

Opening of the 30th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (Marianists)

After having celebrated the mass of the Holy Spirit, we are in this room which will accommodate us throughout the Chapter. Although we have already greeted everyone, I want to personally welcome the 24 Chapter members and the five observers. Also welcome to those who will facilitate the communication: Sr. Saveria Longaretti, FMI for Italian, Thérèse Ann for Korean, Bro. Roger Bosse, of the Sacred Heart Brothers, José Antonio de Muguerza, SM for Spanish and Bro. Frances Xavier Kakiyama, SM for Japanese (a professor at the University, he must continue his classes until the end of the semester and will arrive only on July 15). Welcome once again to our Coordinator, Susana Ramos, of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Castres who is Argentinean.

We will remember Sr. Evangeline Escobar, Provincial of the United States that could not come for health reasons. Sr. Laura Leming will be the substitute. Sister Agatha Song Hye-Jeong that has asked, for reasons of her studies, not to participate at the Chapter and Sister Teresa Mun Ki-Ja will be the substitute. Both of them have promised accompany us especially in their prayer and their conditions.

From the 11th to the 14th, as you already know, we will be joined by the representatives of the other branches of the Marianist Family: Father Manuel Cortés, Superior General and André Fetis, General Assistant for Religious Life, Anthony Garascia, President of the International Team of the MLC, Ana Blazquez, representing Europe within this same team, Agathe Senou, responsible for the members of the *Alliance Mariale* in Ivory Coast.

Since we are all present, I declare open the 30th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (Marianists).

After five years, we are once again reunited in Rome, in the heart of the Church, to live this new General Chapter. For some of you among us this will be the first experience, for others it is almost an old habit. However, any chapter is a bit like an adventure because something always happens unexpectedly and one of the first attitudes to cover is the openness to the unforeseen of God. God always comes as a surprise and only attentive and open hearts can grasp its passage. Much like the prophet Elijah, God often passes like the breath of a gentle breeze. Happy is the one who understands, I wish this grace for each of us!

The Lord has gathered us from the four corners of the world to speak to our heart, not only personally or for the country in which we are in mission but He desires to address the Congregation as a whole because, more conscious of the cries of our world, it becomes more adapted to the service of the mission that Christ has confided to the Church.

Facing this responsibility, with the Virgin Mary, we feel our smallness, our limited means: this task surpasses us. We are neither worthy, nor capable. However, much like Paul the Lord tells us “my power is at its best in weakness” and Mary whispers in our ears: “nothing is impossible for God.”

Five years ago, the Lord called us to live and sow hope everywhere we are. A hope which has its roots in the Pascal Mystery of Christ with which Mary was closely associated. Thus we wrote in the General Chapter Document #18: *With Mary, the first disciple of the Resurrected, the Woman who knew how to wait and live the mystery in the darkness, we are confident that the Lord is with us. (Mt. 28:20) We feel called, personally and communally, to remain standing at the foot of the cross, to live in Christian hope and to bring this hope to our sisters and brothers, opening ourselves to the Reign of God. (Rm. 8:24-25)*

Centering on the Pascal Mystery, it is only normal that the icon of Mary at the foot of the Cross with John inspired us.

During these five years, it seems to me that the contemplation of the Pascal Mystery has helped better discover the mystery of the grain of wheat thrown on the earth it must die in order to bear fruit. I will give an example to illustrate: It was necessary for two Provinces and one Region to accept to “lose” Sisters so that the Foundation of Ranchi be born. And these Sisters have accepted to leave their culture, to learn another language so as to enter into another culture that is very different! The entire Congregation has felt concerned with the response given to this call which had been pending for these many years.

Yes, the Pascal Mystery has truly revealed as a source of inspiration and we wish to continue living it deeper. Thus, as noted by the Preparatory Commission, in their report, the communities desire to continue:

- To deepen in the Pascal mystery in their lives and in the life of those who have been they have been sent
- To draw their conversion within the contemplation of Christ who gave Himself until death for love,
- To be educators of the faith like Mary did for the beloved disciple,
- To make their communities schools of peace and of reconciliation,
- To be next to those who suffer, searching new forms of presence near those excluded.

Already in the Chapter Document of 2002 another icon appeared: that of **Mary with the disciples in the center of the early Church.** (#48)

And these are precisely the two icons that the Preparatory Commission has retained after having studied the responses to the questionnaire sent to prepare the Chapter.

We know that we could not be faithful to the our baptism and our religious consecration without living more and more the dynamic of the Pascal Mystery; but perhaps today the Lord is inviting us to find ourselves at the Cenacle with Mary and the disciples to receive in a new way the Holy Spirit.

Last May at the international assembly of the General Superiors gathered in Rome, we tried to search for a mystic and prophetic response to the great challenges that we had seen and the cries that we had heard:

- The aspiration of women to find their dignity and their rightful place in the world and in the Church,
- The groaning of the wounded earth so that its sacred character be recognized and it becomes the everyone’s home,
- the thirst of a deeper communion among believers of different religions,
- the distress of millions of immigrants, of the children and women that are victims of human trafficking, in search of better human conditions.

- The call of the Spirit to establish in our congregations the bonds of reciprocity with the laity, to live the same charism beyond structures.

Yes, the Lord has assembled us in this Cenacle, with Mary who has made an alliance with us, in order to welcome through prayer, sharing, mutual listening and reflection, what the Spirit is calling us to. Thanks to the action of the Spirit, the disciples have discovered what Jesus wanted to say through these words:

“Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations: baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.” Mt. 28:18-20

And they formed the first community of Jerusalem with these characteristic traits:

One heart, one soul,
Fidelity to the teachings of the apostles,
Put all goods in common,
Testimony given to the Resurrection
Welcoming all people without anyone in misery.

“The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul: no one claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything they owned was held in common. The apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, and they were all given great respect. None of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from them, to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to any members who might be in need.” Acts 4:32-35 and Acts 5, 12-14

For this reason, the report of the Preparatory Commission presented the desires expressed by the communities:

- To be schools of prayer and announce the Good News through their own life,
- To give witness of good relationships in an individualistic and hedonistic world,
- To search for greater openness, favorable to communication and other exchanges among Sisters, and with other congregations and other religions,
- To continue the discernment for new foundations,
- To contribute to the development of the Marianist Family, through the deepening of the Marianist Charism and enrichment by our contribution as religious,
- To continue developing our contribution to the Church from the role of Mary in the History of Salvation.

Such is the “dream” of our Sisters for the Congregation, faithful to the Charism confided to us by our Founders, to let itself be renewed for better service to those to whom it is sent.

A beautiful mission waits for us...Let us enter the Chapter counting not on ourselves, but on the power of prayer and the offerings of our Sisters and of all those, in particular the members of the Marianist Family, that accompany us during this marvelous time where God introduces us to His Council. We can rely on Him, the Master of the impossible, He will make us discover what He dreams for the Congregation. May Mary keep us willing and ready to do all that her Son tells us. Have a good Chapter!

Rome
July 9, 2007

Sr. Marie Joëlle Bec
General Superior