

Opening Mass for the Council of the Institute

20 January 2026

Presided over by His Excellency Mons. Charles John Brown, Papal Nuncio to the Philippines

HOMILY

Peace be with you. Jesus gives these beautiful words in our gospel this morning. And that's my message on behalf of Pope Leo the 14th to all of you gathered for the Council of the Institute here in Antipolo, you the Pious Disciples of the divine master. I greet and I am very grateful to Sister Magdalene for having invited me, your provincial superior to be with you this morning as your Papal Nuncio. I greet Sister Maria Bernardita, the Superior General of the Congregation and also Father Mario, the Provincial Superior, as well as the Local superior, of the Society of St. Paul. As all of you know, I've come with Msgr. Giuseppe Trentadue, Councillor and Father Guilherme De Melo Sanchez, the Secretary at the Nunciature to be with you this morning for this votive Mass of the Holy Spirit asking the Holy Spirit to inspire you during these some 20 days of synodal reflection.

Synodal reflection, of course, as we've been hearing for more than five years, *Synod* comes from the word *hodos* which is the way *syn*, meaning together. So together on the way, together on the way, we discern the path forward. And that is exactly what you as Pious Disciples of the Divine Master will be doing in these some 20 days here in Antipolo asking the Holy Spirit to lead you to guide you and of course invoking always the intercession of Beato Giacomo Alberione and Madre Scholastica your two very important and powerful intercessors, your founders.

The gospel that was chosen from St. John provides in my mind a very beautiful program and very beautiful indications to all of you for these days. The disciples were afraid, they were hidden and Jesus comes and says: "Peace be with you." So first of all, we have the presence of Jesus, the resurrected Lord, bringing peace in the midst of turmoil, tribulation, persecution, and fears. And that's the first thing for all of you, dear sisters, to recognize that the Lord is with you in these days. He is risen. He's guiding you. He called you each by name. And the Lord doesn't play games with our lives. He doesn't call you and then leave you standing by the side of the road as he goes forward. He wants to go with you synodally, that means together on the way because He is the way that leads to the house of the Father. He is with you, dear sisters.

And, then the first thing we see after that arrival of the resurrected presence of the Lord is that he showed them his wounds. This is very important also for you as you do this synodal reflection together. Certainly, as you come together from all over the world and I know sisters, I've met some of you even in Ireland and different places where I've been and throughout my career as an Apostolic Nuncio. You come from all over the world and obviously each of you will be reporting on the blessings, the joys, the successes, the wonderful things that are happening throughout the world in your communities. But let's also remember that there are the wounds and Jesus shows his wounds. He doesn't hide his wounds from his disciples when he appears after the resurrection. In fact, they recognize him because of his wounds. And I think it's

important as you come together synodally to also be unafraid to show the wounds to show the wounds of the communities, the weaknesses, the shortcomings, the failures, the limitations, the wounds. Not to be afraid to show the wounds as Jesus shows us his wounds now made glorious by his resurrection. Because in synodal discernment, we need to focus both on the joys and the triumphs, but also on the limitations and the weaknesses and indeed the wounds of our communities so we can trace the way forward.

And then Jesus after showing his wounds repeats once again in the Gospel today, the same words, 'peace be with you'. So, when we show the wounds, when we exhibit the wounds, when we manifest the weaknesses that need to be healed and need to be brought to a situation of betterment and improvement that brings us also peace, brings us peace. It doesn't mean that we are being negative or destructive. It means we're being honest and transparent. And that's the way the synodal process needs to work. So that peace that the Lord envelops us with, the peace that he begins with, then the wounds, then the peace that comes from together taking account of our difficulties and charting the path forward.

And then we have the indication of the Holy Spirit very interesting in the Gospel. We pray for the Holy Spirit to descend upon you in these days. Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit is intimately connected with the idea of breath. "Breathe on me, breath of God. Fill me with life anew. That I would do what you would do and love what you love." This idea of being filled with the breath of God and that inspiration of the Holy Spirit is intimately related to the idea of speaking. The Holy Spirit of course has an intimate relationship to life because even on a physical level if we don't breathe our physical lives will finish in about five or seven minutes. We need to breathe to be alive. The Holy Spirit is this divine life that's in us through baptism and nourished through the bread of life, the Holy Eucharist. So, this Holy Spirit, the breath of God is associated with life, but it's also associated with speaking with speaking because also if we have no breath in our lungs, we can't speak. The breath of God gives us the physical ability to speak.

And when you look at the Gospels again and again, the Holy Spirit is associated with speaking. When they haul you in front of kings and magistrates and synagogues, do not fear because at that moment the Holy Spirit will tell you what to say. Pentecost, what happens? The Holy Spirit comes on them and they begin to what? Speak. So, the Holy Spirit, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is not simply a vague inspiration of our ideas also relates to how we speak. And that's so important for all of you gathered here in this synodal reflection because all of you all of you, dear sisters, will be called at one point or another probably repeatedly in these days to speak. So, ask the Holy Spirit to inspire your thoughts, but also to inspire your words, so that you say what He wants you to say so that you inspire your sisters by being yourself filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, allowing you to know what to say, to say it in the right way. That is always of great challenge, but always possible through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The spirit gives us the power to speak just as physical breath in our lungs allows us to communicate.

Finally, Jesus says and he gives them after the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of forgiveness of

sins. And that's also important in any synodal process to have mercy and forgiveness and compassion on one another to forgive the faults and failings of each other and that's the way in which we go forward because that's the way in which we imitate the Lord, who, of course, on the Cross himself dies forgiving those who put him to death. So, forgiveness, compassion is very very important but also with truth because the Holy Spirit as I said gives us the ability to speak the truth to say the truth in the way that needs to be said, not to hide the wounds but to manifest the wounds in confidence and humility and also in compassion and mercy and forgiveness for all the failings that all of us certainly have committed.

So, for me as your Papal Nuncio here in the Philippines, it gives me so much joy to be with you. I promise you the prayers of all of us in the Apostolic Nunciature on Taft Avenue in Manila praying for you during these very very important days, these 20 days of synodal discernment. We wish you all the best. We ask you also during your time to pray for Pope Leo. He of course is asking us to pray for him. I will be with him in about three weeks in Rome and I will surely remember to tell him that the sisters of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master throughout the world are praying for him. So, God bless you dear sisters be assured of my prayers and the prayers of all of us all of us at the apostolic Nuncio during this very important time of discernment. May God bless you.