaborated both by the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission, as well as the documents from our NGO representative at the United Nations, in order that the compassion we have for the poor as a Congregation might move us from an affective love toward a more effective love.

I conclude my comments, at the end of this meeting of Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission, asking forgiveness, as your Superior General, for the times that I have not acted from a perspective of a good shepherd. I ask your prayers for me and for my Assistants that we might work in a unified way to help promote the spiritual and apostolic life of the entire Congregation of the Mission; that we, as a General Council, might be able to deepen our compassion for you, as Visitors, and for those members of your provinces in our deliberations with you in all matters, whether informal or formal.

As we share the Eucharist this day, let us firmly believe that this is the sacrament of God's love, which has been poured out for us and which we receive in our hearts. United around this table of the Lord, may we move forward in our faithfulness to Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General