

General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor

Assisi, 21 May, 2015

Acts, 11:1-18

Psalm 22 (23): The Lord is my shepherd

Luke 5:1-11

Introduction to the Eucharist

Beloved brothers,

This morning you once again implore the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide you in seeking the name of the brother he has chosen to be your general Minister for the next six years. You will do so after having thanked our Lord for his Pasch in the Eucharist, mystery of forgiveness, of life and joy, of brotherhood and mercy; through (his Eucharist) Jesus Christ wanted to unite with us his life, his cross and resurrection, as well as his mission, filling us with gratitude, peace and solidarity. (You are) grateful also for the admirable way God's grace and life have enlivened, sanctified and enriched your Order with missionary zeal, especially among the poor. (God has also enlivened, sanctified and enriched your Order) with the love of brothers in the following of Francis throughout your history; especially during the last sessenium.

Homily

To enlighten your search for the brother that God has chosen to be your general Minister, we have recalled in the readings some developments inseparably connected with the choice Our Lord Jesus Christ made of St. Peter, as minister and servant of the whole People of God, composed of the most minor of his brothers and sisters, united to him and to each other by the new covenant in his blood, a covenant which we commemorate and renew.

Our criteria would most likely have led us to choose St. John as the first pope. (He was) the disciple who was most aware of the love of Jesus and who was with Mary at the foot of the cross when Christ died for our salvation. In no way(would we have chosen) the apostle who had scandalized his colleagues, swearing vehemently that he did not belong to the group of the 12, of those who had been chosen to be with the Lord and Master, and who were sent to evangelize. Most likely no conclave would ever have chosen Peter. It would not

have taken into account that his love, tears and repentance were the things that deeply rooted his life in (him who is) the Rock and the Fountain of living water, the true Shepherd of the Community of Jesus's disciples.

As we all know, Peter was a humble disciple. His confession of unworthiness comes from the heart as he knelt before Jesus, after the first miraculous catch. "Depart from me, for I am a sinner" (Lk 5:8). Immediately, Christ gave him the task of being a fearless fisher of humanity. For this task he had to be humble. It was the sorrow of having denied (Jesus) three times that caused him to mourn bitterly. He was then saddened when Jesus questioned him three times about his love, before entrusting his own flock to him. God desires that those he calls to be shepherds in the heart of Christ, know that they are small and insignificant, and that they place nothing in precedence before God's love and God's guidance.

Jesus chose a person who was sincere and generous, (who was) a believer and spontaneous, who knew how to welcome him into his boat and with him sail away from the shore, when it was required of him. Simon abandoned the assurances of having his boat secure on the shore, to acquire the safety of sailing with Jesus. (He) witnessed firsthand the love which by the lakeside encouraged those who had followed (Jesus) there, enflaming their hearts and hopes. Overwhelmed by the growing ties between the Lord and himself and by the awakening of his People, Peter believed Jesus's word; he rowed out into the lake and let down the nets, while his purely human experience strongly advised him against it. God had chosen a modest fisherman, one who was able to be filled with wonder, time and again, by works, wisdom, personality and extreme love of Jesus.

You also seek a general Minister capable of always welcoming Jesus, of moving away from the shore and rowing into the deep, and capable of infecting you, like Francis, with an overwhelming awe and contemplation that awakens in us (the one) who came and comes to meet us, and asks for a place in the boat of our heart and tasks, of our itinerancy and our communities and our prayer, (the one who desires) a place as Lord and Shepherd, but also as a simple brother in the poor and those in need, who share his cross. You ask the Holy Spirit to help you find the name of (the one) whom he has appointed to be an instrument of communion and peace, and (who will) encourage the provincial ministers, custodians and guardians, as well as each of you in these roads of encounter.

