

September 17, 2022, Biennial Assembly, homily, Fr. Łukasz Stec, OFM Cap.

May the Lord give you peace!

The love of Christ impels us. Conversion - reconciliation - mission. Using this motto, you deliberated during these days in preparation for your General Chapter.

It all starts with the love that attracted and delighted St. Francis (including us). Enchanted by this Love, we see that we cannot keep it only for ourselves. It impels us. Not content with experiencing it only for ourselves, savoring it, thinking that one has it and that is enough. For St. Francis to discover Love means to launch Love within him, so that Love does not become a widow; but would be loved. It was this direction - to love Love - that set St. Francis on the only path leading through conversion and the change of heart. Henceforth, the only thing that mattered to St. Francis was the new creation (In Reading I: For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation [Gal 6:15]). From now on he begins the daily observance of the Gospel, including in it the words proclaimed today, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily* and follow me!" (Lk 9:23).

Perhaps it is fitting that the deliberations of your Congregation preparing the upcoming chapter end today - the feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis. In the introduction to the celebration of this feast, it is impossible to omit the moment of St. Francis' conversion, because the very moment of conversion was the setting off in the process of St. Francis becoming like his Master in his Passion.

Conversion - from the moment of his conversion, he became more and more like Christ until he received the stigmata of Lord's Passion, until what he carried in his heart internally became visible in his body.

In the Testament, the moment of conversion appears as a decisive event, as a change of path; the most important event in the life of St. Francis. The fruitfulness of St. Francis' conversion is due to the fact that he truly believed in the Gospel and took up his cross and carried it every day. We need a conversion of this type today in our religious families and in our lives that are more and more arranged, more and more comfortable, full of various contents, information, following events that (mostly) can do without our participation. And conversion, after all, requires attention, concentration, time, the effort to enter into ourselves to meet God at the bottom of our hearts and the truth about ourselves in the light of God's word. About this conversion, Francis writes : *The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, thus to begin to do penance because, as I was in sin, it seemed too bitter to see lepers and the Lord himself led me among them and I showed them mercy. And I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body. And then I stayed a while and left the world.*(Testament 1-3)

Conversion leads to transformation (service to lepers), and this in turn leads to service (the best expression of minority), so characteristic of the mission of the brothers and sisters

of the First, Second and Third Orders. Because the first mission of St. Francis was to care for lepers.

Conversion

As the Chapter approaches, each Sister of the Congregation (not just those attending this meeting, not just those who will be attending the General Chapter) is faced with the question of their own conversion. I will ask some questions that I would like each Sister to answer in her heart. Am I convinced of the need for my personal conversion and that of my community, the Congregation? Do I want, do I desire conversion, do I open myself to my personal conversion and to the communal conversion that my Congregation needs? Do I feel that I am an active member in the process of working out, discerning in the Congregation, what conversion would mean for us Felician women today? Do I give any input from myself to the common thought on conversion, or do I wait passively? (A passive observer, lurking for mistakes and stumbles of those sisters who try to take up the topic individually and communally).

While posing these questions, one more thing came to my mind: how can I determine (scale of 1 to 10) my belonging to the Congregation, the intensity of my empathy with the Congregation. Isn't it the case that the content we are considering, as well as the concern of those in the leadership regarding conversion, remain as if on the side of me or behind me, do not touch me? If so, why? How strongly do I identify with the Congregation?

Reconciliation

The fruit of conversion was reconciliation in the life of St. Francis: *And I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body* (Testament 3). St. Francis' sensitivity and encounter with lepers were two realities that were mutually exclusive before his conversion. After his conversion, when the Lord gave him grace, a miraculous transformation took place, he was reconciled with himself and with the lepers.

What needs to happen (transform, reconcile) in my view of myself, fellow sisters and people? What are the unreconciled areas within me? (Perhaps my frailty that I cannot accept, my illness, my sin in the face of which I am defenseless, my sister that I am unable to accept)? Maybe there is something within me, in the sisters, in the world (with its logic so different from the logic of the Gospel and ever-changing) that I do not accept. A sister reconciled with herself accepts everything, including what is difficult, incomprehensible. A sister in whose interior one piece of her is fighting with another piece of her will not be able to accept with serenity the reality in which she lives. Yes, this is the reality of the Congregation, of our country, of the world that the Lord is giving us today. Do you accept it?

Let's think about the phenomenon of secularization that is affecting your Congregation, first of all in highly developed countries, but also in Poland. Am I free enough, reconciled enough to know how to accept this phenomenon affecting my Congregation as something God wants? Maybe I treat it as something foreign that should not be there? Am I able, like Mary at the Annunciation, to find myself in this situation? The proposal that the Angel Gabriel

made to Mary was very different from what Mary had imagined about her own life and vocation. And yet Mary was able to find herself in this situation. And here is her greatness.

Mission

St. Francis' first mission after the conversion was to humbly minister to lepers: *and the Lord himself led me among them and I showed them mercy* (Testament 2). Again, I will pose some questions: What do I think about when the topic of my Congregation's mission comes up? Maybe I think of the multitudes of people evangelized by the Felicians, the stadiums where we proclaim the Good News and are listened to; maybe I think of the exuberant flowering of the Congregation, the dynamism, the renewal of activities in the spirit of the times? Maybe this is what your mission will look like in the future. But there are many indications that it will be a mission that is very humble and turned ad intra rather than ad extra, more inward than outward. Perhaps it will be a mission in the form of a humble concern, invisible to the world, of the faithful living of the charism in the ever-declining communities of sisters; perhaps the fragility that afflicts you (us) today is to draw our attention to the concern for the evangelicality of life and activity? Maybe we have simply lost the Gospel somewhere and need to return to it? Or will the mission will be patiently accompany sisters departing to the Lord, and to put out the lights in more of our homes that are being left behind; without pretension, with faith that the Lord may want this too? Can I afford such a transformation to accept such a mission as well?

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, thus to begin to do penance because, as I was in sin, it seemed too bitter to see lepers and the Lord himself led me among them and I showed them mercy. And I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body. And then I stayed a while and left the world.

Hidden in these simple words of the Testament is the content of the three words you have chosen as the theme of your General Chapter: conversion (beginning the journey of penance) reconciliation (transformation in the heart of Francis: what was bitter becomes sweet, and mission (he has brought me among them (lepers). Note, as St. Francis writes, all this is done by the Lord. He is the main actor here. *The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, thus to begin to do penance. The Lord himself led me among them.* Whatever awaits you, He is, He gives the grace of conversion and the way to undertake it, He is the author of reconciliation (change of heart), He also missions. May this time of preparation for the General Chapter be a time for you to see what He has been already doing, to humbly discern what He intends for you, and to undertake with generosity the fulfillment of His holy will.