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A word from the superior general

Artisans and witnesses to Peace: a way of walking together

*'I leave you peace, my peace I give to you,
I give it to you, but not as the world gives it.' (Jn 14, 27)*

Dear Betharramites,

As we approach Christmas, I would like to echo a cry that resounds throughout the Church today as the world continues to unleash the scourge of war, and societies experience a growing brokenness. Pope Francis in the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* pleads especially that all citizens of our world be *artisans of peace*. This is the urgent call that touches us especially consecrated persons, called to be *witnesses of Peace*, a gift proper to our lifestyle.

As we know, the word *Shalom*, in the biblical context, has a rich meaning that goes beyond simply the state of 'no-war', of tranquillity and well-being. Peace is always a gift from God, and its fruit is true charity. Christian peace thus *grows*

and harmonises all our relationships – with God, with ourselves and with others. Hence, it is not a human achievement. How many efforts by organisations have been fruitless in the face of war! Likewise, our ‘diplomatic truces’ are extremely fragile, and ‘our verbal pledges’ often weak when we sense threats to our comfort or our power...

The Gift of peace that comes from God the Father, instead, invites us to develop the *wisdom of peace*. It teaches us to practice mercy, to forgive ourselves, to rule out all forms of violence and oppression. How much will the life of our communities mature when we put this into practice!

To stop talking about peace and instead, just trying to live it is not a simple alternative for a true Betharramite. That is why we are challenged by Francis’ invitation to be ‘*artisans of peace, ready to initiate processes of healing and renewed encounter with ingenuity and audacity*’ (Fratelli Tutti 225).

In these times of synodality, as Betharramites are called to *meet, listen to each other and discern together*, we also have to learn to make common cause in this quest for peace, building it inwards and outwards. We must be agents of peace amongst ourselves and in society as a yeast. ‘Making peace’ is always a *shared creative work*, since, for this, it was Jesus who *broke down the wall that made enemies of men, reconciling them with God* (Cf. Eph 2.14-16).

Above all, we are invited to *recognise the dignity of each person, in all truth, justice and mercy* (cf. Fratelli Tutti 227). We must put aside certain prejudices between us and treat each other as true brothers and sisters.

A society based on deepening a *gap* that divides and rules by creating enemies cannot be our model. Our model must be Trinitarian love, which leads us to express ourselves with respect, because it distinguishes and also complements. Loving each other humbly and sincerely when we meet is healing and liberating.

This pathway of peace requires a process that lasts over time, and requires patience and meekness. ‘*Happy are the peacemakers.*’ (Mt 5, 9). Happy are we, religious and lay Betharramites, if we strive to sow peace with our daily actions. With attitudes of service, brotherhood, joy, dialogue, mercy. Pope Francis calls this ‘*building bridges not walls between ourselves and others.*’

How can we be artisans of peace in times of synodality?

First of all, recognising that we already have spaces that should express this synodality: our chapters, assemblies, etc. But it is necessary to revisit them, asking ourselves if we are preparing and using these structures well or if they need to be transformed, in view of a greater communion and participation of all.

To achieve this, **we must all commit ourselves more to collaborate with the service of authority, taking seriously, first of all, our own particular responsibility** (position). This is the way in which we prevent a possible *authoritarianism* from being perpetuated, something that could favour abuse of power. It will also stop authority being exercised as *patronage* by whoever holds it and by whoever supports it (a form of complicity between two parties from which each derives some benefit). This only encourages '*free-will run riot*', and does so much damage to the Church.

In a true synodal setting, authority is not forgotten or set aside. **Authority as service** respects its own limits and ways of working, avoiding authoritarianism and patronage, but above all **avoiding "abdicating responsibility"**. It favours a climate of listening and respect for the other, dialogue, participation and fraternal sharing.

As consecrated persons and in particular as Betharramites, with a witness of peace and a synodal style assumed by all, we can contribute a lot to the Church as members of the People of God: walking together, listening to each other, appreciating the diversity of gifts we have, in welcoming communities that do not hesitate in a response of service to destitute humanity.

Achieving a *solid fit-for-purpose formation*, guarantees the effectiveness of a generational renewal that is knocking on the doors of almost all the institutes of consecrated life. En route, our navigation of current problems, often unprecedented and complex, must not lead to makeshift solutions. Hence, we will need adequate training in *leadership*, which avoids the temptation of 'steering by sight alone, without a compass'.

