

ORDINARY GENERAL CHAPTER 2013

Documents and decisions



ORDER OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

**ORDINARY GENERAL
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Rome, 28 August - 14 September 2013

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FOREWORD

The 184th General Chapter of the Order of Saint Augustine was celebrated in Rome from 28 August, the Solemnity of Saint Augustine to 14 September, 2013, following the six year sequence set forth in the Order's Constitutions, which also stipulate who is to participate. The members of the General Chapter were the major superiors as well as the elected definitors from the Order's circumscriptions.

The General Chapter opened with evening Mass celebrated at the Church of Sant'Agostino in Rome. The Holy Father, Pope Francis, presided and preached the homily at that inaugural Mass. His words of encouragement to continue in the path of Augustine's restless search were hope-filled and challenging.

The General Chapter elected Fr. Alejandro Moral Antón to the office of Prior General and likewise elected the members of the General Council of the Order, as well as other officials of the Curia. In addition, the Chapter focused its time and energy on the following areas:

- The completion of a final document of hope and encouragement to the whole Order.
- The consideration of proposals adopted by the General Chapter as determinations for the work of the next six years.
- The establishment of the new Augustinian Province of Brazil and of the Vicariate of Papua, Indonesia.

To be published in the near future will be a special issue of the ACTA ORDINIS, which will contain the official publication of the Chapter documents, as well as the results of the various ballots and elections. Presented here in this book for consideration are the documents of the Chapter, the Declarations and Determinations of the Chapter, the message offered by Pope Francis at the Inaugural Mass, the opening statement presented to the Chapter by the Vicar General, and the Programmatic Document offered by the Prior General after his election.

We are providing this book to the communities of the Order with the hope that the study and application thereof may contribute to the renewal of life in the Order and may foster the mission of the Order to the Church and to the World. May it help us to embrace the challenges of our present place and time, and may it call us forward to journey with every heart restless for God, restless for justice and peace, restless for encountering the Lord in all.

Rome, 13 November 2013,
the Feast of All Saints of the Augustinian Family

MESSAGE OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2013 TO ALL THE BROTHERS OF THE ORDER

THE PEACE OF RESTLESSNESS

Dear Brothers,

As we come to the end of the 184th General Chapter of the Order, gathered in Rome, we want to send to all of you fraternal greetings and to communicate to you the fruits of our work in the Chapter sessions.

During these weeks we, your brothers, gathered from 50 circumscriptions and 32 countries. We have prayed together, we have exchanged ideas and concerns and, of course, we have also discussed problems and shared diverse opinions. We give thanks to God for this opportunity for prayer, fraternal meetings and work, and for having become aware of the strength and depth of the ties that bind us, by having experienced a diversity that enriches us.

The work of the Chapter focused largely on a theme that is well known to all: “The Unity of the Order in the Service of the Gospel”. The Intermediate General Chapter of 2010 produced that document and, along its same lines, most of the sessions of this Chapter were devoted to seeking solutions to various problems that the Order faces throughout the world.

This document invited us to read once again the first chapter of our Constitutions. In it we are reminded that our identity as an Order comes from four constitutive sources: the monastic heritage of Saint Augustine, our eremitical roots, the particular circumstances arising from the intervention of the Apostolic See, and our status as a Mendicant Order (Const. 4). These are four different roots that come down to us through history to sustain and nourish the same body: the Order of Saint Augustine.

How do we now live this identity of ours? What do we do have to do? Viewed in terms of doing something or not doing anything, is not the best way to pose the question.

It is, rather, a question of yearning. Yearning for communion of life, experienced in such fullness that it makes us feel we are one soul. The yearning, because of which, our vocation, our treasure, the pearl of great price for which we have left everything, brings us to share our goods and our talents. The yearning of prayer and work that give rise to the happiness of spiritual friendship which is deep, founded on the presence of Christ in one's brother. The yearning which leads each person to think of his brother before he thinks of himself, to the extent of being willing to serve by enlivening, directing, presiding, and even, and why not, correcting; putting the common good ahead of everything else, that is to say: communion. The yearning that makes of differences of temperament, age, or ideology, no more than nuances of one common experience. Communion such as this will illumine our inner person to the point that he will radiate the light of the Gospel in every type of work and apostolic commitment. There will be no barriers of language, no obstacles that get in his way.

It is a question of really wanting this communion. Of really wanting a personal depth, arrived at in prayer, study and reflection, done in the intimacy of the heart, that changes, without setting out to do so, the person committed to it into a master of interiority. A depth that blossoms in the service of the Gospel; a depth that seeks as a natural place, the common home of brothers.

It's time to desire. A desire for communion in the Order that will allow us to strengthen the bonds with each and every brother, going beyond differences; that will lead us to unite our strengths and energies, that will make difficult apostolates possible in a complex world. A collaboration that springs from the yearning for freedom, inner freedom before traditions, routines or relationships; a freedom that is manifest in obedience to needs that are shared, a freedom that connects us to the proclamation of the Gospel alone.

It's time to hope. To hope for service in the Church; for a continuous availability that will lead us to get the best out each person. Hope to be a prophetic sign in a world that shouts for peace and justice. Hope to live, not just for ourselves; to forget ourselves, to leave aside our focusing on ourselves and, in doing so, to recognize that we exist because of the Church and for the Church, that our life is the life of the Church which is at the service of the Kingdom of God. We can be confident then, beyond any doubt, that young people will come to share their lives with us, when the only thing that is offered to them is to lose their life for the Gospel.

Yearnings, hopes, desires, aspirations... Our Father Saint Augustine called it "restlessness". Once

again, like so many other times throughout history, the Apostolic See has spoken to us. His Holiness, Pope Francis, in the beautiful words he dedicated to us in his homily at the celebration that began the Chapter, affirmed: “What kinds of restlessness does this great and holy man ask us to awaken and to keep alive in our own existence? I am proposing three kinds: the restlessness of spiritual seeking, the restlessness of the encounter with God, the restlessness of love.” Read his words. “Augustine’s treasure is this very attitude: always going towards God, always going out towards the flock.... He was a man constantly stretched between these poles; never “privatizing” love... always journeying on! Always be on the way ... Always be restless! And this is the peace of restlessness.”

The Church requires “restlessness” of us. Let us be faithful to our Holy Father Augustine in following our Lord Jesus Christ. And may Our Mother of Good Counsel accompany us!

DECISIONS

1 The General Chapter supports the process that has already begun for the union of the four Spanish Provinces. According to the plan presented by the Prior Provincials, the proposed union will be submitted for the approval of the members of those four Provinces.

2 The General Chapter supports the process of dialogue which exists between the vicariates of our Lady of Consolation (Brazil) and St. Thomas of Villanova (Bolivia), with the goal of constituting one single Province. The General Chapter invites the Friars of both Vicariates and the Councils of the Mother Provinces connected with them to complete the planned steps in this process of union.

