

# Echoes of Assisi

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*Alberto Toutin ssc  
Superior General*

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The General Government on retreat together in Assisi.



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From 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2018 the General Government of the brothers made a retreat in Assisi. The first few weeks of living in the community of the General House had given us an opportunity to get to know each other better and time to read and study the decisions and orientations of the last General Chapter. Following on from this we felt the need to reflect more spiritually on our service and – in the words of the General Chapter - connect with our inner self. Assisi and the figures of **Francis** and **Clare** were an inspiration to us. We also felt supported by the prayers of so many brothers, sisters and lay people and we kept them in our prayers.

## **"Put out into deep water" (Luke 5: 4)**

These words of **Jesus** addressed to **Simon** strongly resonated with us during our time in Assisi. They are the words that mark the beginning of Simon's vocation. From a distance he can see the crowds crowding around Jesus to hear the Word of God from his mouth. Then Jesus climbs into the boat next to Simon, which is on the shore of the lake, and asks him to put out a little so he can continue teaching the crowds. In the boat Simon is a witness to what the word of Jesus produces in the multitude. When he had finished speaking, Jesus addressed himself with authority to Simon: "Put out into the deep." At Jesus' request, Simon responds with a first confession: how they are tired at having worked all night and disappointed at having caught nothing. But Simon does not stop at this point. He has seen and heard the impact that Jesus has had on the crowds. And so he hands over his tiredness and disappointment to the light of Jesus' word: "At your command, I will lower the nets." Jesus and Simon are together in the same boat and as such Simon is willing to venture out to sea and at the same time undertake an inner journey of the heart. After an unexpectedly abundant catch, kneeling before Jesus, Simon makes a second confession: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Simon has let the Word of Jesus touch the deepest part of his life and can now present himself in his truth before the Lord. How much sensitivity Jesus has for the fragility of Simon! He welcomes it, understands it and opens it to something greater, to another adventure,

which is to follow him and collaborate in his mission. Always addressing Peter personally, he says: "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching people." Simon can only know how far this new invitation will take him by setting out on the road with Jesus, collaborating with his mission.

### **The Good News of fragility**

This meeting of Simon with Jesus allowed us to re-read the desire expressed by the brothers in preparation for the General Chapter and reinforced in its decisions: the desire for a profound interior renewal in view of a pastoral and missionary conversion. We want something new to arise in us and in our way of being and serving in the Church. We are in the same boat with Jesus and like Simon he is telling us. "Put out into deep water ... Do not be afraid". Simon discovers who Jesus is when he sets out with him, confides his weariness and disappointment to him and recognizes his own human truth before him. Is there not here a source of renewal for our inner self when we open our hearts to the Lord and to his Word, entrusting to him our weaknesses, fatigue, disappointments and even our sin? Is there not a grace and strength to be discovered at the heart of our personal and institutional frailties when we call them by their name and place them simply in the hands of Jesus? Is there not a real adventure to be found when, with Jesus, we put out into the deep water of our lives and into the tensions and aspirations of our world? In a surprising way we are asked to love Jesus and to associate with his mission not so much by what we do or because of something we can claim credit for, but simply by confessing our weakness and placing our trust in him. This is what **Paul** discovered as the source of his pastoral devotion and audacity - the grace of Christ at home in his weaknesses and in the midst of persecution: "Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ: for when I am weak, then I am strong."(2 Cor. 12:10)

This is also what the **Good Father** discovered in his life at the beginnings of the congregation when his principal concern was his religious family. In striving for the Congregation to be recognised and approved, he often found resistance in the dioceses where he served and distrust on the part of the civil authorities. In such institutional precariousness, the Good Father discovered a special inner grace that encouraged him to collaborate in the "work" of the Heart of Jesus. He wrote thus to Sister **Gabriel de la Barre**:

"Yes, my dear daughter, I live only to reinforce, if necessary at a great price, the work of the Heart of that amiable Master, who overwhelms me with his favours; if I am ungrateful, He still loves me, and I feel in my heart that He will always love me, yes always.

There would be no end if I were to write to you regarding the effect of his grace on my soul, the full extent of his power on my inner life ... Love him then fully and I assure you that nothing will separate you from Him." (Paris 4 August 1804, LEBP 192)

### **Come, Lord Jesus!**

The time of Advent has begun. Let us unite ourselves to the whole Church in this prayer which is also a confession of hope: "Come Lord Jesus!" Let the Lord come with the light of his Word, to enlighten our inner selves, especially in our frailties. Thus, counting on his grace and walking with our brothers, sisters and laity, we may find and offer loving and joyful ways to be and serve in the Church.

Alberto Toutin ssc  
*Superior General*