

WHERE THE LORD IS LEADING US

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Dearest sisters, once again I want to tell you how happy I am to have you here with us for the first Enlarged Council Meeting of our governing term—a time of competent participation and co-responsibility. Other meetings will follow this, as foreseen in the General Government's *Planning* for this six-year period.

In the coming days, we will be seeking together for the plan of God for our Congregation today, in an attitude of continual openness to the Spirit, clear-sightedness and daring. I am sure that the Lord, on his part, will not fail to give us the clear sight we need to help us intelligently penetrate our situation so as to grasp the new things that are emerging in this moment (cf. Is. 43:19) and make the decision to *boldly* begin a new stage of our journey in the name of the One “who makes all things new” (Rv. 21:5).

Before plunging into a topic we all feel very deeply about—the redesigning of our presences—which is the fundamental theme of our meeting, I would like to thank the Lord with you for the year that has just ended. Let us do this in the light of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, which we just celebrated, pronouncing a blessing on contemporary humanity in the conviction that everything is a gift and should lead us to the *Magnificat* (cf. AD 4) in a spirit of openness to the innovations God wants to propose to us in this new year.

1

“REMEMBER THE LONG ROUTE BY WHICH THE LORD YOUR GOD HAS LED YOU” (Dt. 8:2)

The Bible tells us, “Do not forget the things which you yourselves have seen, or let them slip from your heart” (Dt. 4:9). May Mary, who carefully safeguarded and meditated in her heart on everything that was said and done, help us “read” in depth and on a spiritual level what is taking place before our eyes.

“Where is humanity going?”

Events that have caused us to hope and rejoice have alternated with those that have turned nations and large segments of humanity upside down: natural disasters; food crises; global warming; wars; situations of violence, injustice and discrimination, a lack of freedom and security, and last but not least, an economic crisis that is bringing even seemingly unshakable super-powers to their knees. Precisely in these days, in some parts of the world, old conflicts have flared to life once again, for example in the Gaza strip, causing damage, mourning and immense suffering to the civilian population. A fundamental role is played by peacekeepers—“all those who, rather than resigning themselves to the twisted logic of conflict and violence, prefer instead the path of dialogue and negotiation as the means of resolving

tensions within each country and finding just and lasting solutions to the conflicts troubling various regions” (Benedict XVI, Christmas Message *Urbi et Orbi*, 2008).

But thanks be to God, there has been no shortage of signs of hope and fruitfulness, of witnesses and also martyrs; of gestures of dialogue, solidarity and love; of progress in knowledge and communication.

On this journey, at times dark and difficult, believers are sustained and goaded to action by the teaching of Benedict XVI, who constantly invites humanity to seek out the genuine sources of faith and Christian tradition, not so as to flee a chaotic and perverse world that is far from God and centered on itself but, on the contrary, so as to “incarnate ourselves” in these situations and bring them the light of Christ. In his Christmas message, the Pope also said: “Wherever the dignity and rights of the human person are trampled upon; wherever the selfishness of individuals and groups prevails over the common good; wherever fratricidal hatred and the exploitation of man by man risk being taken for granted; wherever internecine conflicts divide ethnic and social groups and disrupt peaceful coexistence; wherever terrorism continues to strike; wherever the basics needed for survival are lacking; wherever an increasingly uncertain future is regarded with apprehension, even in affluent nations: in each of these places may the Light of Christmas shine forth and encourage all people to do their part in a spirit of authentic solidarity. If people look only to their own interests, our world will certainly fall apart.”

The grace of the Lord was also manifested through a number of ecclesial events that made a great impact on both believers and non-believers, such as: the Pope’s visit to the United States (15-21 April), the 23rd World Youth Day held in Sydney, Australia (15-20 July), the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church* (5-26 October), in which I was privileged to participate, and—for Italy—the integral and continual reading of the Bible (5-11 October)....

In a special way, I want to underscore how much good the celebration of the Pauline Year is doing throughout the Church, and in particular in the Pauline Family. This ecclesial event has opened new horizons to the pastoral action of the Church and is drawing many people closer to the person and writings of the Apostle. Throughout the world, thanks also to our efforts, many initiatives are being carried out such as encounters, study and reflection sessions and prayer meetings centered on St. Paul.

I also want to mention the recently-concluded 27th *Meeting of the General Governments of the Pauline Family* (Ariccia, 7-11 January 2009) on the theme of the Apostle of the Gentiles in the light of our Founder’s charismatic experience, and the upcoming *International Seminar on St. Paul* (Rome, 19-29 April 2009), organized by the Society of St. Paul, which will help us as a Family to reflection more deeply on Fr. Alberione’s role as an intermediary in adopting St. Paul as the model of our charism.

