The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE CISTERCIANS

OF THE STRICT OBSERVANCE (TRAPPISTS)

Clementine Hall

Friday, 16 September 2022

[Multimedia]

I thank the Abbot General for his words of greeting and introduction. I know you are holding the second part of your General Chapter, at the Portiuncula of Saint Mary of the Angels; a place so rich in grace that it will surely have contributed to inspiring your days.

I rejoice with you at the success of the first part of the Chapter, held in the same place, during which the new Abbot General was also elected. You, Father, immediately set out on a journey to visit the twelve regions where your monasteries are located. I like to think that this “visitation” occurred with the same holy promptness that the Virgin Mary shows us in the Gospel. “Mary arose and went with haste”, says Luke (1:39), and this expression always merits contemplation, so that we can imitate her, with the grace of the Holy Spirit. I like to pray to the Madonna who is “in haste”: “Lady, you are in a hurry, right?”. And she understands that language.

The Abbot Father says that on this journey he “gathered the dreams of the superiors”. I was struck by this expression, and I share it wholeheartedly. Both because, as you know, I too understand “dreaming” in this positive sense, not utopian but planning; and because here we are not dealing with the dreams of an individual, even if it is the superior general, but of a sharing, of a “collection” of dreams emerging from the communities, and which I imagine will be the subject of discernment in this second part of the Chapter.

They are summarized as follows: dream of communion, dream of participation, dream of mission and dream of formation. I would like to offer some reflections on these four “roads”.

First of all, I would like to make a note, so to speak, on method. An indication that comes to me from the Ignatian approach, but which fundamentally, I believe I have in common with you, men called to contemplation in the school of Saint Benedict and Saint Bernard. That is, it is a matter of *interpreting all these "dreams" through Christ*, identifying ourselves with Him through the Gospel and imagining — in an objective, contemplative sense — how Jesus dreamt these realities: communion, participation, mission and formation. Indeed, these dreams build us up as persons and as a community to the extent to which they are not ours, but *his*, and we assimilate them *in the Holy Spirit*. *His* dreams.

And here, then, opens up the space for a beautiful and gratifying spiritual search: the search for "Jesus' dreams", that is, his greatest desires, which the Father inspired in his divine-human heart. In this key of evangelical contemplation, I would like to be in "resonance" with your four great dreams.

The Gospel of John gives us this prayer of Jesus to the Father: "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me" (17:22-23). This holy Word enables us to *dream with Jesus of the communion* of his disciples, our communion inasmuch as we are "his" (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 146). This communion — it is important to make this clear — does not consist in our uniformity, homogeneity, compatibility, more or less spontaneous or forced, no; it consists in our common relationship to Christ, and in Him to the Father in the Spirit. Jesus was not afraid of the diversity that existed among the Twelve, and therefore neither should we fear diversity, because the Holy Spirit loves to stir up differences and make harmony out of them. Instead, our particularisms, our exclusivisms, those yes, we must fear them, because they cause divisions (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 131). Therefore, Jesus' dream of communion frees us from uniformity and divisions, which are both ugly things.

Let us take another word from the Gospel of Matthew. Debating with the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus says to his disciples: "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ" (23:8-10). Here we can contemplate *Jesus' dream of a fraternal community*, where *everyone participates* on the basis of a common filial relationship with the Father and as disciples of Jesus. In particular, a community of consecrated life can be a sign of the Kingdom of God by bearing witness to a style of participatory fraternity among real, actual people who, with their limitations, each day choose to live together, trusting in the grace of Christ. Even today's tools of communication can and must be at the service of real — not just virtual — participation in the concrete life of the community (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87).

The Gospel also gives us *Jesus' dream of a wholly missionary church*: "Go therefore and make

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (*Mt* 28:19-20). This mandate concerns everyone in the Church. There are not charisms that are missionary and others that are not. All charisms, because they are given to the Church, are for the evangelization of people, that is missionaries; naturally in different ways, very different, according to God's "imagination". A monk who prays in his monastery is doing his part in bringing the Gospel to that land, in teaching the people who live there that we have a Father who loves us and in this world we are on a journey towards Heaven. Thus the question is how to be Cistercians of the Strict Observance and be part of a "Church which goes forth" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 20). On a journey but it is a journey that goes forth. How do you live the "delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing" (Saint Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80)? It would be nice to hear it from you, contemplatives. For now, it is enough to remember that: "In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God" and that "the life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that 'he has loved us first' (1 *Jn* 4:19)" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 12).

Lastly, the Gospels show us Jesus taking care of his disciples, educating them with patience, explaining things to them on the side, the meaning of some parables; and illuminating with words the witness of his lifestyle, of his gestures. For example, when Jesus, after washing the feet of his disciples, says to them: "For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (*Jn* 13:15). The Teacher *dreams the formation* of his friends, in accordance with God's way, which is humility and service. And then a little later, when he states: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (*Jn* 16:12), Jesus makes it clear that the disciples have a journey to undertake, a formation to receive; and he promises that the one who forms them will be the Holy Spirit: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (*Jn* 16:13). And there are many Gospel references that attest to the dream of formation in the Lord's heart. I like to sum them up as a *dream of holiness*, renewing this invitation: "Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. *Gal* 5:22-23)" (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 15).

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for coming here and I hope your General Chapter will conclude in the best way possible. May Our Lady accompany you. I offer my heartfelt blessing to all of you and to your confrères throughout the world. And I ask you to please pray for me.

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