3 The General Chapter celebrates the Augustinian Theological House of Studies of Valladolid recently aggregated/affiliated to the Faculty of Theology of the North of Spain/Burgos and which accredits this Theological House of Studies with the ability to grant Licentiate in Fundamental Theology. The General Chapter also encourages the Board of Trustees, the Prior General and the Priors Provincial of the Spanish Provinces to proceed with enthusiasm the work begun. Furthermore, the General Chapter rejoices in the first steps of the Universidad de San Agustín, “Cervantina”, of Bogotá and encourages it to

maintain the centuries of University tradition of the Order in Latin America.

4 The General Chapter supports the project of the Province of Holland to invite Friars from other Circumscriptions to create an International Augustinian Community in the Netherlands.

DETERMINATIONS

1 Recognizing the fundamental importance of the local house chapter and the importance of relationships in community life, and in order to support the renewal of Augustinian community life at the local level, the Spirituality Institute will develop ways and resources which will be sent to superiors of all circumscriptions to assist local priors, especially in their roles as facilitators of house chapters and chapters of renewal. This material will be used to promote reflection on themes such as, but not limited to, interpersonal dialogue, community relationships, restlessness, the house chapter as a place for communal search for God, prayer, and the challenges to religious life in the twenty-first century.

2 The Major Superiors of Circumscriptions should insure that each community of the Order has at least three Friars in order to have a richer community life. (Cfr: CC 227)

3 Recognizing the importance of the Patristic Institute, *Augustinianum*, the General Chapter invites major superiors to send students to this institute to be prepared for study, research and teaching.

4 For the sake of strengthening a sense of identity and belonging through the knowledge of our history and of furthering the tradition of the Order (CC 128), the General Chapter invites all Major Superiors to promote the study of the history of the Church, and the history and spirituality of the Order, especially within the Order's jurisdictions where vocations are flourishing.

5 Recognizing the importance of our current world situation, as well as fidelity to tradition, the General Chapter encourages major superiors to prepare Friars as specialists in the social sciences in order to respond to new challenges of our world and to cooperate in the new evangelization.

6 The agreements made by the major superiors of Circumscriptions under the general assembly of a determined region will have a binding character on the signatories. (Cfr: CC 221)

7 All projects of the Order which involve the participation of distinct Circumscriptions, will be determined by a statute in which the principles and norms which will govern these projects are to be explicitly made. (Cfr: CC 221)

8 The General Chapter establishes the Province of Brazil from the Vicariate of the Most Holy Name of Jesus of the Province of Spain, from the Vicariate of the Province of Castile, and from the Delegation of the Province of Malta. (Cfr: CC 232)

9 Where there are common projects of Formation in the Order, all of the Circumscriptions involved, whether Provinces, Vicariates or Delegations, truly form part of these projects.

10 The International Commission on Formation should accompany the common projects of formation in the Order in a close and fraternal way so that the identity of these projects and the continuity of their diverse stages be strengthened.

11 The Prior General with his Council, in coordination with the Econome General, will establish a group of people, religious and/or lay, responsible for the seeking of funds in order to support the projects of the Order. These funds should be in an independent bank account used only for this purpose.

12 The Delegation of Papua of the Province of Holland will be established as a Vicariate (Cfr: CC 240)

13 The General Chapter recommends the creation of a Commission for Evangelization and Pastoral Ministry.

14 In order to maintain stability and to assure the future of the Augustinian presence in Cuba, the Prior General and his Council will propose that one or several Circumscriptions take on the responsibility to support already established communities and their assumed responsibilities by maintaining a direct connection of the Delegation of Cuba with the General Curia.

15 That the Prior General and his Council study the possibility of establishing a community in France.

16 That the house in Annaba, up until now, a house of the Province of Malta, become a General House according to CC 219 e.

17 The Province which takes on the responsibility of another Province which has lost its ordinary governance will promise that it will carry out a complete study, will propose the appropriate means,

and will bring to bear the necessary human resources in order to help it as soon as possible reassume its ordinary governance.

18 The General Chapter approves the work done by the Commission on Initial Formation, namely the Supplement to the *Ratio Institutionis*, and makes the recommendation to the next General Council to make a complete revision of the *Ratio Institutionis*. In this project, an interdisciplinary group of experts (e.g., Spirituality, Augustinian Theology, Sociology, Psychology) should work together. This revision should be completed in such a way, if possible, so that it can be presented to the Intermediate General Chapter of 2016.

19 The Institute of Augustinian Spirituality, in coordination with the different regions of the Order, will program its activities (courses of Augustinian and spiritual renewal), as an instrument of ongoing formation to serve the entire Augustinian Family. With this goal, it will periodically organize courses in the diverse geographic areas of the Order, keeping in mind the specific spiritual needs and cultural realities of these areas. It will also continue to organize in Rome and nearby places, the three month courses of spirituality in diverse languages. Major superiors are invited to effectively collaborate with the Institute of Augustinian Spirituality encouraging participation in favor of the development of its goals.

20 That the Prior General and his Council promote, animate, encourage, and accompany the Vicariates of Perú (Apurimac, Chulucanas, Iquitos) in their desire to walk together toward the establishment of a new Augustinian Province in Perú.

21 In order to promote greater financial transparency and a greater communion of goods, the International Commission on Finance of the Order will study the economic situation of all Circumscriptions with the aim of proposing to the Intermediate General Chapter of 2016 effective means of arriving at an equitable distribution of resources within the Order.

22 In light of the reality of abundant vocations in some countries without financial resources to accept them all, and also in light of the financial resources available in countries with few vocations, we call upon the General Council to coordinate the transfer of resources to enable more candidates to be accepted into and trained in the Order.

1. The criteria and the requirements with which each circumscription is able to access these funds are to be defined beforehand.
2. There still have to be established the criteria that need to be applied in the process of selection of the candidates as well as the criteria of formation in order to facilitate the responsibility and the enforcement in this and to avoid dependence or motivations that do not deal with motivations that are not related to a vocation.

23 In order to create a more universal mentality in our Order, which facilitates a greater availability of brothers, this Chapter proposes:

1. That the plans of formation of each Circumscription include that those in formation will spend some time in an experience in another Circumscription.

2. During initial formation there should be the study and practice of a second language.

24 The General Chapter encourages the Prior General and his Council to value and promote the creation of international communities especially those responsible for projects of new evangelization in dialogue with contemporary culture. These communities are to be formed from members of various Circumscriptions in order to be a prophetic sign in a multicultural world and these communities should have clear goals.

25 Each Circumscription will identify communities that will offer hospitality to young people to share in our life as a means of developing a culture of vocations.

26 The General Chapter encourages that our mission continue to be shared with the laity in our ministries, e.g., parishes, schools, vocation ministry, administration, and missions.

27 Recognizing the desire of Various Circumscriptions to send candidates to academic centers of particular importance, the General Chapter acknowledges the availability of the Italian Province to host in their communities, particularly those of Rome, Student Priests/Solemnly Professed Brothers of other Circumscriptions for the time necessary to complete their studies. (licentiate, doctorate). It proposes that such an opportunity be offered by other Circumscriptions also. An understanding should be drawn up between the Major Superiors involved.