For all of us, this Jubilee Year is a stimulus to move ahead courageously and dynamically, not because we are well-prepared and strong, capable and powerful, but because we count on the grace of the Lord and on his light, which he will never fail to provide if we truly surrender ourselves to him. How up to date and energizing are the words of Paul: “God chose those who by human standards are fools to shame the wise; he chose those who by human standards are weak to shame the strong, those who by human standards are common and contemptible—indeed those who count for nothing—to reduce to nothing all those that do count for something, so that no human being might feel boastful before God. It is by him that you exist

in Christ Jesus, who for us was made wisdom from God, and saving justice and holiness and redemption. As scripture says: If anyone wants to boast, let him boast of the Lord” (1 Co. 1:27-31).

The General Government: A Year of Intense Activity

Rapidly glancing over the agenda of the General Government, what emerges above all is our commitment to concretizing the *Planning* that implements the Chapter’s decisions.

The past months were intense ones, dedicated to Fraternal Visits and visits for special reasons, as well as to the appointment and formation of a number of governments. New sisters were added to our Secretariats and now we (in particular the General Councilors in charge of specific sectors) are trying to give a more streamlined and efficient configuration to these organisms that support the activities of the General Government so that they will better respond to the needs of our various circumscriptions.

We also set up several commissions that, working more or less at long distance, will make a contribution of reflection, competence and experience in the different areas of our life and mission and will help us prepare for our upcoming international and continental meetings. In fact, we have several important encounters scheduled: the Charism Tour Course, the meeting of the Commission for Animation on the Constitutions, continental meetings for the apostolate and administration, various courses (preparation for perpetual vows, formation of our postulant and novice mistresses and of our junior formators) and several seminars (on hermeneutics, on Pauline mysticism...). Even this present enlarged council meeting on redesigning our presences will lead to continental meetings to concretize the decision we make together in these days.

We rejoice to see that the Lord is still calling young women to follow him in proclaiming the Gospel with the instruments and technologies of communication. In many parts of the world, our sisters are carrying out an intensive pastoral work for vocations, even though fruits might be scarce. In other areas, we have not yet found the way to approach young women who seem to want anything other than a life of consecration to the Lord. We are grateful to him for the new professions that enrich our religious family each year. But we are worried about the high number of temporary professed and also perpetually professed sisters who leave the Congregation....

We are aware of our poverty when it comes to personnel, means and preparation but we firmly believe the promise the Divine Master made to our Founder: “*Do not be afraid. I am with you. From here I want to enlighten. Live in continual conversion.*” And let us welcome with gratitude the words of our Father St. Paul: “That is why we do not waver; indeed, though this outer human nature of ours may be falling into decay, at the same time our inner human nature is renewed day by day. The temporary, light burden of our hardships is earning us forever an utterly incomparable, eternal weight of glory, since what we aim for is not visible but invisible. Visible things are transitory, but invisible things eternal” (2 Co. 4:16-18).

So let us give thanks to the one who gives us strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he has judged us faithful and appointed us to his service (cf. 1 Tm. 1:12).

2

OUR GREATEST “GOOD”

Everything I have said up to now introduces us into an important premise concerning our reflection and discernment on the “redesigning of our presences.” In this process, we are invited to “organize the good.” But what greater good is there than persons? What wealth can

replace the fruitfulness of lives completely consecrated to the Lord so as to give life to many others?

Our Congregation rests on solid foundations that support the entire edifice.

Its first column is *holiness of life*—a perspective that gives direction to our whole journey. From the very beginning, our Founder said over and over again that holiness is the sole path we must pursue. And he underscored that saints were needed to carry out this extraordinary vocation, this unique apostolate that situates us in the heart of the Church’s mission of evangelization. Both Primo Maestro and Prima Maestra tirelessly followed this path, offering themselves as examples and models for the Pauline apostles that have joined our Family over its nearly 100 years of existence.

With joy, we can say that not only the first generations of Daughters of St. Paul but also those of today are attracted to this goal and have decisively set out on this “holy pilgrimage” (Ps. 83:6) of conformation to Christ the Master, the culmination of holiness, the sole *raison d’être* of our life of consecration.

Obviously an itinerary of holiness is not easy to follow since it passes through the cracks and crevices of human limitations, of characters that are sometimes difficult and of complex personalities—situations in which there is a greater risk that we will manifest the “leftovers” of our human nature rather than the harmonious “finishing touches” of Christian perfection. But as the text of St. Paul I earlier cited (2 Co. 4:16-18) reminds us, when we cast aside our exterior nature and allow our inner nature to emerge—a nature shaped by the trials of life and by faith—then the holiness of those who persevered up to the very end shines forth. This is very evident in the sisters called to the “eternal wedding feast.” In fact, it is a great consolation to see *how* our sisters die because at that definitive moment they witness to the fact that their lives were totally focused on God.

