



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 86th GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE CAPUCHIN FRIARS MINOR**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 31 August 2024*

[Multimedia]

I am happy. I remember your brother friars in Buenos Aires; they were good confessors. They were Basques who went there after being driven away by Franco and were truly wonderful confessors. One of them is still alive, an Argentinian – I have made him a cardinal now. He forgives everything! He told me that sometimes he is worried about forgiving too much – he always forgives –, and one day he went before the Lord in the chapel, to apologise: “I am sorry, Lord, I have forgiven too much...but it was you who gave me a bad example!”. That is how this good Cardinal of yours prays.

Welcome! I am pleased to be with you on the occasion of your Eighty-sixth General Chapter. I greet you and especially the Minister General, Fra Roberto Genuin.

Your assembly is an important moment, both for you and for the Church. Your Chapter gathers friars from different countries and cultures, who come together to listen to one another and speak in the one language of the Spirit. It is an extraordinary chance to share the “wondrous things” (cf. *Ps 125:3*) that God continues to accomplish through you, the sons of Saint Francis spread throughout the world. It is my hope that, as you thank God for the growth of the Order, particularly in mission countries, you will take advantage of this meeting to question what it is that the Lord is asking of you, so that you can continue to proclaim with conviction the Kingdom of God in the footsteps of the Poor Man of Assisi.

I would like, then, to bring up with you three dimensions of your Franciscan spirituality, which I

believe can aid in your discernment and your missionary apostolate: *fraternity, availability and commitment to peace*.

Fraternity. Your Chapter has as its motto: “The Lord gave me brothers” (*Test.*, 14) “to go out into the world” (*RB* 3:10). These words bring to mind the experience of Saint Francis, and they remind us that your mission, in accordance with his charism, is born in fraternity in order to promote fraternity (*RB* 3, 10-12; cf. *Letter to the Members of the Franciscan Family on the Eighth Centenary of the Approval of the Rule of Saint Francis*, 9 November 2023). At its heart, we might say, is a “mystique of collaboration”, thanks to which, in God’s plan, no one can consider himself an island, but each person is related to others, in order to grow in love, to step forward and to make his own uniqueness a gift to his brothers and sisters. One of you who cares for his own uniqueness, but without turning it into a gift to his brothers, has not yet begun to be a Capuchin!

You have not come together to “optimize” – as unfortunately we sometimes hear – the “human resources” of the Order, nor to improve its “performance” or to preserve its structures. Rather, you have come to acknowledge, in faith, that you are brothers, chosen, gathered and constantly accompanied by the providential love of the Father, and to let yourselves be challenged by this truth, especially in the field of formation, on which you have been working for some time. Without formation there is no future, let us always keep that in mind.

In your meetings, therefore, I encourage you to be on guard lest economic resources, human calculations or other such realities ever become the main priority. All these are useful tools that need to be taken into account, but always as means and never as ends. The priority must be people, those to whom the Lord sends you and those he has given you to live with, their good and their salvation. In a word, make fraternity your priority and promote it in your houses of formation, in the greater Franciscan family, in the Church and in all the areas in which you work, even if it means giving up projects and achievements of another kind in favor of fraternity. Fraternity comes first. You are friars. “But I am a priest!” Yes yes, but that comes after. The important thing is that you are friars. You are a priest, deacon, whatever you may be, but a friar: that is the basis.

This brings us to the second dimension on which we need to reflect: *availability*. Fraternity and availability. As Capuchins, you are known for being ready to go where no one else wants to, and that is a very good thing. Indeed, your “method” of openheartedness testifies to everyone that the most important thing in life is charity (cf. *1 Cor* 13:13), for which it is always worth dedicating our entire life.

In this way, you serve as a sign for the entire Community, which is called to be, always and everywhere, missionary and “outgoing” (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 2; *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20). It is an important sign, especially in times like ours, marked by conflicts and prejudice, where indifference and selfishness seem to prevail over openness, respect and sharing, with grave consequences such as the unjust exploitation of the poor and the devastation of the environment.

Your readiness to become personally involved with the needs of your brothers and sisters, and to say with humble courage: “Here I am, send me!” (*Is* 6:8), is a charismatic gift that needs to be cherished and cultivated. Try always to be simple, free and available, ready to leave everything behind (cf. *Mk* 1:18) and to go wherever the Lord calls you, without seeking recognition or making demands, with open hearts and arms. And this will be your poverty.

We now come to the third dimension of your spirituality: your commitment to peace. Be peaceful. Your ability to draw near to all, so as to merit being called the “friars of the people”, has made you, over the centuries, expert “peacemakers” (cf. *Mt* 5:9), capable of creating opportunities for encounter, mediating the resolution of conflicts, bringing people together and promoting a culture of reconciliation, even in the most difficult situations.

At the basis of this charism, however, there is, as we have said, a fundamental condition: to be, in Christ, neighbours to all (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37), especially the poor, the outcast and the despairing, none excluded. Saint Francis, as we know, came to be universally known as the “man of peace”, beginning with his encounter with lepers, in whose embrace he discovered and accepted his own inner need for healing and in whose presence he came to recognize Christ as his Saviour. Thus forgiven, he became a bearer of forgiveness; thus loved, he became a source of love; thus reconciled, he was able to reconcile many others. He was forgiven, loved, and reconciled and he brings forgiveness, love, and reconciliation. You must be like this, men of love, of forgiveness, of reconciliation. Faith enabled him to be an instrument of peace in the hands of God, and faith, for him as for us, is always vitally linked to closeness to the poor and those in need. Let us never forget this (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49).

Finally, dear friends, I encourage you to press ahead on your journey, with confidence and hope. May Our Lady always be at your side. I thank you for all the good you do in the Church. From my heart, I bless you and the great Capuchin Family. And I ask you, please, to pray for me – for me, and not against me!