28 That the General Council will develop a program to prepare the Friars of emerging Circumscriptions in the areas of formation, administration, finance and apostolate.

29 In order to improve and facilitate communication around the Order and with the goal of highlighting our Augustinian Mission and Identity as well as new and innovative projects, the Prior General and his Council will work to strengthen the Communications Office in the Curia, which also will be staffed by professionals. This office should also try to see that the web page of the Order should be translated into other languages such as French and Portuguese.

30 The General Chapter requests that Major Superiors, before beginning a process of closing a house of the Order, communicate with the Prior General about such a plan in order to investigate the possibility of another Circumscription with available Friars who could assume responsibility for this house.

31 The General Chapter approves the *Operational Handbook of the General Curia* as a working document.

32 The General Chapter approves the *Manual for Justice and Peace*.

**ADDRESS OF THE PRIOR GENERAL,
ALEJANDRO MORAL ANTÓN,
TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER:
MY OWN EVANGELICAL,
ECCLESIAL AND AUGUSTINIAN REFLECTION**

I want to take a few minutes of reflection with you about the program for the next six years that the Chapter has been laying out, together with my own feelings about it and about how it might best be put into action.

Before I do that, however, I want to thank the outgoing Council for its service to the Order. Firstly, Fr. Robert Prevost who has served during 12 years in a tireless and committed way. I could speak for a long time about you, Robert, and I am certain that it would all be positive. It really isn't enough to say "Thank You," even though you do realize that this comes from the heart. These 12 years at your side, together with all those brothers with whom I have shared community life, have been very happy. Thank you for the trust which you placed in me from the outset; for the support; for the understanding, especially when my parents needed me. Thank you for your patience and please accept my apologies for the times when, perhaps, I did not live up to what you were asking of me or to what the brothers needed from me. May the Lord continue to bless you always, and may his Spirit continue to guide you through life.

Thanks are due also to you, dear Michael Di Gregorio. Thank you all: Franz Klein, Rommel Par, Mi -

guel Angel Keller, Martin Micallef and Miguel Angel Martin for your time and effort dedicated to the service of the brothers. I could write many positive things about each of you that would illustrate your commitment and spirit of service. Of all of you I have, and will always have, great memories of special times lived by your side.

Thanks also to Giancarlo Ceriotti who illness has not allowed to be present here today. Thanks to Luciano de Michieli, to Fernando Zarazua and to Enrique Catalan. I ask God to bless your service as Priors Provincial of your respective Provinces.

Thanks to Fr. Matthias Hecht for his service as Bursar during this last year; to the Postulator, Fr. Josef Sciberras (also to the previous one, Fr. Fernando Rojo) and to the Archivist, Fr. Luis Marin.

As I said to you on my first day of service as Prior General, in our prayer on the morning that we began our first capitular session: I want the following phrase from the Gospel of Luke to be very clear in our hearts and to guide our mission:

“BE COMPASSIONATE AS YOUR FATHER IS
COMPASSIONATE” (Lk 6:30)

Fr. Adolfo Nicolas (ex General of the Jesuits), in the reflection he shared with the Chapter Fathers, presented 8 challenges to us. I want to focus on the first. He said: “You must recover the great challenges of humanity”. And he added: “As religious we must ask ourselves: ‘how can we lessen the suffering of humanity?’. Jesus goes through the world doing precisely that: curing, listening. There are no religious challenges. We are religious, and for this reason we draw close to humanity from our being religious. The challenges of humanity are our challenges, just as they were for Christ”... And he concluded this point by

saying: “We have to recover the old tradition of religious orders and the reason they arose which was to work for humanity.”

For our Order, as we are seeing during this Chapter, it is important to find our place in society. The authentic place from which to fulfill our mission of evangelization. It is evident that the Church of Jesus cannot live closed in on itself, concerned only for its own problems, thinking only of its own concerns. The same is true of the Order of Saint Augustine. It has to be in the world, but not in just any old way. If we want to be faithful to Jesus and if we allow ourselves to be inspired by the “Mercy Principle”, the Church, and the Order, must be in a very specific place: there where there is suffering; where there are victims; women, beaten and terrorized by their partners; immigrants without documentation; those who cannot find a place in either society or in the hearts of others. To say it in just one word, we must be hospital bed, with those who have been wounded.

From its very beginning, in the Church there have been many men and women who have served the poor and the needy, trying to ease their pain and to answer the needs of those who had little to hope for from a society that was poorly organized and which had hardly any social services... Now, today, the activity of Christians is immense, both in mission countries and among ourselves, whether in ecclesial institutions or in organizations and forums of other types. These are the compassionate face of the Church – the very best that we, as Christians, have to offer.

But it’s not enough. We have to work so that the Church and the Order as such will be configured, in their totality, by the Mercy Principle. The Church and the Order should be noted for being the places where

the freest, most daring, and most intense reaction to suffering in the world can be found. The most sensitive and the most committed attitude facing all of the physical, moral and spiritual hurts of the men and women of today.

There will be many other things to be done, but, if we don't have structures, as religious and as Order, for compassion, everything we do will be irrelevant and allowing our mission of introducing compassion in the world to be misdirected could even be dangerous. Compassion is the only thing that can make the Church of today, and the Order, more human and more credible.

What might it mean today in our culture for the Magisterium to say something about sex, homosexuality, the family, women, or many other problems of life, if it is said without compassion for those who suffer? What is the point of an academic theology if it doesn't awaken us from indifference and doesn't introduce into the Church and into modern culture more compassion? What is the point of insisting on liturgy if the incense and the canticles obstruct our seeing the suffering and hearing the cries of those who suffer? The Church will be credible only if it acts in a way that is moved by compassion for human beings, this is precisely what is most lacking in the modern world.

To live compassion is not something easy neither for the Church nor for the communities in our parishes, nor for the hierarchy, nor for ordinary Christians. It's not easy even for those who think of themselves as "progressive" and not for those who are enclosed in the past. This is what gives rise to the urgency of listening once again to the call: "Be compassionate like your Father".

What is it, definitively, that Jesus wants to introduce into the world? What does it mean for Jesus “to search for the Kingdom of God and its justice?”. I think that we can sum it up in this way. God is, before all else, a mystery of compassion towards his creatures. The decisive thing for human history is now to embrace, introduce and develop this compassion. It is not enough to have a new order of things according to the vision of justice that is held by economic, political, or religious powers, almost always focused on their own interests. We have to speak of justice, certainly, but a justice that is born of compassion and that introduces into the world a new dynamic and a new direction. Compassion directs it and pushes it towards a life that is more dignified for those who are last. This is the first task of the followers of Jesus today and always. This is what it means to embrace the kingdom of God: to set peoples, cultures, politics, and religions looking for the dignity of those who are last. Yes, distracted by other questions or interests, the Church forgets it. To the same degree it drifts away from its Lord.