On the other hand, a reorganisation or reconfiguration of a venerable Institute such as Betharram (nearly 200 years old) must be done while *safeguarding communion*, so as not to reduce everything to regrouping, or 'plugging holes', or looking for a substitute to continue 'my work'. When we act like this, we leave imbalanced communities,

vicariates and regions, difficult to manage or accompany.

Finally, consolidating peace means that those who exercise authority in the regions and vicariates ensure that the religious are well engaged in their mission. Unemployment or uncertainty can harm the individual, beget tension in the community, etc. That would be the complete opposite of building a lasting peace!

When preparing for the 2023 General Chapter, we not only listen to our brothers and sisters, and dialogue to better discern, but also, by meeting in a synodal spirit, we have the opportunity to be peacemakers. May this be the fruit of the service of every Betharramite who wants to *show immense love within the limits of his position* (SMG).

A fraternal hug from myself and the General Council to you all, together with sincere wishes for a Merry Christmas and a blessed year 2023.

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General





Angelus • Saint Peter's Square, Sunday, 11 December 2022

The Gospel of this third Sunday of Advent speaks to us about John the Baptist who, while in prison, sends his disciples to ask Jesus: *'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?'* (Mt 11:4). Indeed, John, hearing of Jesus' works, is seized with doubt as to whether He is really the Messiah or not. In fact, he imagined a stern Messiah who would come and do justice with power by chastising sinners. Now, on the contrary, Jesus has words and gestures of compassion towards all; at the centre of His action is the mercy that forgives, whereby *'the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them'* (v. 6). It does us good, however, to look more closely at this crisis of John the Baptist, as it can tell us something important too.

The text emphasizes that John is in prison, and this, as well as being a physical place, makes us think of the inner situation he is experiencing: in prison there is darkness, there is no possibility of seeing clearly and seeing beyond it. In effect, the Baptist is no longer able to recognize Jesus as the awaited

Messiah. He is assailed by doubt, and he sends the disciples to check: *'Go and see if he is the Messiah or not'*. It surprises us that this should happen to John, the one who had baptized Jesus in the Jordan and had indicated him to his disciples as the Lamb of God (cf. Jn 1:29). But this means that even the greatest believer goes through the tunnel of doubt. And this is not a bad thing; on the contrary, sometimes it is essential for spiritual growth: it helps us understand that God is always greater than we imagine Him to be. His works are surprising compared to our calculations; His actions are different, always, they exceed our needs and expectations; and therefore, we must never stop seeking Him and converting to His true face. A great theologian used to say that God *'needs to be rediscovered in stages... sometimes believing that we are losing Him'* (H. de LUBAC, *Sur les chemins de Dieu*). This is what the Baptist does: in doubt, he still seeks Him, questions Him, *'argues'* with Him and finally rediscovers Him. John, defined by Jesus as the greatest among those born of women (cf. Mt 11:11), teaches us, in short, not to close God within our own mindsets. This is



always the danger, the temptation: to make ourselves a God to our measure, a God to use. And God is something else.

Brothers and sisters, we too at times find ourselves in his situation, in an inner jail, unable to recognize the newness of the Lord, whom we perhaps hold captive in the presumption that we already know everything about Him. Dear brothers and sisters, one never knows everything about God, never! Perhaps we have in mind a powerful God who does what He wants, instead of the God of humble meekness, the God of mercy and love, who always intervenes respecting our freedom and our choices. Perhaps we even find ourselves saying to Him: 'Are you really you, so humble, the God who is coming to save us?'. And something similar can happen to us with our brothers and sisters too: we have our ideas, our prejudices and we attach rigid labels to others, especially those we feel are different to us. Advent, then is a

time for overturning our perspectives, for letting ourselves be surprised by God's mercy. Astonishment: God always astonishes. We saw, not long ago, in the television programme 'A Sua Immagine', they were talking about wonder. God is always the One who stirs wonder in you. A time – Advent – in which, preparing the Nativity display for the Infant Jesus, we learn again who our Lord is; a time to leave behind certain preconceptions and prejudices about God and our brothers and sisters. Advent is a time in which, instead of thinking about gifts for ourselves, we can give words and gestures of consolation to those who are wounded, as Jesus did with the blind, the deaf and the lame.

May Our Lady take us by the hand, like a mother, may she take us by the hand in these days of preparation for Christmas, and help us recognize in the smallness of the Infant the greatness of God who is coming. ■



I have a dream...

|

Fr. Daniel González scj
Regional Superior

The Regional Chapter has been a time of GRACE, in which we listen to each other, meet and discern together... a discernment that must continue...

