

WE "ENTERED THE CITY" SO AS TO REMAIN THERE

*Concluding Address of
Sr. Antonietta Bruscato
Superior General*

Dearest Sisters, we have come to the conclusion of our meeting, which kept us working intensively over the past ten days in this very beautiful community in the heart of Nairobi. The meaningful daily Liturgies, the mild climate, the tasty and abundant meals, the smiles of the sisters and their generous and kind hospitality all helped to facilitate our work and contributed to reinforcing our spirit of fraternity and communion. The Lord was truly with us, guiding and accompanying our journey, and we want to thank him with all our heart.

This meeting was held right after the conclusion of the Special Synod for Africa on the theme, *The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*. "You are salt for the earth and light for the world." Urged on by the interventions of the Synod Fathers and enlightened by your input in our assemblies, by our dialogue, and in particular by the talk of Fr. Paolino Mondo, we were able to come to a better grasp of the situations of this continent and allow ourselves to be deeply touched by not only the sufferings of its peoples but also by their wealth on the human and cultural levels. This deeper knowledge of the African and Malagasy contexts served to increase our apostolic ardor, expand our horizons and prompted us to dream of taking advantage of new paths, modes and synergies that will enable the Gospel to reach everyone and reawaken their awareness of the fact that they are children of God, members of the same family and heirs of the earth.

We too are convinced that Africa, the "spiritual lungs" of humanity today, is called to undergo a "new Pentecost" so as to foster within itself a renewed life marked by reconciliation, justice and peace. And we, small and inadequate though we may be, want to contribute as much as we can to ensuring that the peoples of this continent have genuine life, and that they have it in abundance.

Let us listen once again to what Benedict XVI said at the end of the Synod, allowing his words to increase the flame of our missionary ardor:

"The urgent evangelizing action that has been much discussed in these weeks also carries with it a pressing call to reconciliation, the indispensable condition for creating in Africa relationships of justice between people and for building an equitable and lasting peace that respects every individual and every people; a peace that needs and seeks the contribution of all persons of good will beyond their respective religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and social affiliations."

And we want to echo the appeal of the Bishops, who said:

"This Synod proclaims loudly and clearly that it is time to change our attitudes out of love for the present and future generations."

Our presence in Africa-Madagascar is still young: what are 50 years compared to a civilization that is considered "the cradle of humanity"?

And yet, although we have not been on this continent for very long, our Congregation has shaped its own unique story here, offering the people of Africa a considerable heritage on the human level, together with firmly-rooted and effective apostolic action. The Daughters of St. Paul of Africa and

Madagascar have worked hard and have already made a good journey. Your communities, your beautiful vocations, your apostolic centers, your diverse evangelization activities and your well-targeted publications are all signs that our Congregation is firmly rooted in this land and that the Pauline presence is bearing good fruit here, as we clearly saw during this meeting.

The urgent needs of the African continent, described so graphically by the Synod, and the light we received in these days of listening and exchanging ideas with one another, helped us discern paths for redesigning our presence that focus first of all on improving the quality of our life and mission so as to allow the Lord to lead us in the direction he desires, and so as to be, with all the vibrant energy of this continent, *salt for the earth and light for the world*.

This awareness emerged very clearly in the hypotheses you proposed for *redesigning our presences on the local level*. You came to a swift and harmonious agreement concerning the "milestones" that should mark this journey, namely: a "reawakening" on the spiritual and communitarian levels through daily contact with the Word of God; a renewed and more decisive commitment to pastoral work for vocations, the sharing of our charism with the laity, etc.

Even though we realize that we are ignorant and incapable in everything, we also know that we are the bearers of a precious gift that belongs to us only to the degree that we share it with others. It is the Lord who will make it bear fruit: 60% or 80% or 100%....

As for your *Continental Project*: it dynamically expresses the characteristics of the Pauline tradition which the FSPs have lived from the very beginning in Africa: a missionary spirit, "feeling with the Church," love for the people and a sense of belonging to the Congregation. The directives of the African Synod reinforce your decision to carry out a communal journey marked by greater effort in the areas of catechesis, diffusion of the social doctrine of the Church, the promotion of woman and communication. The apostolic anxiety characteristic of our vocation, which urges us to always move forward, led you to sketch out an itinerary aimed at consolidating our structures in such a way as to foster fidelity to the charism in all the dimensions of the Pauline life, and to intensify your collaboration with one another so as to realize the dream of establishing new presences on this continent in the near future.

Dear sisters, at the end of this important meeting, I want to share with you what the Spirit brought to my attention in these days.

I too, profoundly questioned by the situation of this continent of "a thousand faces," asked myself: What does Africa expect of us? What does the Church of Africa and Madagascar expect of us? What does the Lord expect of us, since he is the one who called us and sent us to this land marked by suffering and great human and Christian values? What "redesigning" is God calling us to enact so that we might be prophetic and significant presences in this part of the world here and now?