I conclude by affirming that “we run the risk of perishing as an Order if we do not take the theme of following the poor Christ and the option for the poor, seriously.

But, “be compassionate as your Father is”, can only be achieved by us if we know how to be on our own with him, if we enter into dialogue with him, if we “soak” ourselves in him, in his passion for his children. We have to feel the ANXIETY OF ALWAYS GOING IN SEARCH OF GOD, the desire to find ourselves with him. The interior life is the only way to meet God and to give him as nourishment to our neighbor.

I also want to recall the importance of our community life and of true communion. I recall the words

of Pope Francis when he spoke to us and spoke of the “restlessness of love” in the mass of inauguration of our Chapter. How does the restlessness of love sit with us? Do we believe in the love of God and of others? Do we allow ourselves to be made uneasy by the concrete needs of the brother whom we meet, the brother who is with us? Do we allow ourselves to be made uneasy by his needs or do we remain enclosed in ourselves? What the Pope said was truly sad!: “sometimes you can be in community without really knowing your own brother”.

Two texts as references:

“The greatest among you must be the least, and the one who leads, as one who serves” (Lk 22:25)

“The one who presides over you must not find his happiness in dominating from power but in serving out of charity” (Rule 46)

A) Any authority, even that of the Prior General must always be exercised as a service of love:

- * Service of God, beginning and end of everything, revealed in Christ who calls us by name to a personal following of him.
- * Service of the Church, our Mother, with a total availability to her suggestions and her needs.
- * Service to the Order en every and each one of its members so that we can bring to fulfillment the vocation to which we have been called.

B) This is not a service that can be realized in isolation but in fraternity that strives for communion. In fact, Augustinian religious life can only be understood and lived from the perspective of the

union of minds and hearts journeying towards God. For this reason:

- * The importance of unceasing prayer for the Prior General and for the Government of the Order.
- * The importance of collaboration, dialogue and participation.
- * The importance of being open to the new and often surprising promptings of the Spirit.

C) My program will be the one indicated by the General Chapter

Gathered, as is indicated by the Constitutions, to achieve the common good of the brothers (Const. 408). The decisions of the Chapter, just like your rich contributions in the groups and in the Chapter Hall, mark our path for the next six years and offer a precious material for reflection and analysis. Taking account of all this I want to indicate ten aspects to which I hope to dedicate particular attention:

1. To prioritize the religious dimension our life, strengthening the prayerful dimension and cultivating our spirituality. In this I will be counting on the recently created Spirituality Institute which will be a regional service as indicated by the Chapter.
2. To promote community life in the Order in all its dimensions, stimulating initiatives that strengthen it and helping local superiors in this crucial task. To achieve this we will look for help from the various circumscriptions, especially in terms of personnel and financial

resources. I want them to be involved in the carrying out of the chapter program. This is why we will develop the chapter program in the sessions of the General Council (in the meetings from October to December). The Council's program will be fleshed out by the commissions and secretariats of the Order (from January to March 214) and will be sent to the Major Superiors of the circumscriptions to be studied with their respective councils (April to the middle of May). Finally, all of the Major Superiors, together with the General Council will meet in Rome to seek the ways in which the program can be put into practice, with the support and the commitment of everyone in the planned actions.

3. To strengthen the area of vocation work and the care of the vocation of each one which must be lived in a coherent and joyful way so as to offer a credible option to the world of today. Do we want to increase the number and quality of vocations? Let us live poverty in the way that the Constitutions describe when they say that: "We give to Christ what we give to the poor and what we deny to the poor we deny to Christ", and that "we have to offer a coherent and prophetic witness of the preferential option for the poor, imitating Christ in this way" (Const. 73).
4. To care for the formation of the members of the Order, initial and permanent, taking account of our Augustinian roots and the particular circumstances of time, location and culture.

5. To respond from the Gospel to the needs and challenges of the modern world in the struggle against unjust and in solidarity and the promotion of peace, just as we have said at the beginning of these pages.
6. To revise economic structures, strengthening the centralization of our financial matters and making the most of our resources and transparency. We will seek a real and transparent economic arrangement with the communities and circumscriptions of the Order.
7. To promote in a committed way studies and cultural life in the Order, giving special attention to the Patristic Institute and to the other centers of theological study: Villanova, Valladolid, Bogota...
8. To continue our preoccupation for the religious of the contemplative life in our Order. In this context we will not only promote future meetings of the sisters, shared vocational projects where possible and also spiritual support, but we will also try to achieve the renewal of the Constitutions and the revision of some forms of life, always in conjunction with the Presidents of the Federations and the Superiors of the monasteries.
9. To continue supporting the lay Augustinian movement with special attention to the youth, in such a way that structures of lay representation will be strengthened and to do the same with Augustinian formation and of its members.
10. To strengthen communication in such a way that the interexchange of information will be facilitated.

D) I would like us to open ourselves as Order to a future of hope because there are many signs of life. I invite you to:

- * To discern what God wants of each one of us as Augustinians and in a community manner as Order.
- * To welcome the prophetic dimension there where it is awakened by the Spirit.
- * To renew what is necessary to life our charism with strength and joy, just like so many brothers have done down through history.
- * To participate, collaborate, and to commit ourselves to what is, without any doubt, the task of all of us.

Fr. Alejandro Moral Antón
Prior General OSA

**GREETING TO THE HOLY FATHER FROM
THE PRIOR GENERAL, ROBERT PREVOST,
MASS FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT AUGUSTINE**

28 August 2013

Holy Father,

It is with great joy that the Order of Saint Augustine—here represented by members of the General Chapter—wishes to express its gratitude to you for your most gracious and generous decision to grant our request to accompany us in this celebration of the beginning of the work of our Chapter. You give us today the splendid opportunity to hear your word to us, your message, during this time of great importance in the life of the Order.

Today, the Solemnity of our father Saint Augustine, in this basilica dedicated to his memory and where the remains of his mother, Saint Monica, are venerated, is a time and a place particularly significant for this encounter. If Saint Augustine is our father, our “spiritual founder”, the Church then is our “true mother and teacher”, as wrote Jordan of Saxony, one of the first Augustinian chroniclers. Our institution and our way of life, in fact, share with the other mendicant Orders the same purpose, and sink our roots in the same historical period, but with an important difference: the historic institution of the Order of Saint

Augustine is the fruit of a decision of your predecessors, Pope Innocent IV and Pope Alexander IV, who, in the course of the 13th century, united into one single mendicant Order very many eremitical communities and congregations which followed the Rule of Saint Augustine. The care manifested by the Apostolic See toward the Order from the time of its birth has marked in a specific way the spiritual life, the theological thought, the action of the Augustinians, who feel themselves always pledged in a special way to the service of the universal Church. From this relationship has come also the origin of the devotion and fidelity of the Order to the Supreme Pontiffs. (Constitutions, n. 3).