Our Chapter was preceded by the Meeting, Listening and Discerning carried out in the communities and in the Vicariate Assemblies; and with everything shared and celebrated between laity and religious in the Pre-Chapter, which ended with the diaconal ordination of Bro. Sergio Leiva of the Vicariate of Paraguay.

This **synodal path**, which the Church wants to adopt as our **"modus vivendi"** and which we must continue to learn as we travel along it, had brought us closer to the voice of the brothers from all over the Region; I became gradually **convinced** that:

- the voice of my brothers is both a richness and a responsibility,
- the Chapter must continue this

synodal process of encountering and listening to discern paths to follow, offer guidance, and decide on options...

Gradually, I also began to be aware of the forces that can disempower us, stall us and "neutralise" the promptings of the Spirit which are always marked by novelty, interior movement, readiness to change, creativity...

St Michael once said something like this: having a rock to support myself, I launch myself into the greatest adventures! I allow myself to believe that the solid Rock is **Identity and Belonging**, the rock that **sets us free under the breath of the Spirit**.

That is why the invitation I made to the capitulants was:

Let us be **creative** in order to be **faithful** to our vocation and mission of "reproducing the generous impulse of the Incarnate Word" in the

today that we have to live, in order to remain young and attractive!

But for this we needed a particular view:

- **A liberated gaze:** freed from one's own impulses, from one's own appetites and projects, from one's own attachments and securities, from one's own personal sensibilities, but well connected to reality as it is.

- **A liberating look:** because it is not enough to know reality, or to see it. For there to be creativity, there must be a look that can perceive a vision, a dream. **Creativity arises from a dream that we carry in our hearts, and not from a mere analysis.** It springs from a look that knows how to capture the deepest elements of reality and knows how to respond in a new way to the limits and injustices of time. When Moses had the Egyptians chasing him, and the people were afraid, he did not begin to make calculations, nor to negotiate "honourable" alternatives, but he turned his gaze once again to God and God's dream for his people. That is to say, in something greater that looked beyond the horizon, but was rooted in reality, though hardly visible (as only the Sea, soldiers and a suffering people could be seen). Sometimes we lack the liberating look, sometimes we focus too much on "reality", on the analysis of the situation, on the calculation of our forces, more than on vision, or dreams.

The **challenge** was **to unite our**

gaze in a common dream that sets us in motion within a generative process, that involves us, commits us, excites us and inspires others; and not stop, nor lose ourselves in data, statistics, diagnoses, calculations, words, programmes... This is what Pope Francis does in *Evangelii Gaudium*. "I dream of a church...". He describes what he dreams of, tells us of his vision.

We are Betharram because **one day Michael dreamed:** "I dream of bringing together a society of priests whose only programme is the Heart of Jesus..."

I believe that each one of us has felt summoned and driven by this dream, a dream that even today challenges and guides us.

How did we experience the Regional Chapter?

Before formally starting the Chapter, Father Gustavo Agín introduced us to "Synodal Spirituality", which helped us prepare ourselves to live what we had ahead of us.

The Chapter was organized in three moments:

1° Session: Listening (Identity)

- The conclusions of the Vicariate Assemblies and the Pre-Chapter were presented.

- From this presentation we took the topics to be discussed in the Chapter.



- We listened to the Regional Superior and his invitation.

- We listened to the Community of the Regional Mission in Uruguay, whose discernment of continuity we had to address.

It was about listening to ourselves, about not just what we do but who we are.

2° Session: Meeting (Belonging)

- With oneself, with my own identity, vocation and longing.

- In a common dream, what do we want to dream and live together in Betharram?

Having put together in a few words the common "dream", it gave us a vision, a horizon that commits and excites us. This is one of the great contributions of the Chapter.

3° Session: Discerning

- The themes proposed to the Chapter, but having as guiding criteria the "dream" that we promised to live

together.

- Giving us respect, welcome, appreciation and the necessary time.

It has been a time of the Spirit!

I thank God for the freedom, spontaneity, commitment, responsibility, interest and enthusiasm with which each one of us has lived the Regional Chapter. The fraternal, celebratory and joyful atmosphere throughout the entire Chapter is to be appreciated.

I feel and believe that we have been faithful to the synodal path we are following in the Church and in the Congregation and that, moreover, we have found a good way to live it.

I feel and believe that we are maturing in walking together – synodality –, and that this is the direction.

I confirm how necessary it is for this path:

1. to set ourselves free, especially from ourselves, for which a

"clear identity" is necessary

2. to be part of and protagonist in a **"common dream"**; **"belong"** to something that transcends me.

I am **convinced** that together, we must continue discernment, guided

by the "common dream", of each one of our presences and services, in order to respond creatively to today's world, remain faithful to our identity and mission, and inspire others. ■

Delegates of the
Region to the General
Chapter 2023

Argentina-Uruguay

Fr. Juan Pablo García
Martínez
Fr. Leandro Narduzzo

Brazil

Fr. Paulo Cesar Pinto
Fr. Davi da Silva Lara

Paraguay

Fr. Alberto Zaracho
Fr. Raúl Villalba

**Fr. AUGUSTE ETCHECOPAR REGIONAL PRE-CHAPTER
SAN BERNARDINO – PARAGUAY 4 - 6 NOVEMBER 2022**

The Fr. Auguste Etchecopar Regional Pre-Chapter, was organised by a team made up of six people (5 religious & 1 lay person drawn from the Vicariates of the Region). The meetings were held virtually, in a climate of great camaraderie. To order these sessions of the Regional meeting, the provisions of the Method of Discernment of St Michael Garicoits were employed.

On Friday afternoon, the welcome Mass was celebrated; and followed by a series of games and dynamics, prepared by representatives of the LABEPY group (Lay Betharramites of Paraguay); It was a pleasant moment of integration and dispersion, which served so that the pre-capitulars (religious and lay), coming from the different Vicariates, felt comfortable, relaxed and confident.

On Saturday, the activity began at 8 am. Morning Prayer was integrated, with the First Theme of Work: "Finding ourselves with what we are, and getting to know ourselves". Each participant presented his BEING and DOING as a Betharramite, in a climate of attentive listening; They thanked God for these shared riches and finally, they made pe-



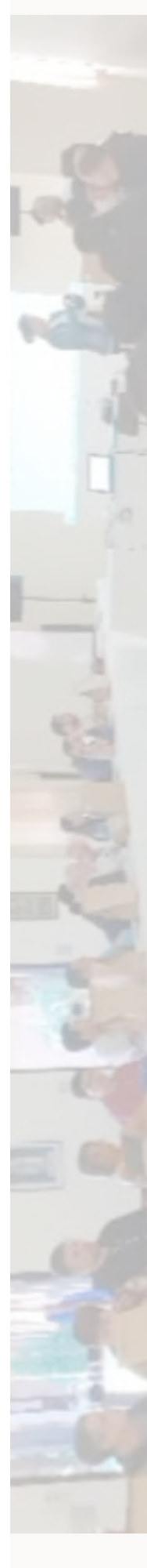
titions for one another. It was an emotional moment of celebration & gratitude to God.

After a brief pause, the Second Work Topic began: "Meeting and listening to each other". Disordered affects were identified at the personal, vicariate and regional levels. Next, the group was divided into small teams, made up of religious and lay people from different Vicariates. After sharing the task and organising themselves, each team presented a brief playful theatrical performance, in which the disordered affections that divert personal and/or community life from the will of God were evident. It was a time to review, recognize and expose weaknesses; to finally present them in a fun and creative way.

In the afternoon, the Third Work Topic was presented: "Identity, Charisma, Belonging". The same teams worked with texts (letters, characteristics, snippets of the life of St Michael), from which the attitudes and reflections of the Holy Founder were extracted, in different circumstances of life. All the richness drawn from the texts was related to their own life (personal and community), seeking the traits that today lead Betharramites to conform to Christ, through the Charism. The synthesis of each group was shared in plenary. As the last activity of the day, each group was assigned to prepare a portion of the Mass, taking into account everything worked on during the day. It was a beautiful Eucharistic celebration, charged with emotional signs of friendship and fraternal unity.

On Sunday, after Morning Prayer (Lauds); the last Work Topic was carried out: "Examine". The participants met by Vicariate, with the task of reviewing everything worked on the previous day, identifying everything that corresponds to the Vicariate in particular; and, finally, to write a synthesis, taking into account the lines of coherence or incoherence between what one is or lives today, the disordered affections and the light that the Betharramite Charism offers for configuration with Christ, both in personal life and in community life. Everything elaborated by each Vicariate was shared in plenary.

