

Fr. General addresses the congregation -

Today is a special day for us: on 27 September 1696 St. Alphonsus Liguori was born in Marianella, Naples. Last night, as I was writing this message, I was thinking about the significance of this new mission which coincides with the birth of our holy Founder. God has his language!

I thank you for your confidence in asking me to undertake this arduous and challenging service to the Congregation. I will not be alone, I will count on my Council and also on the major superiors of the Congregation. I am at peace! Because I believe piously and deeply in the Holy Spirit, the helmsman of history, the One who was present at the creation of the world, on Jesus in the synagogue, at the resurrection, at Pentecost, on Alphonsus at the foundation of the Congregation, in the lives of our Saints, Blessed, Martyrs, Venerables and in each one of us present here today, at this Chapter. The Holy Spirit is here! Today is our Pentecost!

I believe in teamwork. Since my school days I have always worked in a team. It was easier to work individually, to get better marks, but I liked to work in this way, to dialogue, to learn together, to share.

I believe in the human person. I have an anthropological faith. For me, people are above structures. Structures have their importance, but considered in terms of people and mission. And the human person is always new. Every day he/she renews themselves, he/she surprises themselves with his/her potential and his/her weaknesses, and that fascinates me!

I believe in mysticism. A leadership that does not experience God is empty and cannot see persons. It is just cogs to make the gears work and usurps its function of caring, encouraging for personal gain.

The challenge. I like it. I have no fear. I have the prudent courage. A teacher once told me that I like difficult things. It's not a personal taste, but I never see challenge as something negative. For me it is something that needs an answer, a solution. And if there is no solution at least it was considered. I prefer to make mistakes than to remain in the stagnation that, little by little, rots and dies.

In my simplicity, as a peasant, as a farmer, with the necessary patience, I will generously give the best of myself in this service, all that is mine. I will work to make the General Government a missionary body for the animation of the apostolic life of the Congregation. There is much work to be done, many challenges to overcome. I ask for a little patience, especially in this first year. As a Congregation we must remember that we are a missionary body working collegially (cf. Const 2) and it is this missionary body that does not allow us to become fragmented! I will be asking for your collaboration.

During these days, we are addressing the challenges that touch our Redemptorist life: identity, mission, Redemptorist consecrated life, formation for mission and leadership for mission. These are challenges. "The term challenge has a theological character. It is a sign from God asking for our fidelity. In this perspective, we must discover and welcome the presence of the Spirit who, while showing us his gifts, urges us to continue to grow", says Aquilino Bocos.[1]

We have been talking a lot these days about the crisis of leadership. For me, the crisis of leadership begins when those who should care, appropriate their caring role for personal gain. The function of leadership is kenotic and not to oppress others, it is to be a good Samaritan.

In these last times, because of so many changes in our world, we may be like the community of Pentecost with our doors closed for fear of the dangers of the world of crisis. But the Redeemer takes us by the hand and says to each one of us: "In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world" (cf. Jn 16:33). He asks us: "Do you love me? He invites us to feed his sheep and lambs, to be one with him and to follow him. Therefore, let us not be afraid of crises! We should be concerned when there is no crisis. This is our time. It is the Lord's gift to us. This is our time (cf. Const. 3), it is kairós and in it we will announce the copious apud eum redemptio. The Lord is calling us: follow me!

Courage! Do not be afraid. The Lord Shepherd and Master of the flock has called each one of us, we are missionaries of hope! Each confrere is giving the best of himself in the different works. There is Redemptorist blood beating in our veins. We are not dead. The Spirit of the Lord confirms us. What the Redeemer is saying in the heart of each one of us today, at this moment in history! Don't be afraid, don't be afraid of the poor! I would like every Redemptorist to smell the smell of the sheep and exude the smell of Christ the Redeemer.

I would like each confrere to leave this chapter joyful and enthusiastic, as the disciples of Jesus left after Pentecost, with a burning and courageous heart. When you return to your Unite, may you begin to put new wine into new wineskins (cf. Mk 2:22) and re-enchant the other confreres.

Do not be afraid of the creative fidelity that makes us faithful to the Spirit, allows us to re-imagine new things, to intuit new ways of evangelisation; to make mistakes and learn from our own mistakes and not to remain petrified. The Spirit who anointed Jesus, Alphonsus, our saints, martyrs, blessed and venerable, is the same Spirit who is here and accompanies us, the same Spirit who provokes and helps us in this time of restructuring and who loves us without fear! Let us not be afraid of restructuring; it will be our new wine at the wedding feast of Cana! (cf. Jo 2:1-11) Restructuring is for us the wedding feast of Cana; it is the hour of Jesus in our Congregation, becoming new wine! Our saints, blessed, martyrs and venerables have always restructured, they have always been afraid, but they have always believed in the Spirit and in their consecration to the Redeemer. We can have the best structure, a formation with the best content, but if we do not experience an exodus we will not get very far. Consecrated life is exodal in its origin. Theologically it is rooted in the kenosis of Christ.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the service you provide in animating and caring for the confreres. In due course I will count on your solidarity for the personnel needs we have at the General Curia. The confreres working in Rome serve not only their province but the whole Congregation.

Finally, I would like your relationship with me to be that of a brother, a confrere who walks together, who listens, consoles, encourages and loves the Congregation and you and who is called to a service of animation in view of the common good of the Congregation. Nothing more!

May the Lord bless all those present and all the confreres throughout the world. Finally, I would like to entrust the whole Congregation, every confrere and all our lay men and women, everyone who has a Redemptorist imprint in his heart, to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. She is our Mother General.

After the profession of faith, I invite you to sing together the song "Anima misionera". With this chant, I want to embrace the confreres and lay people of the whole Congregation. May the Holy Spirit lead us! Do not be afraid! Let us love each other!

P. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R