

HOMILY OF THE GENERAL MINISTER TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER OFS

S. Sebastian FLM, 17th November 2021

The collection prayer that opened our celebration **made us ask for the grace** to recognize Christ in the poor and the indigent: Being able to recognize is a gift that comes from God, as St. Francis says in the Testament: *the Lord granted me ...*

We are given everything from Him who is the Supreme Good, all Good: the whole life of Saint Elizabeth was under the sign of the grace, the grace of being able to recognize the gift of God through the poor and the indigent, whom we have the privilege of being able to serve through charity. In this way, we are healed from the selfishness of the world, of which today's liturgy speaks, which takes on the face of our individualism, that is, that certain self-sufficiency or self-satisfaction that can also be found in the charitable works we perform.

Even the invocation in the Gospel - *come blessed by my Father* - tells us that being blessed means receiving a grace, among others also that of being able to recognize Christ in the needy people. This grace is not just generic, but it is given to us as our own charism, a gift for the common good. How many times we do ask ourselves about our identity! And here we are reminded that above all it is a gift we receive. Let's keep it in our mind!

In St. Elizabeth this gift shines like a charism and shows us how "*in order to adequately guide the acts of the various moral virtues, we must also consider to what extent they bring about a dynamism of openness and union towards other people. This dynamism is the charity that God infuses. Otherwise, perhaps we will have only a virtue appearance... St. Bonaventure, with other words, explained that the other virtues, without charity, strictly speaking do not fulfill the commandments 'as God intends them'*" (All Brothers, 91).

God's gift in her has become great for the opening to others, overcoming the natural tendency to close in oneself. And here this young woman lived the heart of her faith. We know that "*In her profound sensitivity Elizabeth saw the contradictions between the professed faith and Christian practice. She could not stand compromises*" (Benedict XVI, Catechesis of 20th October 2010). In her as in our time, it is easy to fall into this gap. Perhaps even more in Elizabeth's Christian society. Today we are "forced" to a truly witnessing and that of charity is at the center.

For that in the Collection we asked:... *grant us too to serve with tireless charity...* We ask ourselves then: how to serve the poor? How to recognize the needy people and the needs today? How to perform a *tireless charity* as male and female Franciscans, in a world absorbed by "dense shadows"? And how to live the gift of our vocation and our witness in our life?

In his homily dated last November 14th Pope Francis said in a bright way: "*This is what we are asked of: to be, among the daily ruins of the world, tireless builders of hope*". Through her evangelical adherence, Elizabeth said with her life that there is hope for the poor of course,

but also for those who believe they are rich in their self-sufficiency. By serving the poor, the hope grows for all, served and being served, all poor in the same way.

This hope is growing because - as we pray after the Communion - again we invoke the grace that we offer ourselves to the Master and Lord who is offering himself to us in the Eucharistic bread, to imitate the example of St. Elizabeth who through the totality of offering herself as a gift to Him was able to become a sister close to the indigent and the poor. It is a hope founded on the charity of Christ who offers himself as a whole to us, so that we learn to donate ourselves to Him in his vicars, the neighbor, especially the little ones and the poor.

The General Chapter that you are celebrating as a Secular Franciscan Order finds the roots of its shared charism in this origin, in order to witness still today in the various situations and contexts of the world the transparency of the Gospel of Jesus, according to the form of life by Francis, Clare and Elizabeth. Regarding this I would like to address some invitations to you:

- Stay passionate about Christ, while we stay passionate about the world, and the people we share our journey, about the poor.
- Love reality, because in it we recognize the traces of the presence and the holy acting by the Spirit of the Lord, who never gives up.
- Listen to the voice of God, with St. Francis of Assisi who "*listened to the voice of God, the voice of the poor, the voice of the sick, the voice of nature. And all of this He has turned it into a lifestyle. I hope that the seed of St. Francis will grow in many hearts*" (Pope Francis).
- Let ourselves be transformed by the presence of the Lord and of the word of God whom we expose ourselves in prayerful listening to: it is here that we can be gradually transformed by the power of the Spirit to become diligent and tireless in charity.

I wish you to be able to walk these paths with confidence, to be builders of hope today, tirelessly and with joy. How much our world, loved by God, and also our family needs it. In the unity between loving God and loving our neighbor we can walk on the same paths, as Elizabeth shows us.

For this I conclude mentioning the words by Benedict XVI in the General Audience of 20th October 2010:

... In the figure of Saint Elizabeth we see how faith and friendship with Christ create a sense of justice, of the equality of all, of the rights of others and how they create love, charity. And from this charity is born hope too, the certainty that we are loved by Christ and that the love of Christ awaits us thereby rendering us capable of imitating Christ and of seeing Christ in the others. Saint Elizabeth invites us to rediscover Christ, to love him, to have faith; and thereby to find true justice and love, as well as the joy that one day we will be immersed in divine love, in the joy of eternity with God.

To the praise of Christ. Amen!