We have also heard another telling episode in the life of Peter after Pentecost. It is not always easy to understand or to be available in poverty, without thoughts or prejudices (of our own), to accept and assume the helm strokes with which the Holy Spirit guides the ship of the Church and her communities. We heard it in the first reading. Simon Peter could have remembered what he had heard from the lips of the Master: That the things which defile a person are not those which enter through the mouth, but rather those that come out of the heart. In this way

Christ had declared all foods clean. But, no! The customs of his day, precisely those customs that the Spirit wanted to destroy had more weight in (Simon's) mind. But the Spirit is persistent when seeking to provoke changes and break new ground. And so, the first "Lord Pope", took his first steps among the pagans, resisting initially, he was able to follow the (Spirit's) guidance, and so witness the Pentecost of the Gentiles, opening a new path for the baptism of the centurion Cornelius's family. (He went on) to proclaim and defend in Jerusalem the Spirit's action, as well as his own obedience. He did not act alone, he had taken with him three companions, disciples of Jesus Christ and like him his brothers minor.

A capitular brother rightly spoke on Monday of the inherent relationship to your charism. (This is) not between Franciscan spirituality and the world of markets and finance, the transfers of capital which advise searching for high interest and the acceptance of risks in the securities market. Rather, (it is the relationship) between the spirituality of Francis and his spiritual children, and our relationship with the goods that God gives us, while remaining God's own, and solidarity with the poor of this and every age. You want to assume the guidance of the Spirit, as well as accompany and encourage others with the helm strokes that (Holy Spirit) wants to take with you in history, to promote a new relationship with creation and with material goods, so that our peoples may have life in Christ. We ask for the new general Minister and his Definitorium the grace of Peter's obedience and audacity, to recognize the new paths that God continues to open in our day, whether they come from the past or they reveal new gifts of God to humanity, (gifts coming) from a more radical living of the Gospel.

Naturally the desire to advance on the way of Jesus, and to arouse the company of many others, as we all know, is not only the task of the general Minister (who is about) to be elected. It is a commitment of all the brothers of the Order, accompanying him to make their own Peter's confession. Today, St. Francis invites you once again to follow Jesus and embrace his cross, to proclaim it, not only this morning but on all the crossroads of the journey and in ordinary life. (Francis calls you to) walk in the ways of the one whom we follow in obedience, without anything of our own and in chastity, not just as another guru of our day, not even as a prophet, but more exactly reechoing Peter's words as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16).

Never forget the consequence of this confession, when all around us the cultures of many of our people are hesitant about their Christian roots, as so many disciples of Jesus Christ hesitated after his speech on his being the bread of life come down from heaven in the synagogue in Capernaum. Do not forget (this confession), when false prophets promote paths that are far from God and contrary to his commandments, as being more prosperous for the future for our peoples. Let us be bold with Peter. Let us proclaim with the general Minister and the whole tradition of the Order: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68).

The Lord desires that at the conclusion of this Chapter, the family of Francis and the Lord Pope go out to the diverse forms of existential peripheries, and to geographical peripheries. Go out two by two and in all the ways in which fidelity to an outgoing charism is expressed. Go out to lead (all people) to encounter Jesus, to enthuse (others with) the joy of that encounter, and to proclaim that only in Jesus will today's world find wise words of eternal life! What's more, (in Jesus) the world will find eternal Life, as well as the Way and the whole Truth which lead to it, in our day.

One final consideration. What Peter needed most to be shepherd would be a profound and indestructible love for Jesus. Before entrusting him the surprising task of feeding his sheep, he questioned him three times about his love. I say that the task was surprising because until then Peter and the other apostles surely thought the only Good Shepherd was Christ, who had definitely surpassed the story of the bad shepherds of Israel.

“Do you love me?” (Jn 21:15). This is the question that Jesus will make of the new general Minister not only today but many times, day after day, every time he renews in him the mission of being the shepherd of his flock of Brothers and Minors in our day.

May the vote that each of you gives be not only an act of obedience to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is as it should be. But beyond that may it also be a prayer for him and for the Order, imploring through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin God's blessing for the family of the Friars Minor and personally for him. And may it also be an act of trust in God and in him: in the goodness, wisdom and power of God, and the filial and fraternal, generous and faithful love of one who is called to make present the Good Shepherd and his beloved son Francis, brother and founder, father, shepherd and inspirer of the great Franciscan Family in our day.