In listening to the Word, which is always up to date and overflowing with riches, and in listening to your input, I came to understand that the first "redesigning" we must undertake is within ourselves, in the depths of our being, in our mind and in our heart as consecrated women and Pauline apostles. We are called to be firm, robust persons, who are psychologically and spiritually mature, so as to be apostolically mature. We are called to be women who live our faith intensively, who center our lives on Christ, our Master and Lord; who put God first in everything, who are ready and willing to do only and always what he wants. We are called to be women who nourish ourselves on the Eucharist every day and who "dwell in the Word." We are called to be women who are intuitive and recollected, active and contemplative, capable of dialogue, discernment and communion. We are called to be women who burn with such ardor for Christ and his message that we offer him our lives anew each day and serve him tenderly and compassionately in all our brothers and sisters.

I am sure that the Word of God, read, meditated, shared and put into practice, will gradually transform us into prophetic women, as our Founder and Maestra Thecla desired. If we assiduously read the Scriptures as individuals and as communities, then everything we do will take on a Gospel quality and we will be faithful, happy and fruitful.

But there is another important itinerary that I think the Lord wants the Daughters of St. Paul of this continent to pursue, namely: *to give special attention to the women of Africa and Madagascar and to work for their promotion.*

Victims of ancestral customs and great abuses, marginalized at all levels, almost totally excluded from the process of development in act on this continent even though, as the Synod pointed out, it is they who bears the burden of its armed conflicts, the women of Africa are the true and primary protagonists in the life of this continent. They are such by way of their values, by way of their ability to bear adversities and suffering, by way of their tenacity in generating and defending life, by way of their creativity in finding solutions to the thousands of problems they encounter every day....

At this point in the Congregation's journey in Africa-Madagascar, I ask you to take on a commitment above and beyond those you have already assumed on the continental level, namely: to use the different forms of our apostolate to help promote the dignity of woman and ensure that she is recognized as an active participant in the life of society and of the Church.

It is a "woman to woman" commitment that can serve as a sign of hope on this "continent of hope."

Dear sisters, I want to conclude my talk by thanking you with all my heart for your presence here, for your witness to communion and fraternity, and for your profound input. And thank you as of now for all you will do to share with your sisters the gifts you received in these days.

I want to thank each of you, person by person, like Paul did in his Letters when he sent his greetings to his closest collaborators in the apostolate.

Thank you, Battistina, for guiding our work with great competence, respect, wisdom and determination.

Thank you, Maria Kimani, Teresa, Theresia and Mary Manje. Thank you, Pelagie and Rita Al-mici. Thank you, Louise and Solange. Thank you, Maria Celina, Maria Ema and Paola. Thank you, Samuela, Luz Helena, Angela and Gabriella, my companions in work. Thank you, Maria and Rita, for the precious service of information, both printed and online, with which you provided the Congregation.

Thank you, Wendy, for giving us a "visual memory" of this meeting through your beautiful photographs.

My thanks to Anna Caiazza for her expertise and precision in preparing the news and documents used by our assembly.

My thanks to the sisters of the Commission who prepared this meeting: Natalia Maccari, Annamaria Gasser and Ana Maria Killing. My thanks to the other members of my government who, together with the sisters of the Generalate and the whole Congregation, accompanied and supported us with their concrete work, prayer, messages and the daily offering of their lives and mission for the successful outcome of this encounter.

My thanks to our translators who worked with great speed behind the scenes to supply us with all the material we needed for our work. My thanks to the sisters of SICOM for updating this Encounter's web page daily.

And finally, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, I want to thank Maria Kimani and the whole Delegation of East Africa, Nigeria, Zambia and Sudan.

Thank you, Atanasia and the community of Nairobi for your hospitality and for everything you did to ensure the success of this meeting.

My thanks to all the sisters of this big community, to the novices and postulants, who surrounded us with so many expressions of affection and fraternity, in particular through harmonious liturgical animations enriched with festive songs and music.

My thanks to the postulants for their generous service in the refectory and kitchen. My thanks to the cooks and to Stephanie and her co-workers in the laundry and ironing room. My thanks to the drivers.

My very sincere thanks to all of you!

Sisters, we have come a long way in just a few days. Trusting in the presence of the Lord and in the help of our Founders, we *got to our feet and entered the city*, where we were told what to do.

Now we begin the delicate and essential stage of involving all our sisters in the redesigning process so as to concretize it. We are sure that everything you have assumed on the circumscription and continental levels will give a new "face" to our presence as Pauline apostles in Africa-Madagascar and will reinforce our communion.

We *entered the city* willingly and decisively. The challenge we now face is to *remain* there. How? John the evangelist supplies the answer: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. [...] You did not choose me. No, I chose you. And I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last" (Jn. 15:9, 16).

To *remain* with someone, whoever that person may be, means to focus one's attention on that individual. It means becoming completely involved in that person's life, problems and hopes. This is what we must do if we want to be the "eyes, mouth and ears of Africa" as Bishop Kussala said, as well as witnesses to Love and forgers of reconciliation, justice and peace.

Sisters, let us allow the Lord to fecundate with his Word the priorities that emerged as the fruit of our common work and let us ask him insistently, in prayer, to continue to lead us so that we might be his "Good News" in this land, which he has blessed perennially by choosing it as the dwelling place of his Son.

Let us go forth boldly, in a spirit of communion, because God is with us!

Affectionately,

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Superior General

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