General Chapter 2019

Eucharistic Liturgy

2 September

I am grateful to God for my Augustinian vocation and for the gift of Priesthood!

I have identified myself with the Order for 40 years now (today) when I temporarily committed myself to the Church through the Order then discerned my solemn commitment 3 years later. It was through this discerning spirit that I came to know and love Jesus Christ through the Augustinian spirit of fraternity and friendship. The spirit of charity, especially, continues to grow within me, initially due to my family upbringing (albeit a lot of drama in my Italian-American family). Although I have been accused of having gangster mentality because I am from Chicago, I nonetheless found in Augustinian community life the space to move beyond my limited perspective and to experience life beyond the close-knit family and neighborhood in which I was raised. The Order gives me the opportunity to see God’s face among people that, initially, didn’t fit into my limited world. It enriches my personal integrity and raises up my dignity.

We begin together to widen our perspectives in this grace filled time of discussions and deliberations on how to strengthen our mission in the Church overall. What a grace it is to be here as we represent the Order in all its diversity.

The Gospel of Luke has already set the stage for Jesus’ Mission. The Holy Spirit has descended on him and moves him forward. Now, in the power of the Spirit, Jesus begins his work (and so do we for this General Chapter 2019). Today’s Gospel indicates that Jesus begins his public ministry by proclaiming release to captives and the oppressed. In the presence of his listeners, He announces that today -- the prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled, and the year of the Lord’s favor has come. We appeal to the Lord as well that His favor rest with us during this grace filled time.

Although the local people of Nazareth marvel when they hear Jesus speak, they misperceive who he is: to them he is merely the carpenter’s son. They do not recognize that before them stands the One who will transform them into a new image. Here, familiarity breeds contempt as they question his true identity.

The opening words of Jesus’ sermon text recall his baptism: The Spirit of the Lord has anointed him… And he has been anointed for a purpose. What he preaches today will be the theme of his whole ministry. What we discuss, deliberate and define during this General Chapter will set the course for the next 6 years as we move forward accompanying one another and the people of God in our service to the Church. Our message to the brothers (and sisters) must be a message of hope and encouragement especially during these challenging times within the Church and its leadership. Jesus’ Mission is defined by bringing good news, forgiveness and healing as well as inviting those who feel alienated and whose lives are broken due to the nature of our sinful condition. He preaches freedom and transformation.

When Jesus proclaims good news to the poor, it isn’t just a metaphor. Jesus’ concern for those who suffer the crushing effects of poverty, separation and abuse of power is repeated throughout Luke’s Gospel.

Jesus does not separate economics from spirituality either. The salvation that Jesus brings embraces the whole person, spirit, soul and body…Why? Because God desires us to be made whole from the brokenness we suffer (and at times, inflict).

Today, in order to accept his teaching, Jesus reminds his listeners they will have to change their attitudes toward outsiders, that God’s love extends beyond their borders, they would have to include people they routinely exclude. They would have to believe that God’s salvation is really for *all* flesh, and not just for the few. This moves beyond our tendency to serve our own purposes. It offers all of us the opportunity to see God’s face in the most unlikely people and places. We have been anointed to create a new community that breaks down the barriers between insider and outsider, that all flesh shall see God’s salvation.

This passage reminds us that He forgives us and frees us, He welcomes us and He changes us. He has been anointed to bring us freedom from sin and freedom from sinful structures. Haven’t we also been anointed with the oil of salvation as we accompany the Risen Lord in His healing and unifying Mission?

Perhaps the most disturbing part of this passage is that Jesus does not do any miracles in his hometown. Why should they not receive some benefit from Jesus’ ministry? Yet this very sense of being disturbed can be a helpful pointer in our lives together in community and our service to the Church. Do we feel entitled to the work of Jesus among us? Do we feel entitled in our leadership roles? Or, do we share in Jesus’ approach to ministry as a mission of service?

We are restless due to so much to think about and so much to accomplish because at times, the Mission doesn’t fit into our expectations nor do we fit into one another’s expectations. I have learned that the best way to deal with these challenging facets of community life and ministry is to simply “do good and forget about it.” It is a struggle to let go of our ego in favor of attending to the needs of the brother (or sister).

This restless nature of our lives expresses itself well in how we relate to one another, the continuous struggle to search for God and to see the face of Christ. If we see each other as another problem to solve then we reduce one another as something other than human and this is dangerous. But when we see each other as another opportunity to see the face of Christ even in our woundedness…a kind word, a gentle gesture, a listening heart and the generous nature of our personal goodness, it makes all that we do worth it because we are contributing to the Mission of Christ as we accentuate the dignity of one another and move toward wholeness.

Anthony Benedetto Pizzo, OSA

Provincia Chicagensis

Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel