

XV GENERAL CHAPTER 5TH FEBRUARY - 19TH MARCH 2008

INTRODUCTORY SPEECH M. MARIE REMEDIOS, SUPERIOR GENERAL

Dearest Mothers and Chapter members,

To each and every one of you a warm welcome to Ottavia, the International Centre of our Institute and everyone's home by right! I do hope that you will find yourselves very much at home and at ease here, and will feel free to ask for anything that you may need for yourselves, your health, and your work during this General Chapter.

Gathered in this Chapter hall are 65 capitular Sisters, representing the 22 provinces from 36 countries and clearly marked by an international and multicultural reality, yet sharing the same Charism. We may have come with various expectations and fears... We may wonder how it is that we, and not some other Sisters, were elected to this Chapter. Nothing happens by chance, dear Sisters. The Lord wanted us and not someone else. Why? We don't know. Let us just surrender ourselves to the Holy Spirit who will lead us through these 44 days of our Chapter. St. Magdalene our Mother and Foundress, exhorts us with these words: "*May the Lord grant you the grace to serve Him with a big heart and to work for His glory.*"

For all of you, especially those who are attending a General Chapter for the first time, let me prepare you for a few things which I feel are important before you begin this Chapter:

- First of all, the Chapter "*is called to promote the vitality of the founding charism and to re-express it with attention to the historical moment and to the needs of the various cultures, in fidelity to the Gospel and the directives of the Church.*" (RoL No.77). Its specific role is the election of Mother General and the General Councillors. In the business session, we will then deepen the theme of our Life of Consecration.
- Then, let me tell you, by experience, that **participation in a Chapter is not an easy task**. It can be real spiritual and ascetical experience. I say this because a Chapter is a part of life, and life is not always so easy. It is like a journey fraught with difficulties. Once we go on a journey, we know where we start, but we do not know where we will end up, or what will happen along the way. We do not know where the Spirit will lead us. During this Chapter, we will also be expected to commit ourselves to the pleasant but also sometimes hard task of living together day by day, with our different cultures and mind-sets, of sitting down a lot, of listening to the translations, of speaking, praying, waiting for light, discerning and, ultimately, of making decisions. You will be missing your communities and your active ministries, and often you may wonder if it is worth wasting so much time here! But St. Magdalene assures us: "*For the glory of God which I desire above all things, no sacrifice would ever be too great*".

- Let me tell you, however, that **this Chapter will also be great fun**, simply because we are all here together, so very different and so unique, but we are one big family. It will be enjoyable because of the moments of recreation and surprises, but above all, because we know who it is that is ultimately in charge of this Chapter. Yes, it is the Holy Spirit! In spite of the difficulties and hard work, we are light-hearted because we are sure that the Lord's goodness and provident care will be leading us. Jesus had assured us: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be there in your midst." This indeed is something that is most comforting and reassuring.
- Another conviction which each one of us here present should have, is the following: **this Chapter needs me**. Yes, precisely **me!** Each Sister here is precious and important, regardless of her age, nationality, background, ministries, etc. We have different ways of perceiving reality, a problem, an issue, and we can be mutually enriched by this diversity itself. Therefore, I encourage each one of you Sisters to listen, to pray and to speak as the Spirit leads you, both at the informal group sharing as well as at the assemblies. We are all equal here, in front of God; each one is responsible for the lights that she has received and has the duty to communicate them. All have a precious contribution to make, and we must not allow ourselves to feel overpowered or conditioned by anyone or by any title. It will be a real training to speak in humility and truth. Let us train ourselves to take time to listen actively to each other's views and stories, and in this way, to empower one another in leadership.
- **This Chapter will not be perfect and cannot do everything**. Just because we are human beings, and therefore imperfect, this Chapter will be limited and will not satisfy everyone in the same way. We cannot solve all the problems of the Institute, neither can we satisfy all the expectations of our Sisters here or back home. This Chapter will be a success only if we are united among ourselves and trust in the Lord. Whatever little step this Chapter will be able to take, let us make sure that we take it together. As long as this Chapter helps us to take one step together and challenges us, personally and as a group, to love a little bit better, to live our Charism just a bit more faithfully, and to question some of our daily concrete choices in order to change them for the better, then this Chapter will certainly be a success. The next Chapter, after six years, will then pick up from here and continue to take a few more steps forward.
- **This Chapter, like every other Chapter, has also the goal of helping us become more and more passionate lovers of the Lord**. We should go back to our respective Provinces more committed to our vocation as consecrated Religious Women and Canossians, more desirous to live our Charism according to the spirit of our Model Jesus Crucified, more willing to pay the price of this faithfulness, and burning with the desire to inspire our Sisters back home to do the same.
- **This Chapter, furthermore, is a very special one**, because it occurs just on the 200th Anniversary of our Foundation. Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation "Consecrated Life" (N.110) addressed these words to us: "*You have not only a glorious history to remember and recount, but also a great history to accomplish.*" Each one of us, today, is asked by our saintly Foundress to "*hand down, in all its entirety and perfection, the Spirit of the Institute*", that is, to continue writing this history of our Institute, with faithfulness to the essentials and with openness to listen to the "signs of the time".

We are therefore asked, dearest Sisters, to make the effort:

- to be **open to dialogue and to listen,**
- to **trust in others and in ourselves** as well,
- to **be persons of vision and prophecy, seekers** of the truth,
- to be **wounded healers,**
- to be **persons of deep prayer and compassion.**
- to stand **united with one heart and one mind**
- **to be life-giving, casting less shadows and more light** whenever possible.

Never mind if each one does not have all these qualities; as long as we remain in communion of mind and heart, united together, we can have them all.

I thank you, in anticipation, for all that you are and for all the efforts you will be making to live fully the life of this Chapter, for your precious contribution of light, insights, ideas, prayers and services of many kinds. The days we spend together will remain always in our memory as a beautiful experience of a **learning and growth process** that will make a change in our lives and be a turning point in our journey towards becoming more fully consecrated women and more credible and joyful Canossians.

I wish to conclude with the same words with which I began my service six years ago, quoting the Prophet Micah: *“This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.”* (Mic 6,8). If we stretch out our hand to Him, dear Sisters, imploring His light, guidance and grace, surely He will not let us walk alone, but will stretch out His own hand to us, and guide this General Chapter to a fruitful end. Let us trust the Lord as St. Magdalene invites us to do: *“My Sisters, do not be frightened at seeing the height of the aim proposed to you.... God who always chooses the weakest and most unsuitable instruments in order to confound the wise and the strong, wished to start this Holy Institute Himself alone. He who has deigned to lead us, will complete the work of His Mercy, as long as, on your part, you acknowledge your unworthiness, weakness and ignorance, but at the same time, trust and abandon yourselves entirely to Him. You must put into practice, however, the necessary means that are suggested to you in order to reach the happy attainment of your aim...”* (U.R. Preface, P.20).

Let us then proceed with the Lord, in simplicity and trust, and He will do the rest for us. I thank you all once again for making this effort to be here during this month and a half, and I wish you a very happy journey together.

May God bless you all.