



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

Consilium Internationale
Via Vittorio Putti, 4/int. 6 - 00152 Roma
Tel. +39 06.45471722 Fax +39 06.45473094
E-mail: ciofs@ciofs.org
www.ciofs.org

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To all my sisters and brothers in the Secular Franciscan Order, all over the world

.. filled day by day with the comfort and grace of the Holy Spirit¹

My dear Sisters and Brothers!

May the Lord give you his peace!

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!"² On the Feast of Pentecost let us listen to St. Paul; rejoice and rediscover, that we are filled, day by day, with the comfort and grace of the Holy Spirit, as also Saint Francis has experienced it. God always provides for us the best we can use in order to love our neighbours in a deeper manner, to accomplish our duties better, to walk on the way of our secular franciscan vocation, as salt of the Earth and light of the World.³

I invite you all to open our eyes, our ears and our hearts, so that we can receive the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, who is to fill us, to console us, and to lead us individually, in our families and in the fraternities. It is the Holy Spirit, who fills us with life, without Him we would not have life. Because of Him we can live our vocation, can live our family lives and our lives in the fraternity. Let us always be fully aware of this, and live "the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in His temple."⁴

1. "As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world."⁵

This is the motto of the coming General Chapter, and I take the opportunity to invite you to consider, what does it mean for us to being sent into the world?

We must have a clear vision about our identity. It is much more important to have a very clear knowledge on who we are, than to know what we are to do. Our identity is whom God wants us to see. Without knowing who we are we will never know what we shall do, and will make lots of mistakes, also if with a good intention.

"It is not good for the man to be alone."⁶ It strongly belongs to our identity that we are to live in different kinds of communities. "No man is an island."⁷ We, secular franciscans are living in our

¹1Cel XI 26

²Ph. 4.4.

³Mt. 5.13-14.

⁴LG 9.

⁵Jn. 17.18.

⁶Gen. 2.18.

⁷Jonh Donne: Meditation XVII., 1624, and Thomas Merton, 1955

families, in our fraternities, in our working teams, in our parish communities: such a richness and treasure, where God has invited to us to experience, to celebrate and to spread his love!

Family life

The most important community, that gave the most important part of our being, of our identity, is our family. Everyone was born into a family. Except some rare and sad stories, each of us has an experience of the family. We have the experience of the love of our father, which is the image of the love of our Heavenly Father. We have the experience of the love of our mother, which is the image of the love of the Holy Virgin, who is the heavenly mother for all.

"From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church".⁸

Our families, as being domestic churches, have to be places of prayer, where we can convey the faith and love that we have received and thus have to share it with our children. Through our whole life, through the example of our spiritual life, through the example of our love to our husband/wife, through the example of our work, through the example of our dedication to the fraternities, to the poor and needy, to the social affairs, we live our identity as the children of God, and share all these goods with our children. By bringing up our children we are instruments of God who is working in our children, too, and thus we are perpetuating the people of God.

Fraternity life

Our fraternities - particularly our local fraternities - are the places, where we can live our vocation, where we can find the source of life, by accepting, living and giving the love of God. We have to open ourselves in the fraternities, to make them real fraternities, that is to share our lives with our sisters and brothers. The goal is not to live a nice fraternal life but a true and honest one. We have to open ourselves. We shall not be afraid to expose ourselves to one another, to share our treasures, but also to accept and not to hide our weakness, our shortcomings! We have to be so close to each other that our souls can touch one another. We have to take the risk of being opened, we have to take the risk of the conflicts. Sincere and opened fraternal life means to be ready to share all that we have. However, real fraternal life also means to be opened to the fraternal warning and fraternal correction. Remember, my dear sisters and brothers, that the Holy Spirit is working through these fraternal relationships in the fraternity. We have to take the risk of hurting each other and also of having wounds, but these wounds help us in the reconciliation. There is no real fraternity without reconciliation. As brothers and sisters of penance, we always have to live together with our fragility, with our wounds, being always ready, however, to ask and to give forgiveness. There is no Pentecost, no renewal in the fraternity if we close ourselves from each other and limit our relationships to a kind of tea party.

