

# "In whose service I wish to live and to die"

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Dear brothers and sisters,

During the Easter season, we meditated with the Church on the birth of the first Christian communities, as narrated to us in the Acts of the Apostles. The apostles surprise us by their openness to the action of the Spirit of Jesus. Indeed, it is precisely because they were docile to the Spirit that their humanity – with its greatness and limitedness - was able to be transformed. Moreover, because the Spirit is at work in the heart of every person and every culture, the apostles paid attention and listened for his voice in all events, even in moments of internal tensions and external persecutions. To listen to the voice of the Spirit one needs to gaze at and listen to all attentively. A frankness in speaking is also required as is a certain freedom in the circulation of words among the apostles and with the people and communities whom they meet and accompany. We see this in the debates at the Council of Jerusalem, and in the difficulties in putting it into practice. When Paul saw that Peter was ambiguous about whether or not to be open to the world of the Gentiles, he confronted him face to face and in public, "for I saw that he was not on the right road in line with the truth of the Gospel" ( Gal. 2:14).

It is good for us to recall the birth of the Church, and to give thanks for the leading role that the Spirit played in it and for the docility of the apostles and those who seek God. The Spirit is with us in our searching and listening together, in our freedom of speech and in our

openness to looking at the facts of reality. In short, we are a Church that is born of obedience to the Spirit and his mediations, we are a Church that is not greater than its Lord, who loves us and who restores us precisely through our filial obedience. Happy is the Church who dresses itself as a servant and acts in this way!

We find this obediential dimension of Jesus and of his Church beautifully presented in our Rule of Life. In this regard, what our Rule has to say about obedience takes on new flavours as the years go by, like a good wine.

I suggest that we re-read carefully what is stated in the rule about the conditions of faith which must guide our daily experience of obedience to God, through the community of brothers and sisters. For it is in faith in the Lord Jesus and in his Spirit that the experience of obedience, expressed in the profession of vows, takes on its full depth.

"First of all, only God deserves obedience, because he alone is true, he alone is free and able to influence us while respecting our freedom, he alone is truly "superior".

From this it follows:

- Everyone has an obligation to obey God, to seek out and follow his will. All, superiors, and brethren, are subject to the Holy Spirit and must be attentive to his voice, which is manifested through Scripture, other people, events and circumstances". (*Rule of Life*, no. 82)

God who seeks to be heard as God is, therefore, the only one who deserves to be obeyed. God is a free God who imposes himself by respecting our freedom and making us more available for his service. This God takes seriously the word of all, and the value of our mediations, always perfectible. Such things might seem obvious to us, and perhaps because of this, can be forgotten.

On 19 and 20 May, Ignacio Moreno and I visited the four brothers of the Dutch delegation in Teteringen. During those days we discussed, among other things, what will happen to the brothers when only three of them are left, and what will be the destination of the delegation's patrimony. We were touched by their lucidity in looking at their situation, their serenity in recognising that they are part of a great missionary history of the country, their conviction that the mission of the Congregation will continue in other ways, and that their assets are at its service. Once again, these are things that are "known", so to speak, but it is quite something else to see how this becomes a criterion for decision-making.

We know from our communities and from our own families that such decisions are not easy to make, that they are painful and often a source of tension and dispute. However, the brothers have been maturing in these choices, remaining open to look at the facts and maintaining a deep sense of obedience to the Lord and to the brothers.

Being a small group, they are great. In their old age, they bear witness to a joyful freedom and availability to the action of the Spirit of Jesus.

On the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, (16 June), a memorial of the missionary history of the Dutch province will be inaugurated in the cemetery of Breda. It contains the names of all the brothers and associates who have served God's work in the Congregation, most of them outside their own country, in more than 20 countries. On this monument they have placed

the emblem of the Sacred Hearts and the opening and closing words of the Creed. A beautiful synthesis of what we expressed on the day of our religious profession in the Congregation: "In whose service I wish to live and die. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Wishing you all a wonderful feast of the Sacred Hearts.

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