

THE 1980 GENERAL CHAPTER

December 8th, 1980 - Letter - Rome

Vocations. - Our response to the poor. - The challenge of the new Constitutions. - A Chapter of hope.

L.J.C. et M.I.

We are at the end of the Chapter. Yesterday evening, in the presence of all the Capitulars, I received the perpetual profession of six scholastics: three from Italy, one from South Africa, one from Spain and one from Poland.

My heart was filled with the experience we had just lived. I had in mind the whole Congregation, all its members, those who feel completely at home in it, those who suffer, those who little by little are moving away from it. I also thought very much about the Congregation's future.

Vocations

Vocations

The ceremony reminded us that vocations must always remain a priority if, as a Congregation, we want to stay young, creative, daring, acting with the dynamic power of faith in a style unceasingly renewed.

The Congregation's future will be that of the young, of the novices and scholastics of today, of all the young men whom the Lord will send us. This future, however, is also in your hands, in the hands of all the Oblates of today, whatever their age or their ministry may be. Our task is to transmit to future generations, in all its purity and with a great spirit of openness and welcome, the heritage we have received from those who went before us.

Our response to the poor

Present-day Oblates hear the appeals of the poor in our day, of those who are far away, of the most abandoned, and they want to respond to them. As we have experienced it throughout the entire Chapter, in every region of the world their eyes are wide open to the needs of people. There is no lack in generosity. But we do lack numbers: our ranks are becoming thinner each year. We also lack unity to some degree; likewise, on the part of some, the firmness and assurance that come from faith. Like Peter on the waters of the lake, they look too much at the wind and the waves and not enough at Christ; they are losing their foothold and are afraid.

The challenge of the new Constitutions

The new Constitutions were at the very heart of this Chapter. They were discussed and again debated: each read the articles in the light of his personal experience and in view of the needs, opportunities and appeals of his own milieu. There are differences of mentality, religious sensitivity and theological outlook among us. As long as they do not contradict the Oblate ideal but rather serve to enrich it and make it universal, we must know how to recognize and accept these differences.

In an atmosphere of work and peace, of frankness and freedom, of cooperation and prayer, the Capitulars voted, with near unanimity, the new text of the Constitutions and Rules. In a few months, I hope, after the approval of the Holy See, you will receive this text. It is a challenge to all of us, the challenge of the future.

Are we able to live together and help each other mutually to live better and deeper the apostolic ideal which the Founder bequeathed to us?

Are we able mutually to support and encourage each other to respond with greater zeal to the appeal of today's poor, to answer as the Founder would, with faith, daring, and an ardent love for Christ and for the Church?

Are we able to accept our differences and to put them at the service of the Gospel, after having submitted them to community discernment made in the light of the Constitutions and Rules?

Will the radical character of the Gospel, the prophetic quality of religious life, living the life of the poor, fidelity unto death of the commitments made, the proclamation to modern man of Jesus Christ and the salvation and full liberation he brings... will all these things be mere words for us, or a living reality which daily grows still more alive and real?

By taking up this challenge, by answering all these questions personally and in community, we will together be building the future.

A Chapter of hope

The Chapter of 1980 was a Chapter of hope. The years ahead will translate this hope into life. The Constitutions need to be assimilated, interiorized. Only then will they be a source and a way of life. May 1981 be for us the year of interiorizing the Constitutions!

The spirit which animates them is that of the Founder: "to identify with Christ"(C. 2), "to cooperate with him" (C. 2), "to follow Jesus in a radical way" (C. 12), "to proclaim Christ to the most abandoned" (C. 5), "to bear witness to God's holiness and justice" (C. 9), "to listen attentively for the Father's voice so that we may spend ourselves without reserve to accomplish his plan of salvation" (C. 24), "to be pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love" (C. 30).

Young men are, and will always be, interested in a life-ideal like this. But they demand that it be genuinely lived by those who profess it, and not that it be merely written down in their Rule Book. While we may not all be directly involved in vocation work, we are, all of us, by the witness we bear, partly responsible for young men coming to us or avoiding us. Different factors are relevant in this matter; nevertheless, a Congregation which ceases to attract vocations must always question itself about its manner of life and about the quality and dynamism of its missionary action.

You have all prayed very much for the success of the Chapter; from my heart, I thank you. Let me assure you again of my deep affection and availability, of my desire to help you and be helped by you better to live the Oblate ideal.

Today we celebrate the feast of our Mother, the Immaculate Virgin Mary. In thanking her for the love she bears us, I want to reaffirm the Congregation's attachment and fidelity to her. May she obtain for us the grace to live the coming feast of the Saviour's birth with joy, and to make the coming year a real year of renewal!

In the General Council's name, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!