



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE CONGREGATION
OF THE SACRED STIGMATA (STIGMATINES)**

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 10 February 2018*

[Multimedia]

I liked what the “outgoing” [departing Superior] General said. I prepared this speech for you, but as he was speaking I felt something within me and I would like to speak to you off-the-cuff. And Archbishop Gänswein will give you the official copy of the [prepared] address. We will speak here about what has come to my mind, is that okay?

One thing that hit me is *fraternity*: the Father General spoke of fraternity, which perhaps has weakened a bit.... It is not easy to live in fraternity. Religious fraternity, life in common.... Even our Saint John Berchmans said that “*mea maxima poenitentia, vita communis*”.

Life in community, the life of fraternity, is difficult because there are human problems, jealousy, competition, misunderstandings: we have so many issues, all of us, myself first and foremost. Everyone. It is very important to be aware of this in order to be understanding in community life. And to reach the point of being able to speak as brothers. Very well. And at times, when we speak as brothers, things are said that are not pleasant. But they are said as *brothers*, that is, with charity, with gentleness, with humility, and not by hiding things, no. One clear matter — the clearest in community life — is being able to speak as brothers. Perhaps a brother tells you something that you do not like, but without holding a grudge: “You did this to me; you will pay for it!”. This does not work. But fraternity is a grace, and if there is no prayer this grace does not come. “Yes, I pray the offices; I pray; I meditate on the Gospel...”. Yes, yes, but do you pray for this brother, for the other, for the other, for the Superior? Concrete prayer for your brother. Concrete prayer for your brother. This creates the miracle of fraternity. At times in community meetings there are quarrels, but even in good families, in good marriages, there are quarrels. It is

not a sin to quarrel. Rancour is a sin; the resentment left in your heart after having quarreled. But quarreling is saying the things that you think, breathing the air of freedom as brothers. Do not be afraid. Without offending, but say things as they are. And then have the courage to speak as the Gospel teaches us: if you have an issue with your brother, or if you know that he has an issue with you, talk to him. Talk to him on the side. And then, if things don't work, speak in community, but talk. Do not swallow what is indigestible; these problems are not digested.

I exhort you in community life to go along this path of truth, of freedom, with much charity and prayer, but proceed in this way, without fear. Do not be afraid. It would be bad should I, a religious man, not have the courage to say what I think to my brother's face, but go behind [his back] and say it to another. This is gossip. Allow me the phrase: it is the idle chatter of "old bachelors". We took the vow of chastity, not of "old bachelorhood", no; of chastity: it is another thing. And instead of being chaste we become "old bachelors". What is worse than being old bachelors or spinsters? Giving up fatherhood, motherhood. It is interesting: when one does not give up spiritual fatherhood, he seeks to fully experience it; and he better experiences fraternity in the community. But idle chatter is an alibi: with it you believe you have resolved the problem, but you resolve nothing. You vent a bit, but you vent as an "old bachelor". So often, perhaps you have heard, as I call gossip: one who gossips is a "terrorist". Because gossip is an act of terrorism; gossiping about another, because I go with a bomb in hand; I drop the bomb, destroy my brother, and I go away trouble free. And then, who will rehabilitate my brother's reputation? I do evil behind [his back]. It is a little calumny or defamation. At times I may be right, but I defame: I take away his good reputation. And Saint Philip Neri's anecdote about the hen comes to mind: that woman who went to confession for gossiping, and as a penance she was told to pluck a hen — do you know it? And then she returned: "And now try to collect the feathers". You can't. That is how it is. Once you have sown the seeds of calumny or gossip, defamation, you have destroyed. The devil is cunning: he uses this, which is one of our weaknesses. He is cunning.

Fraternity. Please safeguard fraternity. This does not mean that everyone has to be close friends. No, brothers. With respect, the rules of respect, the rules of freedom, esteem and prayer for one another. And I ask you to examine your conscience about this. In these days, before the elections, perform an examination of conscience, both of the community and of your own. About this too: fraternity.

The second dimension is your name, which comes from the *Stigmata*. I really like this. Saint Bernard says that the Word of God made flesh "abounds in mercy" which in the Passion, with the Stigmata, is poured out upon us. The Lord's Stigmata, the Lord's wounds, are the very door through which mercy comes. That "abundance of mercy", which is Jesus Christ. And Saint Bernard continues — surely you have read this — if I am depressed, if I have sinned too much, if I have done this, this, that..., I go and take refuge in the Lord's wounds. You are aware that you are "wounded". Each one of us is "wounded", and resolves his life if he unites it with the Lord's wounds. Only awareness of a "wounded" Church, of a "wounded" Congregation, of a "wounded"

soul or heart leads us to knock at the merciful door of the Lord's wounds. One who knows he is "wounded" seeks the wounds. Look for this text: contemplating the wounds of the Lord is entering his wounds. By Saint Bernard. It is a beautiful image; I really like it! The "abundance of mercy" that opens for all of us in the wounds of the Lord. This is interesting too: people who do not feel they are "wounded" by sin, do not understand Jesus' wounds. Sometimes we hear: "But this devotion to Jesus' wounds is rather mediaeval...". That person does not feel "wounded". "By his wounds we have been healed" (cf. 1 Pt 2:24). Precisely there: the Lord's wounds. And as that prayer says: "Within your wounds conceal me" (*Anima Christi*). Conceal me from shame. Conceal me from the Father's ire. Conceal me from my misery. But in your wounds. Do not be ashamed of devotion to the Lord's wounds. It is your path of sanctification. Teach people that we are all "wounded". A "wounded" sinner finds forgiveness, peace and consolation only in the wounds of the Lord, not elsewhere. This is the second thing that came to my mind as the General was speaking.

And the third is the *Holy Family*. Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Ever docile to doing God's will. Mary, the woman "of haste". I really like that passage of Luke, when he says that Mary went "with haste" to her cousin to help her (cf. 1:39). In the Litanies it would be nice to insert this: "Our Lady of haste, pray for us". Always with haste, to help. And Joseph is a gentle man, who received revelations in his dreams. Maligners would say that, already being old, Joseph suffered insomnia; he could not sleep. But there was a psychological problem: he was frightened, because every time he went to sleep his plans were changed! He is the man open to the Lord's revelations. And with gentleness, labour.... But united, together: Mary's haste, Joseph's strong, patient gentleness — strong! He knew how to educate the Son. The devotion of Mary and Joseph. Do not leave these devotions aside. Someone could say: "But they are for children". Yes, but we are children before God. If only, if only we could become children before God! Say to our Mother who makes haste: "help me". And go to her in difficult moments. Russian mystics say that in moments of spiritual turbulence we must take cover under the mantle of the Holy Mother of God, and it is from there that the first Western Marian Antiphon comes: "*Sub tuum praesidium confugimus, Sancta Dei Genitrix...*". The mantle of the Holy Mother of God. And Joseph: the gentle man, the just man, a man of silence, man of patience, man of labour. But everyone together, as a family. This devotion will help you so much, and what I tell you is not advice for old men, no, no. It is for men, for men who must be strong in proclaiming the Gospel. Go to the Mother and go to that man who acted as father and raised the Lord. And learn there, as a family.

I thank you. May you have a good election. Do not forget the wounds of the Lord. Do not forget brotherhood among you. And do not forget Our Lady ever with haste and Joseph always at the ready, in obedience and gentleness. And pray for me too. Now I shall give you the blessing.