Finally, the final synthesis that would be delivered to the Chapter was prepared. In the afternoon, the laity and religious participated in the Diaconal Ordination of Brother Sergio Leiva, in the city of Mariano Roque Alonso. There were moments full of emotion and joy, for this grace that the Lord grants to the Congregation. May Saint Michael Garicoïts intercede for his work and for his collaborators, so that they seek the Will of God in fraternal synodality, embracing the Cross of Christ and taking hold of the Beautiful Branch of Mary of Betharram. ■





Canonical visit of the Superior General to the Vicariate of England

|
Fr. Wilfred Pereppadan scj
Regional Vicar

Our Rule of life : The Superior General's canonical visit to our communities "aims to promote unity both within, and between communities; the visit allows him to witness their fidelity to their charism and mission, and helps stimulate the spiritual and apostolic life of the religious." (RoL 218)

These words from our Rule of life were evident on the Visitation of Fr. Gustavo to our Communities. His visit made a positive impact on the life of the Vicariate and our places of mission. The nature of his accompaniment and his personal witness of a simple Betharramite was helpful to lead this visit to a fruitful one. The family spirit of Betharram and in the idea of coordination for communion through synodality presented by Fr. Gustavo was relevant for the future of Betharram presence in England. He highlighted the importance of, as a Betharramite Religious, to make sure the importance of personal and

community encounters with each other in a climate of spontaneity with openness and constructive dialogue.

During the Assembly at Shallowford Retreat house in Stone, he expressed his thankfulness for the friendship and brotherhood each religious offered to him since his arrival on 10th October 2022. He spoke of the positivity of the family spirit and simplicity of religious of the Vicariate. Fr. Gustavo presented to us for the future of Betharramite in our Vicariate by sharing four points of reflection. They were **Visibility, The "New areopagus of the Mission" The internal configuration, The Arrival of new Religious, and Retirement of Religious**. These points challenged us to enter into the transforming process together with the whole church.

The Visibility as a religious Betharramite to be a sign and proclamation of God's love by living out our vocation and mission in the

Church. A special focus to make our lives visible despite small numbers in the Vicariate.

The New areopagus of the mission:

This theme was proposed to us for the desire to find new areas to present and witness gospel to the places where we are located. In this regard Fr. Gustavo also expressed his thanks to the Vicariate for the help in Mission in India, Thailand and especially a contribution was given to the new mission in Vietnam. The expression of generosity is valued which allows our presence for the future development. Fr. Gustavo also highlighted the presence of Fr. Biju Antony, Fr. George, Fr. Vincent and Fr. Wilfred from Indian Vicariate which allowed us to continue our presence in England. Vicariate is also looking forward to welcoming two Thai Religious, Fr. Pithak and Fr. Athit shall strengthen this attitude to take more steps in finding new areas of the Gospel to be made visible and shared. Fr. Gustavo also thanked each member of the Vicariate for their valuable ministry. The task of the parish community guided by Fr. Anton, Fr. Biju Antony, Fr. George Mathew and Fr. Wilfred in Clayton, Olton, Droitwich and Nottingham. Appreciated the presence of our Brothers Andrew and John in the secondary schools as



chaplains. Valued the work of Hospital Chaplains of our Fathers Austin, Biju and Wilfred. The community administration and parish work of Brothers Patrick, Liam and Gerard were appreciated. Fr. Gustavo also pointed out the generous contribution of Fr. Enrico as an active collaborator at Olton Community. He witnessed and appreciated the care of the Elderly in our Vicariate towards Fr. Dominic and Fr. Brian.

The internal reconfiguration: Fr. Gustavo asked us to reflect and discern, "What path do we have to choose to reconfigure our religious life before problems make us take a certain path?" He also expressed that timely reconfiguration has taken place, especially the trusteeship of the Congregation. The participation of the laity in the life of the congregation. He also challenged us to take more steps in discernment for the reconfiguration

in the areas of administration and accounting.

Regarding **the retirement of religious**, Fr. Gustavo stressed the importance of brotherhood by saying in Betharram no one should feel abandoned or left to their own devices when the years of old age arrive. He was happy to see the vicariate express a clear sign of care towards our elderly, sick and informed religious. He saw the sign of love and care from the young religious towards elderly religious who have given their life for Betharram speaks louder than any other words. He reminded the importance of our elderly to accept their limitations and receive help from other religious.