My visits to the communities and conversations with many sisters prompts me to say that, in general, we all yearn for holiness and are committed to pursuing a personal project of life nourished by prayer, the Eucharist and the Word. But we are still far from incarnating “a style of life that manifests our faith in Christ Jesus” (CD 9) and that “is expressed in love for one another and zeal to announce the Gospel” (CD 13). How important it is that we superiors witness to the primacy of God in our lives, animate our sisters so that they can revitalize their relationship with the Master, and seek to ascertain whether or not they are truly in love with Jesus Christ and are seeking him alone.

What the Church has to say to all consecrated men and women applies to us too, as Daughters of St. Paul: “It is necessary to adhere ever more closely to Christ, the center of the consecrated life, and once again take up the path of conversion and renewal which, like the initial experience of the apostles, before and after the resurrection, was a starting afresh from Christ. [...] Starting afresh from Christ means proclaiming that the consecrated life is a special following of Christ, a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to his brothers and sisters. This implies a particular communion of love for Christ who has become the center of their life and the continual source of every initiative.... It is becoming one with him, taking on his mind and his way of life, and it is a life taken up by Christ,” touched by the hand of Christ, a life where his voice is heard, a life sustained by his grace” (*Starting Afresh from Christ*, nn. 21, 22). This was the experience of Paul, of Blessed James Alberione, of Maestra Thecla and of many of the sisters who have preceded us.

At this point, instead of setting down the operative guidelines already present in our Constitutions and reaffirmed by our General Chapter, I would like instead to emphasize the transforming power of the Word of God when it is habitually read, meditated on and concre-

tized in our lives. It has been pointed out, including by the recent Synod of Bishops, that the *Lectio Divina* or *prayerful reading of the Word of God* is a way to meet our beloved Spouse: a way of intimacy, obedient listening, dialogue and mutual self-gift. I think that when the *Lectio Divina* is lovingly and assiduously practiced on the personal and, above all, on the community level, it is the most effective instrument we have for maintaining a vibrant relationship with the Lord, for rekindling the profound motivations at the basis of our consecration and mission, for continually remembering our *first love*, and for setting out on a genuine journey toward holiness, refusing to be sidetracked by the insidious temptations of our culture and counting them well worth the loss for the sake of Christ (cf. Phil. 3:7).

In the redesigning process that we are launching, we must “keep our antennae fine-tuned” so as to perceive what is posing obstacles to the Kingdom of God and strain ahead. The Word of God is our traveling companion because we need inspiration and wisdom, fortitude and constancy so as to make the changes of life that can rightly be called “conversions.”

The second column for the Daughters of St. Paul is without a doubt our *mission*: “an essential element of our consecrated life” (Const. 12). We can also say it is a *unifying element* of our life. We are “chosen and loved,” consecrated and sent out “to preach the Gospel to every creature.” We are the “new apostles” that our Founder envisioned. We are aware of our “prophetic role” and our “responsibility toward history.” And thus we dedicate all our energies and indeed our very life to our mission.

But what gives us this missionary thrust? Our 9th General Chapter says that it is *faith*, “the principle on which our identity as consecrated Paulines is based.” And Fr. Silvio Sassi affirms: “The thermometer for measuring the quality of our faith is its ‘missionary’ dimension. If it is lived as a gift we have received, then it is transformed into a gift that we share with others.” Because, “communication is the style of life that manifests our faith in Christ Jesus, whom we are called to announce with courage and creativity in the culture of communication, so that the Word of Life will touch and transform all persons, and love will truly become the dominant measure of the world” (CD 9).

The “ardor of our faith” (Const. 13) must be paired with fraternal witness. It seems almost like listening once again to the words Fr. Alberione addressed to our first three sisters in 1916, when he gave them their Rule of Life: “The Lord has gathered you together so that you might more easily become good and do good to others in the world.” As if to say that an effective strategy for carrying out our mission can only spring from communion and sharing, desired and sought in the context of fraternal interpersonal relations (cf. Const. 58ff.).

In the international and continental meetings for the apostolate and administration that were held over these last years, we focused our attention above all on the functional and business aspect of our apostolate, taking for granted the spiritual and charismatic motivations that undergird the Pauline mission and are its *raison d’être*. Did this perhaps contribute to watering down the spirit? And also: Has the fact that we have often had to concentrate our energies on concrete situations because of our advancing age and the decline of our physical strength made us more afraid to face the challenges of our mission, undermining our creativity and transforming us at times into “civil servants” of the apostolate? If so, then how can we revive our apostolic passion—that intense and profound desire that leads us to make ourselves “all to all” in keeping with the example of St. Paul? How can we be the creative, dynamic, enterprising and wise apostles that Primo Maestro and Prima Maestra wanted us to be, and that we all surely want to be?

