

GENERAL DEFINITORY AND PRESIDENTS OF CONFERENCES

HOMILY (23.05.2019)

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My dear brothers,

The gospel for today is very short. It is only 3 verse and it is all about love. The word “love” occurs 5 times, twice as a verb, thrice as a noun.

At the Biblicum, we were told to observe the occurrences of the words. If it is repeated many times, it must be very important. We must take it seriously and make some tentative affirmations. There are five of them. 1) The Father loves Jesus, 2) Jesus loves his disciples, 3) Jesus commands his disciples to remain in his love, 4) They can remain in his love by keeping his commandments, and 5) They must imitate or follow Jesus who remain in his Father’s love, because he keeps his commandments.

Why is Jesus saying these things that are obvious? They are easy to understand. Very easy to follow. You do not have to go to the Biblicum to know this, but we can go to its original background.

The commandment of love was first addressed to his disciples at the Last Supper. They must have been very wary about what would happen when Jesus departs. They may scatter, each one going his own way, following his own individualistic tendencies, like our problem today. That will be the end of their community, their fraternity, which they had been developing for the last three years. But Jesus assures them, that they will not disappear on earth provided that they follow the commandment of love. They should not imitate the one who will betray him, the one who has no love.

They should show their love by serving one another, washing the feet of one another, which means, supporting one another as brothers, mature persons, in their mission. They will bind up the wounds of the other brothers when they are hurt, broken or driven away in the process. That is fraternity in action.

In fact, when they do this, even in a hostile environment, they will possess the joy of Jesus. Their joy will be complete. Joy is not only in following and listening to Jesus’ teachings, looking at his bodily appearance. Joy will come as a result of ministering to the needs of the fellow missionaries, of being fraternal to one another.

First Reading

In the first reading, their fraternal love is being tested. The passage from the Acts of the Apostles, known to be the missionary document of the Church, has a different tone. The apostles or disciples who were with Jesus at the Last Supper are not faring well now. They are in conflict with the Judaizers. They have an issue to resolve, not to spoil their mission to the Gentiles. Peter claims that he is sent to evangelize the Gentiles. The Gentiles must not be required to undergo

circumcision and do other Jewish practices. The Gentile converts are already saved because of faith. The Judaizers, the disciples who are still embedded in their Jewish traditions, who have not yet moved on, must stop troubling the Gentiles, who have accepted Jesus in faith.

My dear brothers, somehow we are like Peter and other apostles discussing how to carry out evangelization today.

Many of us still impose the old ways, old theologies, old platforms, old mindsets when we deal with the youth, with the migrants, with our young candidates and friars. We love more our structures and history, reminiscing our good ol' days, justifying what we have done in the past, and we love less our brothers who differ from us, who are uprooted from their culture and loved ones. We love less the new candidates who have a different breeding, who speak a different language.

Often, we lack ongoing formation or do not have proper reading of the signs of the times or proper way to handle ourselves in the midst of poverty, migration, discriminations, violation of human rights and violence suffered by the countless innocent children, women and laborers.

The Minister General once emphasized when he visited Asia, on mission *inter gentes*, not so much the *ad gentes*. In *inter gentes*, we go among the people, as co-journeymen, fellow pilgrims on earth, as lesser brothers. We move with the oppressed, sharing their joys and sorrows. In *ad gentes*, we go to the people and can become condescending, and then move back to our comfort zones.

We have to admit that we have to catch up with this fast changing world. And we do this together as brothers. We can only do this if we have developed love for one another. Since we come from different cultures and continents, linguistic groups, all the more that we have to love one another. We use the formula of Francis, which is fraternity, we are all brothers. We will minimize the exodus of friars and reduce the number of friars who are lethargic, clericalistic and toxic, if truly we behave as lesser and joyful brothers. And we will attract more vocations, if we recover our first love, Jesus who gave us the commandment of love, whom we Franciscans might have lost as we cope with this fast changing world.

In this Eucharist, we pray that the Lord assist us as leaders of the Order and of the Conferences. In this Eucharist, we once more re-root ourselves to our First Love and keep his commandment of love, so as not to face extinction. God bless us all.