In each community Fr. Gustavo was welcomed. There were also opportunities for him to meet the parishioners at Clayton, Nottingham, Olton and Droitwich. He thanked the lay faithful in respected parishes who welcomed our Betharram presence and contributed by their accompaniment and generosity towards our Religious. This also gave opportunity for our Superior General as head of the congregation representing all of Betharrmites to share our spirituality and invited them to become more collaborative in our Betharramite mission in England. The Parishioners were very happy to meet Fr. Gustavo and expressed their thanks for the congregation for sending the religious to work in a

pastoral mission. The lay companions of Betharram also gathered together to celebrate mass of thanksgiving and fellowship meal at Olton to conclude the canonical visitation.

The Canonical Visit was a fruitful one which gave a significant experience of the Betharramite family spirit of simplicity. Going forward in the hope of fruitfulness, we are asked to make greater efforts to preserve and find a good balance between our ministry and community life. As we are walking along with the whole church by engaging "the synodal journey", Fr. Gustavo inspired all of us to be part of walking together as a Vicariate by reflecting on what can be improved? What needs to change or be modified? What is the way forward? He reminded us the process of fruitfulness of walking together is the result of a prayerful discernment. This must always guide our religious life.

The visit of Fr. Gustavo was a time of grace. All of us were touched by his simplicity and humility. His capacity to listen and to understand each religious and the situation of community life is commendable. As Betharram religious, the canonical visit gave us all the motivation and hope we needed to carry forward. Overall, it gave us a chance to reflect on our lives and gave us fresh inspiration for the future. ■

Meeting of the General Council on December 7th, 2022:

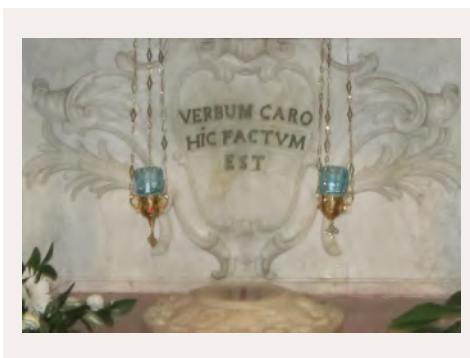


■ The Superior General with the consent of his Council canonically *erected the House of the Interregional Novitiate in Bethlehem, from 1 January 2023* (RL. 205/f); he *appointed Fr. Stervin Selvadass scj Master of the Novices of the Interregional Novitiate* from 1 January 2023 (cf. RL. 206/a and 244/f);



■ With the advice of his Council, he *appointed Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez SCJ collaborator of the Master of Novices* (Can 651 § 2) from 1 January 2023 for four years.

The *Interregional Novitiate* that will start in January 2023 *will welcome four novices from the Saint Michael Garicoits Region and the Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Region:*



Br. Joyal BABU (from India)

Br. Aimé Isidore Ankre BOGUI (from the Ivory Coast)

Br. Aymar Conrad NAMBOMESSE (from Central Africa)

Br. Clément Hubert SALLE (from Central Africa)

■ The Superior General with the advice of his Council *approved the Acts of the Regional Chapters of the Saint Michael Garicoits Region and the Fr. Auguste Etchecopar Region* (RL. 206/d).

December supplement:

Fr. Etchecopar and the community of Bethlehem

Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

Soon available in pdf on www.betharram.net



Fr. Etchecopar, Model for a Joyful Synodal Walk

|
Fr. Michael Bistis Fernando scj

“We are a pilgrim Church” (cf. LG, 7). The Betharramites both religious and companions all over the world, have an indispensable role in the Synodal Pilgrimage. In this Synodal Journey, Fr. Etchecopar walks with us as an unseen spiritual guide and the Betharramites can draw inspiration from him to ‘dialogue, converse, discern together’ to live in Communion, Participation and Mission. The Betharramite pilgrims have got so much to learn from the spiritual school of Fr. Etchecopar.

His personal life was an example of holiness which conveyed his love of God and neighbour and inspired many in his days to hold firm to Christ’s values and teachings which he continues to radiate to us the Betharramites of the 21st century. “As a loving father who leads his children, he recommends perseverance, courage, vigilance, and firmness in this joyful walking together” (cf. Fr. Duvignau SCJ on Fr. Etchecopar).

Fr. Etchecopar and Adsumus Sancte Spiritus

With open hearts before the Spirit, the Synodal Church invites the Holy Spirit to work within us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. This prayer spiritually resembles that of Fr. Etchecopar imploring the Sacred Heart to guide the religious family.