For this inauguration of the General Chapter we have wished that also the entire reality of the greater Augustinian family would be represented. Therefore, beyond the Chapter members of all of the Augustinian circumscriptions of the world and their collaborators, there are also today among us some of the communities close by us, also some of the cloistered sisters, and women religious of the many congregations connected to the Order and also some lay people, who are members of diverse fraternities. Their presence reminds us constantly of the very many gifts and charisms that God gives to his people, and their presence adds a precious element to this celebration. Together with you, Holy Father, we are happy to remember that as Saint Augustine teaches us, we are all members of the Church and servants of God, and if we love Christ, how can we not *not* love the Church, in all of its components and in all of its beauty, because the Church truly is the “Christus Totus”, the Body of the Lord, who has loved us and given his very self for us.

Holy Father, a few days ago, when we knew that you would be present with us in this celebration, someone asked me: “What do you want the Pope to say to the General Chapter?” Truly this made me think, and I am not sure of the answer. But I found in one of the sermons of Saint Augustine words that might serve as an answer. Augustine reminds us of the importance of journeying together as one, together with all of the Church:

“if because of the companions on the journey there is a motive for reciprocal joy, together on the way, what joy will we not have in the homecoming! Along this journey the witnesses (*martyres*) have always struggled and advanced in the struggle, in the going forward they have never stopped. In fact, in as much as they love, they always go forward...and the way that we travel desires fellow travelers. There are three categories of men that are disliked: the one who stops going forward, the one who turns back, and the one who goes astray. With the help of the Lord, our going forward may our going forward be protected and defended against these three negative categories. Now, in reality, making this way together, one goes more slowly, another speeds up, nevertheless they all go forward together.” (*Sermo 306B*)

Holy Father, your presence with us today will help us renew our commitment to go forward with dedication, with love, and it will help to reinforce our conviction to walk always together and together with all of the Church.

Barely a month has gone by since the celebration of the World Youth Day, at which many of those here

present participated with joy in that event. We wish to thank you, Holy Father, for all that happened in Rio de Janeiro. The enthusiasm of those days is still alive and not just a memory. Our desire is that also today the Lord, through your presence with us, will be able to enlighten our minds and move our hearts, and inspire all of our life, exactly as happened to so many young people in Brazil, so that this celebration and our Chapter may be a propitious time (*kairós*) to respond with greater generosity to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to serve the Church with and great love and with courage, an also to serve our brothers and sisters and every person in our time who has great need. Thank, you, Holy Father, thank you from the bottom of our hearts for this great gift that you have wished to give to the spiritual family of Augustine!

**MASS FOR THE BEGINNING
OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE ORDER OF SAINT AUGUSTINE
HOMILY OF HOLY FATHER POPE FRANCIS**

Basilica of St. Augustine in Campo Marzio,
Rome Wednesday, 28 August 2013

“You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (*Confessions*, 1, 1, 1). With these famous words St Augustine addresses God in his *Confessions*, and these words sum up his whole life.

“Restlessness”: this word makes an impression on me and sets me thinking. I would like to start with a question: what fundamental restlessness did Augustine live in his life? Or perhaps I should say: what kinds of restlessness does this great and holy man ask us to awaken and to keep alive in our own existence? I am proposing three kinds: the restlessness of spiritual seeking, the restlessness of the encounter with God, the restlessness of love.

1. The first: the restlessness of spiritual seeking. Augustine lived an experience that is fairly common today: common enough among today’s young people. He was raised in the Christian faith by his mother Monica, even though he did not receive Baptism. However, as he grew up he fell away from the faith, failing to find the answer to his questions, to his heart’s desires, and was attracted by other proposals. He then

joined a group of Manichaeans, devoted himself diligently to his studies, did not give up carefree pleasures, the spectacles of his time and deep friendships. He experienced intense love and had a brilliant career as a teacher of rhetoric that even took him to the imperial court in Milan. Augustine was a man who had “made it”, he had everything. Nevertheless, his heart still yearned for life’s deep meaning; his heart had not been overcome by sleep. I would say it had not been anaesthetized by success, by things or by power. Augustine did not withdraw into himself, he did not settle down, he continued his quest for the truth, for the meaning of life. He continued to seek God’s face. Of course he made mistakes, he took wrong turns, he sinned, he was a sinner. Yet he retained the restlessness of spiritual seeking. In this way he discovered that God was waiting for him, indeed, that he had never ceased to be the first to seek him. I would like to tell those who feel indifferent to God, to faith, and those who are far from God or who have distanced themselves from him, that we too, with our “distancing” and our “abandonment” of God, that may seem insignificant but are so numerous in our daily life: look into the depths of your heart, look into your own inner depths and ask yourself: do you have a heart that desires something great, or a heart that has been lulled to sleep by things? Has your heart preserved the restlessness of seeking or have you let it be suffocated by things that end by hardening it? God awaits you, he seeks you; how do you respond to him? Are you aware of the situation of your soul? Or have you nodded off? Do you believe God is waiting for you or does this truth consist only of “words”?

2. In Augustine it was this very restlessness in his heart which brought him to a personal encounter with

Christ, brought him to understand that the remote God he was seeking was the God who is close to every human being, the God close to our heart, who was “more inward than my innermost self” (cf. *ibid.* III, 6, 11). However even in the discovery of and encounter with God, Augustine did not stop, he did not give up, he did not withdraw into himself like those who have already arrived, but continued his search. The restlessness of seeking the truth, of seeking God, became the restlessness to know him ever better and of coming out of himself to make others know him. It was precisely the restlessness of love. He would have liked a peaceful life of study and prayer but God called him to be a Pastor in Hippo, in a difficult period, with a split community and war at the gates. And Augustine let God make him restless, he never tired of proclaiming him, of evangelizing with courage and without fear, he sought to be the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep (cf. Jn 10:14). Indeed, as I like to repeat, he “knew the odour of his sheep”, and went out to search for those that had strayed. Augustine lived as St Paul had instructed Timothy and each one of us: he proclaimed the word, he insisted in season and out of season, he proclaimed the Gospel with a magnanimous heart, with a great heart (cf. 2 Tim 4:2), that of a Pastor who is anxious about his sheep. Augustine’s treasure is this very attitude: always going towards God, always going out towards the flock.... He was a man constantly stretched between these poles; never “privatizing” love... always journeying on! Always be on the way, the Father said. As for you, always be restless!

And this is the peace of restlessness. We may ask ourselves: am I anxious for God, anxious to proclaim him, to make him known? Or do I allow that spiritual worldliness to attract me which impels people to do

everything for love of themselves? We consecrated people think of our personal interests, of the functionality of our works, of our careers. Eh! We can think of so many things.... Have I, so to speak, “made myself ‘comfy’” in my Christian life, in my priestly life, in my religious life, and also in my community life? Or do I retain the force of restlessness for God, for his Word that makes me “step out” of myself towards others?

