



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE ORDER OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY OF MERCY (MERCEDARIANS)
ON THE EIGHTH CENTENARY OF ITS FOUNDING***

*Consistory Hall
Monday, 2 May 2016*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you and I thank Fr Pablo Bernardo Ordoñez for his words. I entrust to the Lord the work of this Chapter Assembly and the beneficial projects planned for the next six years, and I entrust to the maternal protection of Our Lady of Mercy the new governing group that will result from your deliberations.

With the motto “Mercy, remembrance and prophecy in the peripheries of freedom”, you are facing this General Chapter which opens with the upcoming celebration of the eighth centenary of the Order, a *memorial* which evokes the great undertakings carried out in these eight centuries: the work of redemption of prisoners and the bold mission in the new world, as well as the many illustrious members who through holiness and writings adorn your history. Surely, there is much to recall and it does us good to remember.

This remembrance, however, must not be limited to an exposition of the past, but must be a serene and conscious act that allows us to appreciate our successes, without forgetting our limitations, and above all to face the challenges that humanity poses to us. May this Chapter be a privileged occasion for a sincere and helpful dialogue that does not stop with the glorious past, but which examines the difficulties encountered on this journey, the hesitations and also the mistakes. The true life of the Order must be sought in the constant effort to adapt and renew, with the goal of being able to give a generous response to the real needs of the world and of the Church, while remaining faithful to the perennial heritage of which you are depositaries.

With this spirit we are able to really speak of *prophecy*, we cannot do so otherwise. Because being prophets is lending our human voice to the eternal Word, forgetting ourselves so that God may manifest his omnipotence in our weakness. The prophet is a messenger, anointed, having received a gift from the Spirit for the service to the holy People of God. You too have received a gift and you have been consecrated for a mission that is a work of mercy: following Christ, preaching the Good News of the Gospel to the poor and proclaiming release to prisoners (cf. Lk 4:18).

Dear brothers and sisters, our religious profession is a gift and a great responsibility; may we carry it in vases of terra cotta. Let us not trust our efforts alone without always entrusting ourselves to divine mercy. Vigilance and perseverance in prayer, in cultivating the interior life, are the pillars that sustain us. If God is present in our life, the joy of bringing the Gospel will be our strength and our happiness. God has also called us to serve him in the Church and in the Community. Support each other on this common journey; let fraternal communion and harmony in doing good works testify, before words, to the Message of Jesus and his love for the Church.

A prophet is able to go to the *peripheries*, which need to be approached with light baggage. The Spirit is a light breeze which pushes us forward. Remembering what it was that moved your fathers and where it led them, do your best to follow in their footsteps. They were able to remain as hostages beside the poor, the marginalized, those cast out by society, bringing them comfort, suffering with them, completing in their own flesh what was lacking in Christ's passion (cf. Col 1:24). Doing so every day, in perseverance, in the silence of a life freely and generously given. Following them is accepting that, to set free, we must make ourselves small, joining the prisoner, in the certainty that in this way not only shall we accomplish our goal of redeeming, but we too will find true freedom, because in the poor and in the prisoner we recognize the presence of our Redeemer.

On the eighth centenary of the Order, do not cease "proclaiming the year of the Lord's grace" to all those to whom you have been sent: to those persecuted on account of their faith and to those who are deprived of freedom, to the victims of trafficking and to the youth of your schools, to those whom you assist in your works of mercy and to the faithful of the parishes and missions whom the Church has entrusted to you. To each of them and to the entire Mercedarian family I impart my Blessing and I ask that you too not forget to pray for me.