

Homily of Father Adolfo Nicolás
at the Church of the Gesù
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Closure of the General Congregation 35

I shall deliver this simple homily in Italian. I do not know whether that will put you at ease or make you uncomfortable.

Right now we are filled with the experience which we have lived for the past two months. This morning, in a prayerful and grateful spirit, we heard some reflections on this experience, an experience of incredible diversity, perhaps the greatest diversity we have ever had in the history of our General Congregations.

Along with this diversity we have experienced a strong desire to listen to others, to be open with others so different from ourselves. We have also experienced the will to change. And, yes, we have changed. We have changed in our points of view, in the drafting of our texts and in our discussions. We have developed an attitude of greater attentiveness to others. In such a large and diverse community we have rarely witnessed so much rejoicing in the joy of others and so much sadness in the suffering of others. We have prayed for one another.

The first reading of the day invites us to go to the source of this experience and to make it fully Christian. The logic of the Christian experience is very clear. God is love, and so we too love. God is mercy, and so we too show mercy. God is good, and so we too desire to be good. If we do not love, we really do not have anything to say. Here we discover, I think, the root and source of our identity and our mission. Here is our *raison d'être*. Why do we want to love the poor, to help the lonely, to console the sad, to heal the sick and to bring freedom to the oppressed? Simply because this is what God does. Nothing else. As the Holy Father told us, love for the poor does not have an ideological but a Christological basis. It is the very essence of Christ. Christ has taught us how he acts, how he lives, how God loves—and we try to learn.

Another thing which John's letter tells us is that this is not something sporadic, something we do in a fleeting moment when we feel strong, even heroic. No, it is a constant in our lives. The letter invites us to "remain" in love. This word is repeated several times in the letter. In order for God to "remain" in you, you must "remain" in love. For Christ to "remain" in you, you must be united with others. There is a play of words as the concept of "remaining" is repeated several times.

The invitation which we have received in our Congregation and in today's liturgy is to become new persons—persons who "remain" with our insights and who "remain" with the contacts we have established with the Lord through one another.

In the document in which we considered our charism, we say that in looking at Jesus we understand who we ought to be. "Remaining" in him. We all know that it is not through guidelines or directives written for others that the Church and the Society will change. They will change if we know how to become new persons. The question is not what we wish to do in community, but what kind of community men we need to become in order to "remain" obedient men, men who know how to discern, men who are always companions, always. Not with some people whom we choose to be our collaborators, but to be companions of others always and everywhere—ready to serve, ready to offer solidarity. Men who live continually in love and in service. "To love and to serve in all things." How often we have sung these words in the past two months! In all things. This

is not an act of heroism; it is a way of life. This is what we have prayed for these two months.

The Gospel takes us still further. It tells us that everything we have done is for mission. I did not choose the Gospel text for our Mass here in the Gesù. Others chose the mission of Christ as the text. At the very heart of the sending is the “remaining.” We are sent, as you have discussed these days and indicated in the documents. We are sent because we have entered into Christ and it is Christ who has sent us. The mission has its source, its *zampilla* as the Italians say, in our encounter with God, but it ends in others. It begins with Christ and ends with others—in their joys, in their hopes, in their sufferings. Then Mark tells us: make universal what you have experienced these two months during the General Congregation. This love and this concern for one another must now be extended to all we meet. This collaboration, this mutual help must become our way of life. This is not easy. Perhaps some of you are familiar with the power point which features letters written to Jesus by little children. One letter reads, “Jesus, how do you manage to love everybody? There are only four of us at home and we don’t do very well at loving one another.” We know what this means. At least we have accomplished it among the 225 of us. But how do we keep doing it in our local communities, in our Provinces and with our collaborators, unless we remain in love?

The Gospel also indicates how we are to carry out our mission. I will limit myself to the most important points because the vision presented is very dynamic. As I have already said, it is a dynamism which begins in us when we go out to others. Something happens in others and then it is beyond us. The results are there, not here. The vision is very modern. The fruit is not “input” but “output.” First of all, go. Go to the whole world. We have spoken of frontiers, or the periphery. The Gospel tells us: Go, go. We have indeed gone and we have encountered many problems and made many mistakes at the frontiers. I could tell you about my mistakes, but I know that there have been other mistakes as well. We have come to understand that “going” does not mean simply getting on a plane but entering into the culture, into the life of the people. “Going” means study, research, entering into the life of the people. Solidarity, empathy, inculturation, respect for others. Going to the whole world turns out to be more difficult than we had thought. We feel like children. Perhaps we have discovered the Kingdom of God.

We are then told: Go and proclaim the Gospel. We have done so—sometimes well, at other times not so well. But then we have understood that proclaiming the Gospel requires that the Word of God be visible. It is not enough to proclaim it with our lips. Visibility is necessary, visibility in our life, in our work, in our openness to others, in service, in forgiveness, in compassion, in reconciliation, in our capacity to help others become healthier, freer, more human. And the Gospel continues. Something happens. People have faith. Those who believe are transformed. This is where Saint Ignatius can be a great help to us. Ignatius saw this. Faith is not something exterior. Faith transforms. Faith is something which has happened to each one of us from the moment we became Christians, from the moment we became Jesuits. This has been a process of transformation, an all-embracing process, a process which changes the person and a process which opens the doors to hope, to love and to the risk of caring for others. When the Gospel touches us, we change. Something happens and we all grow.

The Gospel goes on to say that this is salvation. It is not a matter of saying, “If I believe, I will be saved.” That is far too external. If I believe, I am already saved. To believe, to enter into this process means to find salvation. Ignatius understood this very well. This is the very essence of Ignatian pastoral practice, whether in a parish, in education, in the spirituality of our houses. Salvation consists in interior change, in interior transformation. Ignatian pastoral care, based on the Spiritual Exercises, consists

precisely in helping people to change interiorly. From this interior change of heart comes the change in feet, hands, service, work and love for others.

The end of the Gospel states that there will be visible signs. These signs will be in those who believe, not in the missionary who may already have been forgotten. The center of attention, therefore, is those whom we serve. Believers will find that their lives have been changed. The signs are the result of faith, of a life that has been transformed. Perhaps our challenge today is to discern the signs of the Gospel. Nowadays we do not handle snakes! What, then, are the signs? Justice, peace, compassion, solidarity, reconciliation and human dignity. When these have become universal, when everyone has access to these most human elements of our lives, these will be the signs. The Gospel tells us that our mission is to go and proclaim the Gospel which transforms the human person. The signs will follow. In yet another passage the Gospel states that "by their fruits you will know who is true and who is not." Our question, then, must always be this: What signs do we need in our parishes, our schools, our services and all our works?

Now I conclude for today. I believe that we are all aware that we have had a great experience. The Word of God, however, invites us to go to the source of this experience and to make sure that it is being transformed into mission, an all-embracing mission, a mission which will continue to bear fruit in others. To return home with less than this cannot justify the two months we have spent together, guided by the Spirit and seeking to find God's will in all things. We pray, therefore, that this experience as well as the Word of God we have heard today will bear fruit in transforming our own lives and the lives of others, so that the faith which we communicate may always be a transforming faith. This is what I ask for all of us.