However, it is not only for us, it is not for our good feelings. It is because we bring it out to the world, regardless we are aware or not. We bring out what we receive and experience there. It is our deep responsibility how the Holy Spirit can fill our fraternities with life, with life that we will bring out and make visible to our neighbours. Let us give space to the Holy Spirit, my sisters and brothers, to shake, to move our fraternities, to renew our fraternity life! God is not willing to make us sit in a comfortable place, He wants us to live a vivid life, that brings fruits.

In the ecclesial community

The Apostle warns us: "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you"⁹. We understand it, and it is correct, that each one's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. But it is worth to consider, that we, as the body of Christ when we think about the Church, are the temple of the Holy spirit, too. Our communities are temples of the Holy spirit, too. St. Paul's trinitarian spirit can lead us to a new

⁸LG 11.

⁹1Cor. 6.19

approach of our role in the Church. We have to let the Holy spirit dwell among us, dwell in the ecclesial community.

We shall be such stones of the Church, that are ready to receive Christ as being the cornerstone, and are ready to be a place for the Holy Spirit. It is particularly our duty, as secular franciscans, to bring our spirituality into the parish communities and to other ecclesial communities, so that it will be filled with joy, with humble attitude of serving one another, with creative love, with an attitude that respects and strives for the care of creation in all our activities, with an intention to focus the parish life on the poorest and the most needy inside, but also outside the members of its community.

As a temple of the Holy Spirit we have to fill the life of the Church with what we can give: the fraternal love, the respect of each other, the attention to everyone, the good news, that we all are children of God by the sacrament of the baptism, and God has made of us his people.

In the society

Each secular franciscan is a citizen of a certain country. Each secular franciscan is living in a town or village. Each secular franciscan is working (or used to work) for the good of the society. We are not hermits, we are inserted to a wider community of our fellow citizens by God. It is our responsibility and a part of our vocation to strive to form part of our society always in a better way, in the spirit of service, and to do our best to "build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively"¹⁰.

We have to seek the good of all, particularly in the service of the smallest, the poorest, the most marginalized, those, who do not have the essential to live a life with human dignity, regardless these essentials being material or spiritual ones. We have to take care of the created world, because since the beginning of times, the Spirit of God has been present over the creation¹¹. We have to do our best, each one of us according to the possibilities, to create a spiritual and material environment responding to the initial project of God, by seeking the best solutions to the problems and to the tasks we are facing in our daily life.

However, it is also a part of our vocation to bring the Holy Spirit where civil liberty or religious freedom is misunderstood, and thus practised in a wrong manner. Also, we have to bring the Holy Spirit, where culture is not a praise and fruit of the talents, the knowledge or the beauty for the good of the people, for the care of creation or for the protection of life, but on the contrary, such things are called culture, which are to ruin dignity, to mislead the ignorants, the uneducated, the illiterate, to exploit the natural and human resources, and which are praising the immediate experience, the instant joy, leading downwards instead of searching the way up high to God.

2. How to manage an order

In November in Rome, we will conclude the topic, that has been opened to a worldwide discussion in 2014 at the General Elective Chapter in Assisi: "How to manage an international Order like OFS?"

What is the Order, who is the Order? We are the Order, we all, sisters and brothers, all over the world, who want to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis¹². The Secular Franciscan Order is not only the presidency, not only the international council, not only the international fraternity, but "it is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world"¹³. It is our common task to learn, how can we animate and guide this great union of our fraternities, which is not only a spiritual family, but has also the reality of a kind of an organization. Therefore, the management of the Order

¹⁰OFS Rule 14

¹¹cf. Gen. 1.2

¹²OFS Rule 2, GG.CC. 3

¹³OFS Rule 2, GG.CC. 3

does not regard only to the International Council, or to the CIOFS Presidency. Management has to be a common management at all levels.