3. And let us come to the last kind of restlessness, the anxiety of love. Here I cannot but look at the mother: this Monica! How many tears did that holy woman shed for her son’s conversion! And today too how many mothers shed tears so that their children will return to Christ! Do not lose hope in God’s grace! In the *Confessions* we read this sentence that a bishop said to St Monica who was asking him to help her son find the road to faith: “it is not possible that the son of so many tears should perish” (III, 12, 21). After his conversion Augustine himself, addressing God, wrote: “my mother, your faithful one, wept before you on my behalf more than mothers are wont to weep the bodily death of their children” (*ibid.*, III, 11, 19). A restless woman, this woman who at the end of her life said these beautiful words: “*cumulatius hoc mihi Deus praestitit!*” (*ibid.*, IX, 10, 26). God lavishly rewarded her tearful request! And Augustine was Monica’s heir, from her he received the seed of restlessness. This, then, is the restlessness of love: ceaselessly seeking the good of the other, of the beloved, without ever stopping and with the intensity that leads even to tears. Then I think of Jesus weeping at the tomb of his friend Lazarus; of Peter who, after denying Jesus, encounters his gaze full of mercy and love, weeps bitterly, and of the father who waits on the terrace for his son’s return

and when he spies him still far off runs to meet him; the Virgin Mary comes to mind lovingly following her Son Jesus even to the Cross. Do we feel the restlessness of love? Do we believe in love for God and for others? Or are we unconcerned by this? Not in an abstract manner, not only in words, but as a real brother to those we come across, the brother who is beside us! Are we moved by their needs or do we remain closed in on ourselves, in our communities which are often “handy communities” for us? At times we can live in a building without knowing our next door neighbour; or we can be in a community without really knowing our own confreres: I think sorrowfully of the consecrated people who are infertile “old bachelors”. The restlessness of love is always an incentive to go towards the other, without waiting for the other to manifest his need. The restlessness of love gives us the gift of pastoral fecundity, and we must ask ourselves, each one of us: is my spiritual fecundity healthy, is my apostolate fertile?

Let us ask the Lord for you, dear Augustinians who are beginning your General Chapter, and for all of us, that he keep in our hearts the spiritual restlessness that prompts us to seek him always, the restlessness to proclaim him courageously, the restlessness of love for every brother and sister. So be it.

**ADDRESS OF MICHAEL DIGREGORIO,
VICAR GENERAL, TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER**

August 29, 2013

Dear Brothers,

I add to the words of greeting already expressed yesterday and today, my own warm expression of welcome to each of you, to Rome and to this Chapter which, our Constitutions remind us, is the “chief event in the life of the Order” (Const. 408). As President *pro tempore* of this gathering it is a great privilege for me to address you, the international leadership of our Order and the representatives of our friars spread throughout the world.

1. We are gathered here to celebrate our 184th General Chapter, just as our confreres have done at fixed intervals throughout more than 750 years of our history. We are 90 capitulars who have come here from 32 countries, representing 50 circumscriptions and 2,663 friars, to discuss the state of the Order, to address timely questions and meet new challenges, to deliberate our future, and to choose our leadership for the next six years. The tasks that await our attention are multiple and serious, and the work that we will do in these next weeks will have consequences—some of them, perhaps, far-reaching ones—for our own lives, for those of our brothers and sisters, as well as for the people to whom we minister in the Church.

We gather during the Year of Faith proclaimed by Pope Benedict, and we do so precisely as men of faith, conscious that what binds us together and will inform our discussions and decisions in this Chapter, are the values and principles of our faith tradition as expressed in the Gospel which guides our lives, as well as in the Augustinian spirituality and charism which give it shape. Fittingly, the first act of the Chapter was to celebrate our faith at the Lord's table yesterday on the Solemn Feast of our Holy Father, under the generous leadership of Pope Francis, and to call upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which we have done again this morning and will continue to do each day, in the conscious desire and humble petition that what we do will truly be God's own work.

2. The great privilege we experienced yesterday of having Pope Francis lead our celebration is a reminder and a clear sign that what we are about in these weeks is not some activity we carry out behind closed doors because it concerns only the inner life of the Order. This Chapter, as all General Chapters throughout our history, has a context, and that context for us is the Church and society of the 21st Century. The Order does not live and function for itself alone, as though in a vacuum, but rather does so within the Church and at the service of the Church, and for the good of humanity: to proclaim, by the witness of our fraternal life and the many works of our circumscriptions and their members, the Gospel we have received from Jesus.

3. The Church today faces many and great challenges: among them, a crisis of belief on the part of large numbers of its members, with the consequent estrangement of millions from the practice of the faith

they grew up with; scandals involving religious and clergy and laity alike; a rejection of many traditional moral values; and the widespread secularization of much that was once considered sacred. Similarly, there are challenges and difficulties confronting civil society in many of the countries where we live and carry out our ministry: an economic crisis; open conflict between nations and peoples; multiple forms of social injustice; the constant threat of terrorism; and the endless menace of ecological disaster, to name just a few. Our Order is touched in some way by each of these. Indeed, in our various ministries we confront them, and in many places we directly seek to assist people who are burdened by them. Our Constitutions call our attention to the fact that our work at this Chapter is “for the common good and progress of the Order,” (not only) “that the spiritual life of the friars may be renewed,” (but also that) “our apostolate (be) better accommodated to the needs of the Church and the exigencies of the times” (Const. 434).

This same context of Church and society in which we gather, however, is also graced in many ways, and among them by the witness of individuals and the occurrence of events in the Church and in the Order that are significant and inspirational, and therefore which invite our attention and reflection. These people and these events can be bearers of encouragement and motivation for us in our deliberations, discussions and decisions. I would like to single out three of them.

4. This past February 10th, Father Theodore Tack, as we all know, passed away in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Father Tack had been elected 93rd Prior General of the Order in 1971, just three years after the special Chapter of Villanova in 1968, whose principal task was

the re-writing of the Order's Constitutions following the Second Vatican Council. The twelve years of Father Tack's two terms of office, which ended exactly 30 years ago in 1983, were dedicated largely to increasing among the members of the Order a clear awareness and deep appreciation for those Constitutions and even more so for the Augustinian spirituality and identity which lay at their foundation. To this end Father Tack travelled the Augustinian world as no other Prior General had done previously. His manner was personable and sincere, his tone enthusiastic, his message life-giving, even if, at times, provocative and prophetic. (It took some of us many years, for example, to appreciate his bold statement that "the community in itself ... is indeed our primary apostolate"). I would describe the legacy of Father Tack to the Order that he loved and served so diligently and so well, in large part, as his own spirit of gratitude and reverence for the distinct gift which the Augustinian charism brings to the Church.

The day immediately following Father Tack's passing, February 11th, the Church and the world received the startling news that Pope Benedict XVI would, in his own words, 'renounce the ministry of Bishop of Rome'. Self-awareness, coupled with sensitivity to the realities of his duties and the needs of the Church, viewed with an attitude of deep and constant prayer, led him to the obviously difficult conclusion that there was need for change. In the days and weeks that followed, various opinions and interpretations of the pope's pronouncement were put forward. Among these was the widely held opinion, offered by critics and fans alike, that Benedict's decision was, above all, an act of great courage taken, not for some personal gain, but in the best interest of the Church.