During his lifetime he recognised and acknowledged the wealth and the variety of the gifts and charisms the Spirit bestowed upon the members of the religious family which he often reminded the brothers to channelise for the good of the entire human family. Nevertheless he continued to implore the Sacred Heart to free the members from pride and teach them the humility of heart and spirit that makes us worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. He firmly believed that life completely surrendered to the guidance of the Spirit can alone bring the fruits of the mission as he prayed,

“fill us with your strength and your tenderness, fill us with your Spirit, fill us with your love.” He learned this spiritual lesson for life from St. Michael himself who said, “God talks to the heart in solitude. This solitude, through which the spirit is always linked to God, needs to be developed and modelled. We must never lose sight of it” (cf. *The Missionary Spirit of St. Michael* by Mgr Lacoste SCJ). Thus Fr. Etchecopar reminds us of his beloved children that it is through the Holy Spirit we discern the path for our Church – universal and local.

Fr. Etchecopar and Sensus Fidelium approach

The Synodal Church exhorts that all who have been baptised are the principal subjects of this synodal experience since they are the focal point of the *sensus fidelium*, the living voice of the people of God. It gives greater hope for the Companions of Betharram who would engage in the prophetic articulation of the Word and also in the prophetic discernment, of course in the synodal fashion. Fr. Etchecopar had a sensitive heart for the needs of others, particularly the laity. His letters demonstrate how he carried out all the responsibilities as a son and a brother and how completely dedicated he was to the service of the Lord. He had the ability to pay attention to and listen to the people, communicate with clarity and conciseness, and be unafraid of taking calculated risks in light of his

faith in God. He was endowed with commendable insightfulness, acute sensitivity, and adaptive empathy, which he used as a leader to inspire the people of God to discern God’s plan. He loved to surround himself with enlightened people to pay attention to the voice of God even in the voiceless and insignificant. In all things, especially in facing delicate situations, in the presence of the insecure, or the sick, he knew how to employ common sense and compassion.

As the Synod progresses to different phases, it is important to know that the Church will be listening to the whispers of the Holy Spirit and evaluating the *sensus fidei* in which the criteria of evaluation would be ‘authentic participation with a compassionate heart.’ For the Betharramites, *sensus fidei* would be nothing but acknowledging the fact of ecclesial humility—that says, “the human aspect of the Church needs to receive more emphasis.”

Incarnated Faith from the Interior Master

To be authentically ecclesial and effective, the synodal path of listening and discernment should always endeavour to be communitarian and touch on the life of the community in accordance with the logic of an “incarnated faith.” Fr. Etchecopar derived from the direct source of St. Michael Garicoits the inexhaustible wellspring of the Interior Master that

unites us in one heart and one soul to be serene in all that the Lord has entrusted to us. To a disturbed and discouraged religious Fr. Etchecopar wrote, "Be at peace! Do not become sad or discouraged, which could be a sign of temptation. In this way, dear friend, continue to be a good soldier of Christ. Make your soul always gentle, at peace, and serene."

Since the synodal path is not exempted from unexpected disturbances and spiritual turmoil, Fr. Etchecopar reminds us to have frequent attentive listening to the voice of the Interior Master who leads us along the way. The correspondences of St. Michael and Fr. Etchecopar would serve as effective tools of *Modus Vivendi et Operandi* in bringing out the best of our reflections from different vicariates amidst the diversity of contextual contemplations on the same source of Betharramite spirituality.

Fr. Etchecopar's Betharramite Spirituality is a Listening Spirituality

Betharramite Spirituality, in addition to being Incarnational Spirituality, is a Listening Spirituality as well. For this reason, St. Michael sent Fr. Etchecopar as his representative for Canonical visits because he had a willing heart to listen to the brothers. Incarnational Spirituality is a spirituality of the influential presence of God in all the events of one's life where one believes that God listens to the innermost thoughts and even

unuttered prayers of the silent heart. Fr. Etchecopar learned this 'Listening Spirituality' from the very inspiring model of St. Michael as he acclaimed, "He was all in all to the weak and to the strong, to the ignorant and the wise, to the simple and the sublime, to the servant and the protector. And he did not brake the crushed reed." What an amazing virtue he drew from St. Michael, a heart that listens...