We have to learn from God and from each other, how to deal not only with the 'heavenly' things, like prayer life, sacramental life, devotions, but also with the 'earthly' things, like organize meetings, give proper formation, improve communication. None of these two parts can live without the other. We have different experiences and different skills, practices. This will be the time to share them, to teach each other and to learn from each other. We have to remember, that each and every one of us will be the instrument of God towards the others. Therefore I ask all of you to read the Instrumentum Laboris carefully, discuss it in the different councils and fraternities, so that those who will be present at the General Chapter, will be able to enrich the common experience and will be able to help the entire Order to find the project of God for the next three years.

Saint Francis said, that the General Minister of the Order is the Holy Spirit¹⁴. It is always very important to know this, but now in particular, when we are facing the XVth General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order. We will meet to strengthen our identity, to celebrate the diversity and to build the unity in the International Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. This will be our mandate, we have to work on this in November in Rome, and also after having returned back to our local fraternities. All what we have to do will not be completed by the end of the General Chapter, moreover, it will be the beginning. We have to go back to our fraternities, sharing the gift of God and the fruit of our work, so that ALL levels of the Order and each single sister and brother be filled more with the Holy Spirit and be able to live a more authentic secular franciscan life, and so that ALL councils on the different levels be able to accomplish the service of animating and guiding in a better way. This is not a goal for itself, but in order to live our vocation better, and to bring Christ, the risen Lord to the world.

Next year we will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the renewed Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. Paul VI. has given this Rule to us on June 24th 1978. We have to remember: it is a gift. It is a free gift of God, and a free gift of the Church. We have to appreciate it, and we have to keep it as a treasure. But keeping it as a treasure does not mean to lock it up in a safe place, on the contrary! We have to make it a living thing. I repeat the words of the pope Saint John Paul II.: "Study, love and live your Rule, because its values are truly evangelical ones"¹⁵. It has to be a part of our formation, to read often and to study the basic document of our life. It has to be a part of our life, a daily nutrition.

3. "... filled day by day with the comfort and grace of the Holy Spirit"¹⁶

What does it mean to be filled with the comfort and grace of the Holy Spirit? Do we really recognize, how much less we could live without Him? We need Him, in order to not be afraid when the storm is coming and our boat is in danger, and to call the Lord instead of being frightened¹⁷. But we also need the Holy Spirit to step out from the boat, to leave our security, to leave the safe and well-known ambit of our life, and to do what we could not imagine to do before, to start to walk on the surface of the water¹⁸. Miracles are out there, not when sitting in the boat.

My dear sisters and brothers, we need to be filled by the Holy Spirit. By that Spirit, whom Jesus gave to the disciples when they were gathered. By that Spirit, who filled the disciples when they were together with many and proclaimed the good news. By that Spirit, who has made the Church from a group of weak and uneducated persons. By that Spirit, that likewise makes of us what we can call 'fraternity', and makes of us an Order. Let us open us to the Holy Spirit so that He can fill us and make of us a true fraternity! Let Him fill our assembly, too, when we celebrate our General Chapter!

¹⁴2Cel CXLV 193

¹⁵pp. John Paul II. to the International Council of the OFS, 1982. Sept. 27th

¹⁶1Cel XI 26

¹⁷cf. Mt. 8.25

¹⁸cf. Mt. 14.29

I wish to conclude this letter with a personal thing. Believe me, I feel very much, how much I need the Holy Spirit to fill me with his wisdom and with the love of God, so that I may fulfil my duties. I need the Holy Spirit to guide me and to fill me with his life-giving power and with his strength. I need the Holy Spirit, the real General Minister, to reinforce me in the difficult moments and to keep me cautious when I forget to take care and be prudent.

Finally, and at all, I need your prayer, my sisters and brothers. I ask you to pray for me, and I also ask you to pray for the entire Secular Franciscan Order, so that the Holy Spirit may renew our life, our service.

Come, Holy Spirit, come! Fill us, day by day, with your comfort and your grace!

Your minister and your brother

Tibor Kauser
CIOFS Minister General

