

National Elective Chapter of the SFO

October 21-25, 2009 - Rio Rancho - Albuquerque

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord Give You Peace!

With great joy I greet you all cordially. I thank the Lord for the gift of being able to be here with you together with Doug Clorey, Vice-Minister General of the SFO, and to share with you this experience of the celebration of the National Chapter of the Fraternity of the SFO of the United States. As a sign of communion with all the International Fraternity of the SFO and on behalf of the all the members of the Presidency of the CIOFS, and especially the Conference of the Assistants General, I send you best wishes.

We celebrate the National Chapter in the year of the celebration of the VIII Centenary of the start of our Franciscan Charism. For this reason, we want to give thanks to the Lord for the gift of Francis and the way of life that he handed down to us. We entrust ourselves to his protection and, by following his example, we want to renew our love for both God and the poorest, committing ourselves anew to pass *from the Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel*.

We want to commit ourselves to begin anew and once again take the Gospel seriously. We want to receive joyfully the invitation of the Lord as Francis did when he heard the voice from the Crucifix in St. Damian Church, saying, *Go Francis and rebuild My Church!* This invitation resonates strong also in our hearts, for through our varied and different ways and our communion with each other, we want to incarnate the Charism of the *Little Poor Man of Assisi* in both the life and mission of the Church today.

At the audience we had at Castel Gandolfo after the historical "Chapter of Mats" celebrated in Assisi from April 15-18, 2009, the Holy Father Benedict XVI, in his address to the members of the Franciscan Family, said, among other things, "While you praise and thank the Lord who has called you to belong to such a large and beautiful "family", continue to be attentive to what the Spirit says to it today, to each of its components, so that you may continue to proclaim the Kingdom of God fervently, treading in the footsteps of the Seraphic Father. May every brother and sister always preserve a contemplative, simple and joyful heart: always set out anew from Christ, just as Francis set out from the gaze of the Crucifix of San Damiano and from the meeting with the leper, in order to see Christ's Face in the suffering brethren and bring his peace to all. May you be witnesses of

God's "beauty", which Francis was able to praise while contemplating the marvels of Creation, and which made him exclaim to the Most High "You are beauty!" (*Lodi di Dio altissimo*, 4,6: FF, 261).

Let this also be, therefore, the journey and mission of the SFO and YouFra of the United States as well as all the Franciscan Family who live in this very beautiful country. Let us open our hearts to these inspirations which the Holy Spirit wishes to spark off and realize in our lives and fraternities.

I would like to leave you with some pointers that, in my opinion, can help in your commitment as Secular Franciscans to renew your motives and way of evangelizing today.

The Franciscans of the SFO and Franciscan youth, as an integral part of the Franciscan family all have a specific and important task in evangelization. Together with the other members of the Franciscan family, you are called to render our common Franciscan charism present in the mission of both the Church and society.

In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II recalled that the work of the faithful laity is all the more necessary today and that this call "is a concern not only of Pastors, clergy, and men and women religious, but a call addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world" (*ChL 35*).

The same Pontiff in his discourse to the members of the General Chapter of the SFO in a private audience, quoting their General Constitutions said, "Secular Franciscans, you live by vocation your belonging to the Church and to society as inseparable realities. For this reason, you are asked first of all to bear a personal witness in the place where you live: "before all: in [your] family life; in [your] work; in [your] joys and sufferings; in [your] associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father; in [your] presence and participation in the life of society; in [your] fraternal relationship with all creatures".¹

The Pope, then, underscores firstly the need of bearing witness by one's life and then highlights the various areas in which Secular Franciscans are called to bring the Good News. These are areas in which we are likewise called to bring the Gospel message.

¹ John Paul II, *Discourse to the participants of the General Chapter of the SFO*, Rome, November 22, 2002.

I would like, furthermore, to recall some areas of evangelization that, in my opinion, members and the Fraternity of the SFO and of YouFra have to consider as challenging areas in today's world. These are areas in which they themselves seek to respond by the personal witness of their lives:

1. Evangelizing the Family

It is about bringing the Gospel in the families to enable them in this way to take leading roles of a new evangelization through prayer and the listening of the word of God.

2. Evangelizing Fraternity

This is about evangelizing *ad intra* in order to help Fraternity in its life and mission according to the real needs of the local Church and the social life in which they live and work.

3. Evangelizing Society

This concerns evangelizing the society in which we live with courageous and prophetic initiatives, especially in the field of human dignity from conception to natural death, and in situations of discriminations, marginalization, and indifference toward the weakest and the poorest.

In addition, it is about bringing the Gospel logic to the public life, in politics, in the field of culture, health, education, sport, etc. through courageous activities and initiatives and build, in this way, a more fraternal and Gospel world.

4. Evangelizing the Mass Media

This is about employing all the possibilities offered by the Mass Media today to carry the Gospel message to every person.

5. Evangelizing for a Gospel Conscience of Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation

It is about promoting a Gospel vision of Justice, peace, and integrity of creation; a vision that is based on the redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ and his revelation.

6. Evangelizing Children and Youth

This is about helping children and youth in the overall Human, Christian, and Franciscan growth process by fraternally accompanying them, while using the methods and adequate pedagogical initiatives for their needs.

To conclude, I would like to thank you for your service and witness of life. I extend a special greeting and thanksgiving to all the members of Franciscan Youth, whom I have come to know on different occasions, and who are committed to live boldly their calling and mission in both the Church and Society.

Lastly, let us extend a fraternal greeting and heartfelt thanks to all the Spiritual Assistants who dedicate themselves with fraternal concern to your service and who walk with all the Fraternity of the SFO and YouFra in the United States.

May the Lord help us to be faithful to his most Holy Will!

Br. Ivan Matić, OFM
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