

People to listen

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Dear Brothers, Sisters, and Lay members,

During these last few weeks, I have been able to accompany the Provincial Chapters of the Provinces of Japan and the Philippines (November 6th to 10th), of Brazil and the Region of Paraguay (November 20th to 24th) and of the Andean Region (November 27th to 1st December). This has allowed me to appreciate, once again, and beyond mere slogans, what the simple beauty of our religious life is, synodality in action.

These Chapters are part of the path of a provincial community. They have been appropriately prepared, the topics to be discussed have been defined, the working committees appointed, and the brothers included in the reflections. The Christian community accompanies us with their prayers, along with the brothers and sisters of the immediate province and the wider Congregation. We also count on the intercession of our founders, saints and martyrs, and all those who have gone before us in following Jesus in our religious family. Even the brothers who are sick or have been hospitalised follow the Chapter proceedings. Rafael Azanza, a 95 year old brother, from the Province of Brazil, was hospitalized for pneumonia, and was sedated. As soon as he woke up in the Hospital, he asked the brothers who were visiting him: "And how is the Chapter going?"

A chapter is also a sounding board for what is happening in the local church, in different countries around the world.

“The Provincial Chapter constitutes the maximum expression of the internal authority of the Province” (Const. 103).

In effect, the Chapter is a collegiate form of authority. The voice - the participation of each brother is important. It is an exercise of taking the Word and, above all, of listening to the voice of God in the brothers. The liturgical celebrations and times of worship during the Chapter remind us that we are seeking to discern the work that God is carrying out in us, and so be able to support it more generously, and with even more dedication. Ultimately, the Chapter seeks to answer the question: “Lord, what do you want from us? In what way can we make ourselves available to your work and useful to the Church?”

The times we live in require that we pay special attention to the sober reality of the facts. I see this less in grandiose decisions and beautiful discourses, and more in simple guidelines that help situate ourselves in the present, and the immediate future, with an evangelical outlook. Being

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fewer in number, and being present in several countries, we want to grow in greater co-responsibility in the mission of the Congregation. Thus, many provinces have decided to go from a Chapter of Delegates to an open Chapter.

The synodal process that is happening in the Church has enriched the exercise of authority that is a Chapter. Together with the necessary work, the method of conversation in the Spirit helps us to enter into a dynamic of spiritual discernment. This is something we used to talk a lot about, but in practice, while we knew about it, we incorporated it very little - favouring instead times of prayer and silence, giving more attention to the Word of God, listening more to what the Lord and his Spirit are stirring up in each of the brothers. A young brother in Japan said that what is most difficult for us in our lives is to truly listen to each other, without prejudice, with an open heart, letting ourselves be touched by what the other person tells us. In this sense and following this dynamic, it has been good to listen to the voices, the reflections and the opinions of each brother. Each one has their time, is called to say every-thing they wish to say and only what they want to say, in a brief and sufficient timeframe. There is, then, an asceticism in both speaking and listening.

The decisions and orientations taken by the Chapters in many cases recall or underline fundamental aspects of our life and mission. These are things we already know, but through this exercise we hope that they will pass from the head to the heart and move us in a certain direction. The new provincial government has a mandate and a guide for its service from the chapter. And if the Chapter is the highest internal authority of the Province, it asks for internal

adhesion and obedience of the heart. We accept that the decisions of the Chapter are binding on us. The provincial government supports its implementation. Otherwise, the capitular decisions will be a dead letter.

Sons of obedience.

You will receive this letter in the season of Advent. We are preparing to welcome the God-with-us who continues to come to meet us as he did in Jesus of Nazareth. His obedience to the Father, his detachment from his condition as God and his emptying of himself, united him with us. His way of placing himself as God-with-us is that of a servant. His entire existence was marked by lovingly listening to his brothers and sisters and the love of his Father. In that listening, Jesus discovers himself the Son, well loved by God his Father, the blessed among the poor and simple who joyfully welcome his Kingdom.

Let us draw closer to Jesus who comes to meet us as our founders did on Christmas Night. In the vows they pronounced, they told Jesus: "Count on us to carry out your work, the work of the Father." And, as we renew our religious vows that night, let us rejoice with Jesus who tells us: "These are my mother, my brothers and my sisters."

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