In a Betharramite community, we are called to listen to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times to discern what God is saying to all of us. Pope Francis characterises the two interrelated goals of this process of listening: "to listen to God, so that with Him we may hear the cry of His people; to listen to His people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us." God often speaks through the voices of those that we can easily exclude, cast aside, or discount. Fr. Etchecopar reminds us that we must make a special effort to listen to those we may be tempted to see as unimportant and those who force us to consider new points of view that may change our way of thinking. Thus, from the perspective of Fr. Etchecopar, it is ultimately listening to the heartbeat of humanity in all its diversity where God is undoubtedly present, because He dwells "*in the depths of our hearts where he fosters a ceaseless fermentation*" (DS § 128).

Fr. Etchecopar: Model for Synodal

Church's Participation and Mission

A synodal Church is where there is unity in faith and where all participate actively in the prophetic mission – a mission of evangelization and proclaiming the Good News of salvation and liberation. The Synodal Church's Participation and Mission remind me of Fr. Etchecopar, the third Superior General and the second founder of our religious family, who founded the mission in the Holy land and expanded the mission in South America. With his gift of supernatural discernment, he recognized the holiness and divine intervention of the Carmelite saint Mary of Jesus Crucified. With Divine Providence, the establishment of Bethlehem, our religious family's first seminary took place. The jubilant gratitude might have been raised from the heart of Fr. Etchecopar to the Lord of missions who had sent His apostles all over the world centuries before from this Land so Holy and pure.

Though he was ill, he made missionary journeys to Argentina and Uruguay. There he preached retreats and strengthened the mission communities with his encouraging presence. For sure he felt like a proud father witnessing the early seeds of St. Michael's missionary spirit producing fruits in abundance in evangelization, particularly in education mission and increasing members to the religious call. Nothing ever hindered him from the missionary zeal, carrying the Incarnate Word forward, presenting

the Betharramite family joyfully at the service of the people of God. In the light of the missionary spirit of Fr. Etchecopar, mission in the context of Synodality envisages a shift from hierarchy to the community with the joyful sharing of responsibilities.

Triple Blessings for the Betharramites

The Synod on Synodality, The Year of Fr. Etchecopar and The Upcoming General Chapter are the triple blessings God bestowed upon us. Everything is under the seal of promise. In the Exodus journey, God has liberated His people, but He liberated them for a journey, not for rest. Exodus is a prefiguration of the Betharramite Joyful Synodal Walk, recalling the marvellous spiritual treasures God entrusted to us through the witnessing life stories of St. Michael and Fr. Etchecopar. We ask the Incarnate Son of God to help us set our face toward the future, strong in faith and determination until we encounter Him face to face in the company of our Beloved Mother of Betharram, St. Michael and Fr. Etchecopar our dear fathers of the mission. Always ahead! ■

Jesus, the long-awaited one, the
One who comes,
enlighten our minds
and our hearts.

Make us creative and bold.

Make us able to meet, to listen, to
discern, the signs of the times!

Best wishes to all!



Merry
Christmas !



Yes, my friends¹, children of the Crib, of Nazareth and of Calvary, doubly marked with the sign of Our Lord Jesus Christ with the seal of Betharram, with the seal of the colony and of San José, you will always have to walk a narrow path of humility, of work, of suffering: this is your heritage, this is your glory and that of the congregation; it must also be for you, in the ever recurring and ever new trials, the source of immense consolation and the principle of indomitable courage, for you must say to yourselves: Thus did our Fathers, sow in tears for a prodigious harvest; thus you must follow them, fertilize your furrow, come what may, in the hope of a reward that God has kept secret, but which will come in its time. And you will be able to see that by this noble disinterestedness, you will carry out the wish of our founder; you will appear to be, and you will be in fact, his true and legitimate children: humble and devoted...humble, always humble in the heart; in the midst of success, saying in the spirit of truth, in the presence of truth itself: servi inutiles sumus ; we are only useless servants. And if success eludes your efforts, it makes you doubly humble, but never defeated, never defeated: he alone is our foundation, he alone is the ground of our being. A soul may be dominated by the thoughts of the earth, but not a soul which dominates the whole earth by the thought of heaven, and by the life in heaven: conversatio nostra in Coelis est. Our dialogue is in heaven.

1) To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Bethlehem, 12 December 1892



Societas S^{mi} Cordis Jesu
BETHARRAM

Generalate House

via Angelo Brunetti, 27

00186 Rome - Italy

Phone +39 06 320 70 96

Email scj.generalate@gmail.com

www.betharram.net