Approximately one month later, on March 13th, Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected to succeed Pope Benedict as the 266th Bishop of Rome. From the very first public moments of his papacy, as he appeared at the balcony of Saint Peter's Basilica, he signaled that the style of leadership he was to give the Church would be uniquely his own. From the announcement of his chosen name, to his request for the silent prayers of the people listening to him in the piazza and in front of TV sets all over the world, the image of his bowed head was clear. Simplicity and humility were the words widely spoken by observers then, and since, to describe Pope Francis and the first months of his Petrine Ministry.

Gratitude, reverence, and enthusiasm for the Augustinian charism; courage in deciding a path for the greater good of all; simplicity and humility in the exercise of leadership: these, my brothers, are three themes which events of the early months of this year 2013 suggest to us. They are images and impressions offered, perhaps unconsciously, by three men of faith, who were chosen to be servants of the communities entrusted to their care. They are values and attitudes, approaches and standards which we who are gathered here will do well to carry in our minds, in our hearts, and in our conversations, during our time together.

5. The immediate past Ordinary General Chapter of 2007, of which a fair number of us were members, stated that *"as a result of serious reflection on this topic in recent decades, the Order has arrived at a consensus about Augustinian identity..."* (Document of the Ordinary General Chapter 2007, 1.2). Our revised Constitutions, approved at that same Chapter, have defined and described that identity, and in its various numbers, have offered the members of the

Order, a structure and norms to live out that identity. It falls to us now gathered here, through the decisions we will make, as it will to others in years to come for their time, to insure that we faithfully and authentically conform to the image we have sketched for ourselves, and to the spirituality which we profess. That is always the challenge before us in our Chapters and in the lived reality of our everyday life: to make the choices that will enable us to become more and more who we say we are; to make concrete the ideals to which we aspire; to give credence to what, by our profession, we have freely chosen. But it is precisely here, brothers, we know, that we find ourselves severely tested, for the practical consequences that must flow as necessary decisions from lofty and treasured ideals are often costly and inconvenient, and sometimes unpopular. Much falls on us who have been called to this Chapter, to pave the way, precisely by a courageous and humble exercise of leadership, with love and enthusiasm for our charism and for the greater common good of the Order.

6. One of the principal topics before us during these weeks will be the question of the Unity of the Order with its many implications, as expressed in the proposed Chapter Document that we will consider. The topic of Unity is, in the popular idiom of people in the United States, as universally acceptable and agreeable as “motherhood and apple pie”, that is, everyone speaks glowingly in its favor, at least in the abstract. But we do not live in the abstract. We live in the altogether complex reality of everyday life where differences, variety, independence, autonomy, self-determination and individualism reign as highly prized values. To what extent can the three principles I mentioned a moment ago - reverence and enthusiasm for the Augustinian

charism, joined with sufficient courage to make wise choices, and a humble exercise of the leadership we are here called to carry out, - enable us to draw more tightly the links between the ideal and the real for the greater good of the Order and the Church! How far are we able to go in making bold decisions - even if, at times, uncomfortable and demanding ones - for the sake of the common good of our circumscriptions and the Order as a whole, as well as the needs of the Church in conformity with our particular charism!

7. Many opportunities are before us in this Chapter to act with faith and courage, out of love for the Order and the Church, with confidence in Jesus in whom we live and move and have our being, and with a spirit of simplicity and humility. During these proceedings we will consider the responses to the proposed Chapter Document which were sent to the General Council by individual friars and communities since the time of the Intermediate Chapter 2010. Some of these are of utmost importance, and we cannot ignore them except to the detriment of the Order and of the Church. I would like to single out two among the many, not only because of their urgency but because they are themes which, while raised repeatedly in recent General Chapters, may not have yet been adequately addressed everywhere:

The first theme concerns the area of vocation promotion and formation, and asks whether as an Order, in which we bear responsibility and accountability to one another, as well as to God and the Church, we are satisfied that a vigorous and well-conceived approach to vocation promotion exists in all of our circum-

scriptions. Are we actively encouraging a culture of vocation promotion amongst our membership? Is the invitation to youth to consider our way of life as a realistic option a question that we continue to ask? Is the promotion of Augustinian life among youth a priority which is numbered among our many activities and which is demonstrable in the dedication of friars and material resources?

Related to this question is that which concerns the selection and preparation of formators. The General Chapter of 2007 asked the General Council to prepare a course for formators, which was conducted via the internet over a 12 month period and concluded with a six-day gathering in Cascia. A sizable number of formators participated, many of whom were quite young and inexperienced, and who, conscious of their limitations, made a fervent plea for additional training. Are we prepared to do more to equip those we ask to do the important and challenging work of accompanying our candidates and young friars in formation with the resources they need and deserve? Are we willing to endorse even greater inter-circumscriptional collaboration for the enrichment of our formation programs and the advantage of our formators and formation students at every level? In these three areas of vocation promotion, preparation of formators and collaboration in formation programs, lies our hope as an Order for the future.

The second item concerns the ever-challenging reality of basic requirements needed for healthy and attractive religious communities, large enough to guarantee a viable experience of Augustinian common

life, most especially where the burdens of ministry are most stressful and the needs of our friars, therefore, greater. While this, too, is a question that has great implications for our ability to attract new members and therefore to look to the future with realistic expectations, it has also immediate consequences for the well-being and effectiveness of our present membership. Allied to this issue, of course, is that of the sustainability of communities and apostolates with the diminishing membership of many circumscriptions. Here, perhaps, the burden of leadership is most keenly felt! But it is also where prophetic leadership is most urgently needed. Recently, the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, speaking to members of the International Union of Superiors General of Women Religious here in Rome suggested that when there is a question of choosing, because of diminishing numbers of religious, between living the charism of a religious institute and doing the works of the institute, “we must choose charisms and let go of works,” (Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, May, 2013) otherwise the charism itself will disappear. When, as in our case, integral to the charism of the Order is “life in common” (Const. 6), the multiplicity of communities of two or even three friars must be a real concern.

