

Meeting with participants in the General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor

Sala Clementina
May 26, 2015

Dear Friars Minor,

Welcome! I thank the Minister General, Father Michael Perry, for his kind words and wish him well for the task in which he was confirmed. I extend my greeting to the entire Order, especially to the sick and elderly brothers, who are the memory of the Order and are the presence of Christ crucified in the Order.

In these days of reflection and prayer, you will you be guided in particular by two essential elements of your identity: minority and fraternity.

I asked for advice from two Franciscan friends, young, Argentinian: "I have to say something about this, minority, give me some advice." One told me: "God grants that to me every day." The other said: "That's what I try to do every day." This is the definition of minority that these two friends, young Franciscans, from my land, gave me.

Minority calls us to be and to feel small before God, relying totally on his infinite mercy. The prospect of mercy is incomprehensible to those who do not see themselves as "minor", that is, small, needy and sinners before God. The more we are aware of this, the closer we are to salvation; the more we are convinced that we are sinners, the more we are open to being saved. This is what happens in the Gospel: people who identify with the poor before Jesus are saved; those who do not believe this do not receive salvation, not because they have been offered this, but because they have not accepted it. Minority also means coming out of ourselves, out of our own agenda and personal views; it means going beyond structures - which are also useful if used wisely - to go beyond habits and certainties, to witness to concrete closeness to the poor, the needy, the marginalized, in an authentic attitude of sharing and service.

The size of the fraternity belongs in an essential way to witness to the Gospel. In the early Church, the Christians lived to such an extent as to constitute a fellowship and attractive eloquent sign of unity and charity. People were amazed to see Christians so united in love, so helpful in giving and in mutual forgiveness, so sympathetic in mercy, benevolence, mutual help, unanimous in sharing the joys, sufferings and experiences of life. Your religious family is called to express this fraternity concretely, through a recovery of mutual trust - and I stress this: recovery of trust - in interpersonal relationships, so that the world may see and believe, acknowledging that the love of Christ heals wounds and it makes us one.

From this perspective, it is important to recover a consciousness of being carriers of mercy, carriers of reconciliation and carriers of peace. Fruitfully realize this vocation and mission and you will be more and more a congregation that goes out. This indeed corresponds to your charism, also attested to in the *"Sacrum Commercium"*. In this story about your origins. It is said that when the first friars were asked to show their cloisters, they climbed a hill and, showing the land around, as far as the eye could see, they answered, 'This is our cloister'. Dear brothers, continue to

go into this cloister, which is the whole world, driven by Christ's love, as St. Francis invites you to do ... when he says ... 'I counsel, warn and exhort my friars in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when they go about through the world, they are not to quarrel nor contend in words, nor are they to judge others, but they are to be meek, peaceable and modest, meek and humble, speaking uprightly to all, as is fitting. ... Into whatever house they may enter, first let them say: 'Peace to this house', and ... it is lawful to eat any of the foods which are placed before them" (III, 10-14: FF 85-86). This last thing is good!

These exhortations are of great relevance. They are prophecy of fraternity and minority for our world today. How important is it to live a Christian life and not get lost in religious disputes and gossip, cultivating a peaceful dialogue with all, with gentleness, meekness and humility, with poor means, announcing peace and living soberly, content with what is offered to us! This also requires a strong commitment to transparency, ethics and solidarity in the use of the goods, in a style of sobriety and dispossession. If, instead, you are attached to the goods and riches of the world, and place your safety there, it will be the Lord Himself who will strip off this spirit of worldliness in order to preserve this valuable heritage of minority and poverty to which He has called you through St. Francis. You will either be freely poor and minor, or find yourselves stripped."

The Holy Spirit is the animator of our religious life. The more space we give, the more He is the animator of our relationships and of our mission in the Church and in the world. When consecrated persons allow themselves to be enlightened and guided by the Spirit, they discover in this supernatural vision the secret of their fraternity, the inspiration of their service to the brothers, the power of their prophetic presence in the Church and in the world. The light and strength of the Spirit will also help to meet the challenges that are ahead of you, particularly the decline in numbers, aging and the decline in new vocations. It is a challenge. But, I say to the people of God love you. Cardinal Quarracino once told me more or less these words: "In our cities there are groups or people who are against the clergy, and when a priest passes by they say certain things to him – in Argentina they call them "crows". But I have never, ever heard these remarks in the presence of a Franciscan habit. Why? You have inherited authority with the people of God with your minority, fraternity, meekness, humility, and poverty. Please preserve this! Do not lose it. The people love you."

Be encouraged by the esteem you receive from these good people, as well as the affection and appreciation they have for their Shepherds. I commend the entire Order to the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, whom you venerate as your special Patroness with the title of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. You will be accompanied by my Blessing which I cordially impart to you; and, please, do not forget to pray for me, I need it.

Thank you!

At the Vatican
May 26, 2015

+ *Francis*