



Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (P.I.M.E.)

The Superior General

OPENING OF THE XI GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE
NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
8 SEPTEMBER 2018

Dear Sisters, today, with this celebration, you officially begin your XI General Chapter. Today's liturgy invites us to celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, the person who has changed, through divine grace, the destiny of humanity.

Let us listen to the Blessed Virgin and let us see together what she has to say to us at the beginning of this General Chapter, which is a very special moment for your Institute.

First, the Virgin Mary reminds us that she made herself available to the Design of God (Angel) and to the Design of men (Joseph). She did that trustfully and peacefully, without hesitation, critics or complains.

I believe that each General Chapter should help understand what God wants from our Institute (before understanding what we want...). Our discussions should lead to that, even though it will not be without difficulties, because it is not easy to understand God's will for our Institute. Most of the times, we who are consecrated to God, are tempted to emphasize what for us, selfishly, seems right and adequate, and risk to forget the rest: the Church, the world and God.

Perhaps, before any discernment within the Chapter, we need to open ourselves to discern what others suggest to us, which is not always what we want to discern.

Mary is then a "woman of courage". Mary was courageous to accomplish what the Angel and Joseph told her, and to follow, along the way, Her Son Jesus till His death on the Cross.

A General Chapter that does not reach courageous choices can be concluded quietly, but it will never meaningfully mark the life of the Institute and of its members.

During the General Chapter we are called to make courageous choices, otherwise it could be seen as a moment that did not have a proper preparation or enough reflection to keep up with the signs of the present time of the Church, of the society and even of our own Institute.

Looking at the signs of the present time, I believe that today's Church needs courageous choices so that it can be present in the world in meaningful, purposeful and radical ways. If it is not like this, we risk to be drifted away, not because we can disappear, but because we will not be points of reference for the women and men of our time.

Finally, I think that Mary was, since her birth until her ascension into heaven, a "woman of Family", a community woman. What does it mean?

Mary, as the Gospels describe her, has always kept her Family (Jesus and Joseph) close to her heart and she did the same with the community of the Apostles. In which way? Building communion, harmony, serenity within the Family of Nazareth and in the community of the Apostles. She did it not with her words (Mary does not speak too much...), but with her life, a life donated to others. She paid attention to others' sufferings and she was always present in the crucial moments of her family and community life.

A General Chapter is a community experience, a family experience. You will be living together for several weeks. Maybe some of you, even though belonging to the same Institute, meets here for the first time. You will be discussing, sharing, eating, praying and playing together ... All these activities will create a Family experience, a missionary community experience.

It is important to keep this Family spirit during the General Chapter, because perhaps there will be heated discussions, misunderstandings and maybe some "defeats". Keep this Family spirit at the center, and then all the rest! Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* writes: "Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others" (GE 141).

Please, do not forget those who are not present at this General Chapter. They also are part of your Family! Maybe they seem to be far away, but they are those who mostly need you and have great expectations from your reflections and from the decisions you will make in this General Chapter.

Mary, Queen of the Apostles, pray for you!



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