8. Brothers, we are living at a moment in Church history in which a popular and important theme and a stimulus for many in the Church is ‘The New Evangelization’. The term itself, we know, is debated. It holds various meanings and evokes divergent opinions. But it cannot help but suggest to us Augustinians, as it does to others with whom we share a common history, our very origins as a religious community. It was, in

large part, for the work of evangelization that the Order as such came into existence as a participant in the emerging Mendicant Movement. Evangelization was the banner under which religious communities of our stripe rallied forces to proclaim the Gospel in new ways, to meet new social and religious needs. The energy and enthusiasm with which our forefathers engaged in this initiative was highly contagious. It captured the imagination and the hearts of many people resulting not only in a great work on behalf of the Gospel, but in great numbers of new vocations to religious life. We need to ask ourselves how we find our local communities, our circumscriptions, and indeed the whole Order, engaged in the New Evangelization today. Can this effort on the part of the universal Church not be for us also an invitation and opportunity to rediscover in our day, in our community life, and in our ministries, new incentive and a valuable means of renewal? Can we find the courage to admit that some established and comfortable ways of operating, as well as some of our structures and works, may no longer address the real needs of people of today, and with the faith and conviction demonstrated by our forebears centuries ago who left the familiar surroundings of their hermitages in the wilderness to engage in a great work for the revitalization of the Church in towns and cities, not inspire us in a similar way today!

9. Something very positive is happening in the Church presently, brothers. Despite the great challenges she faces in many areas, there is felt among many, and especially among many young people, a spirit of enthusiasm and vitality in living the Gospel and proclaiming it to the world. Witness the number of novices, seminarians, religious in initial formation, and

youth engaged in vocational discernment, who gathered here in Rome this past July from many countries to celebrate the Year of Faith. Witness the more than 600 young people who participated in the Augustinian Youth Encounter in Sao Paulo and the millions who traveled to Rio de Janeiro for World Youth Day just weeks ago. Witness the young friars and candidates in some of our own circumscriptions who generously, and notwithstanding the many attractive alternatives offered them by society, continue to opt for a radical following of Christ, together with us, in service to the Church.

10. Let us embark on the work of this Chapter, grateful for our personal vocation and the vocation of our brothers, so many of whom day after day recommit themselves to this way of life we have professed, and who energetically preach the Gospel in word and deed. Let us undertake the tasks that are before us, with a spirit of reverence and thanksgiving for the many good things our Order has done and continues to do. Let us pray for the courage to make the choices that will enable us to become more and more who we say we are; to make concrete the ideals to which we aspire; to give credence to what, by our profession, we have freely chosen and still proudly embrace.

Michael DiGregorio
Vicar General

**HOMILY OF THE PRIOR GENERAL,
ALEJANDRO MORAL ANTÓN,
AT THE EUCHARIST CLOSING
THE GENERAL CHAPTER**

14 September 2013

Perhaps one of the most instinctive experiences of human being or every living thing is to flee from pain, to run away from hostile circumstances. A revolutionary element of the life of the Kingdom is precisely the opposite movement, rather than to escape, to embrace the cross. It is the unexpected movement of he who is bitten by the snake looks up to the serpent to be healed.

The Son of Man lifted up on the Cross is perhaps the highest expression of the dimension of weakness and frailty of human life; a life marked by hatred, violence, famine, indifference, loneliness,... Realities which sometimes come to subdue human being totally to the extent of taking away his dignity. To contemplate the Cross is to contemplate the sons of men who are crucified: sexually exploited women, children forcefully conscripted in wars, to see families evicted from their homes, to watch refugee camps, and to contemplate lifeless bodies of those who encounter death while trying to enter illegally into the first world. Perhaps closer to our circle, the Cross takes the form of unemployment, broken families or abuses of power between those who have the sacred task of ensuring the growth of infants. All these are

manifestations of this amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, that is building up a city in which there is no place for God because there is no home for human being. There is no greater contempt for God than to see him hung on the Cross, there is no greater contempt for the Son of Man.

Those who look up ... will be healed. The expression of the book of Numbers presents the movement almost unnatural to turn our gaze at the Cross in order to find health in it for this inhuman city, this world, perhaps inhospitable, but that is the world which God has chosen. He who ascends into heaven is he who came down from heaven, he who embraces the Cross is he who came down from heaven. It is truly unnatural, almost an ontological aberration for a God to embrace human suffering. To look at the Cross is to recognise this impulse of the innermost being of God that leads him to embrace all that is human including his deforming self-love.

However to look is not enough to heal, you have to know how to gaze well. Pope Francis said to the youths in Rio that one can look at the Cross like Pilate did, keeping distance, considering it something strange, something that is not responsible. This gaze does not heal. Also one can look at the Cross with the gaze of Simon of Cyrene, carrying the crosses of others be it through generosity or social pressure, giving our gifts to others, our time, our energy, our surplus and including what we ourselves need. This gaze lightens the crosses that afflict our brothers and helps to create a world suitable for all.

Still, I think there is a more deeper reality in the mystery of the Son of Man crucified like any other son of men. There is a third way of looking at the Crucified. The gaze of the mother, who recognises the fruit of her own entrails nailed to the wood, flesh of her flesh, body

of her body; a way of looking at the Cross which shows us that this suffering is the suffering of our own body, it is the gaze of he who “suffers with”, the gaze of compassion that makes us recognise he who suffers besides us as we are and moves us to heal them, to accompany them, to console them, to laugh together, to support projects, to avoid hurtful expressions, to avoid easy and scandalous criticisms; finally to live as members of one body.

And this compassion, this identification with the suffering body of humanity is the feeling of Christ, the intention of Christ, who assumes our condition, he puts on our humanity, he becomes Son of Man crucified and so exalts the sons of men. It is the feeling of all a God who reveals a same body with the sons of men crucified and who invites us to learn from him to gaze the same way. One way to gaze the Cross that heals amor sui that poisons us from within is the compassionate look, the gaze of God, the gaze that comes from the inmost of his entrails.

It is a form of gazing deeply present in our Augustinian tradition; the form of gazing the Crucified in Cascia and which pushes to share his sufferings; the way of gazing the Cross in Montefalco, and that plants it in the same heart; the form of gazing it in Genazzano, contagious like the same pest, the way of gazing it in Valencia distributing the wealth among the poor. A compassionate look that in more recent time creates schools in San Diego or Papua, that accompanies prisoners in Huelva or El Paso, which opens dining halls in Prague or in Bologna, that heals the sick in Babadogo, that teaches trading in Jos, and which in all our communities proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.

It is not the solidarity look of an NGO nor the charitable look of a friend or a brother. It is the

compassionate gaze of the Father, the gaze of he who takes care of his own body, who walks through Christ the Son of Man, who becomes the body of the sons of men, in order to come together to be the Body of God.

To ascend to heaven. With this image one could express the most profound desire of human heart, all the desire for peace, Justice, Joy, Goodness, all that seems to have no place in our earthly world. It is the desire to reach that land beyond the desert. The deep desire of our heart that has led us, when we began the Chapter, to move forward, to set sail and get carried away by the wind of the Spirit. That same Spirit propelled us some years or many years ago to follow Christ more closely as a Brother of the Order of St. Augustine.

If at the end of this Chapter you ask me that I indicate from which way to go out of the desert, from where to get to heaven I can only answer you what the Gospel has said: it is only he who has gone to heaven, only he who has crossed the desert, he who “has descended so that in him and with him those who would rise through him were only one individual.” So there is no other way than that which he taught us on the day of profession: to walk through the man Christ through whom we walk in order to reach Christ God.

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