The redesigning of our presences—a process that leads to life, not death—can be launched only for powerfully apostolic reasons, as we will see in the third part of this meeting. It can be launched only from that sorrowful cry that every apostle must make her own:

“How can [human beings] call on One in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in One of whom they have never heard?” (Rm. 10:14)

The third column of the Daughters of St. Paul is our *community life*, the place in which our identity as disciples and apostles of the Master matures and is reinforced; the context in which communion with him and among ourselves expands into mission (cf. Const. 58). Our communities have an above all *theological* identity because they share in the mystery of the Trinitarian communion and are a sign of a new way of living together, founded not on natural bonds but on the Spirit that we received in Baptism and in our religious consecration (*Ibid.*).

The Church asks men and women religious to be “experts” in communion, inasmuch as they are witnesses and artisans of that plan of communion which stands at the center of history according to God. And it invites them to grow in the spirituality of communion, “first of all in their internal life and then in the Church community, and even beyond its boundaries, by beginning or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially in those places where today’s world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence. This is a task which requires spiritual persons interiorly shaped by God, by loving and merciful communion and by mature communities where the spirituality of communion is the rule of life” (*Starting Afresh*, n. 28).

We are therefore called to “focus the gaze of our heart on the mystery of the Trinity dwelling within us, whose light can also be seen in the faces of the brothers and sisters around us” (John Paul II). We are called to listen to our sisters in faith, in the profound unity of the Mystical Body, as persons who are a part of us (cf. *Ibid.*, nn. 25-26). This is what Paul teaches us when he says that the other person is a member of the same body, whose head is Christ himself (cf. 1 Co. 12).

The process of redesigning our presences must realistically take into account every resource we have at our disposal and aim at the goal of creating conditions favorable to revitalizing our members and communities. We must truly be convinced that “we have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished!” (VC 110) And because of this we look with hope and trust to the future, “where the Spirit is sending us in order to do even greater things....” (*Ibid.*).

3

“THE LOVE OF CHRIST URGES US ON” (2 CO. 5:14)

It is said that once upon a time a very timid man got lost in the forest. He didn’t know what direction to take to continue his journey. At a certain point he saw the head of a local tribe approaching him. He was paralyzed with fear but when the native drew near he found the courage to ask him with apparent serenity, “Chief, could you please tell me what direction I should take?” The native looked at the man compassionately and said kindly—with so much kindness, in fact, that the man was no longer afraid—“To rediscover the path leading to your destination, you must always keep your gaze fixed on the horizon and move in the direction in which the wind is blowing.”

Dearest sisters, the present moment asks us to do the same thing: to study the horizon carefully and wisely, to remain open to the innovations the Spirit is revealing to us, and to be ready to follow his promptings.

The “redesigning of our presences” is, in actual fact, innate to the consecrated life, which is always called to “move ahead,” scrutinizing the signs of the times before setting out,

taking a minimum of luggage and walking with a light step, looking into the distance. This involves inevitable changes, which may not always be physical and geographical, and which lead to new fecundity and vitality. It is not the changes—the restructuring, the redesigning, the configurations and re-configurations—that are the problem. Instead, the problem is that of a weak spirit, mediocrity of life, decreased enthusiasm, tepidity, the inability to rekindle our “flame”....

From today on, we want to “return to the right path,” firmly believing that the process we are undertaking will not lead to “euthanasia” but, on the contrary, to a new thrust toward growth in life and toward giving life. Even more: we are “Daughters of St. Paul,” daughters of an Apostle who, urged on by the love of Christ, traveled the highways and byways of the world establishing missionary bases, always looking to new horizons. He carried out his mission in an exemplary, well organized and effective way. As soon as he founded a community, he set up and formed a group of persons responsible for it, but he always kept in contact with his young churches through his visits and those of his collaborators, as well as through his letters. Above all, he remained open to the Spirit, who guided his footsteps, at times prompting him to take paths he had not seen or would not have chosen on his own. In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Paul says several times: “the Spirit prevented me....the Spirit of Jesus did not allow me...” (cf. Acts 16:6-10). The Holy Spirit “blows where he wills....”

So then, sisters, what are we asked to do? During the General Chapter, moved by the desire to guide an initial discernment on the need for redesigning our presences, I pointed out our need to draw up a Project on the general and circumscription levels, not only so as to redesign our presences but also so as to make choices compatible with the changing situation of the Congregation and the formation/apostolic needs of the world of communication. I said that this Project should also define new forms of our presence in a territory that would help us develop our apostolate and propose the Pauline vocation more effectively.

At this moment, I feel the strong need to say once again to each of you that the purpose of redesigning our presences is not to ensure that death is “sweet” nor is taking such a step simply a matter of survival. Instead, it means identifying paths that will allow us to continue to be prophetic and significant presences; that will allow our charism to reveal all its vitality and perennial newness.

In these days, let us not fail to keep our gaze fixed on the *horizon*, that is to say, on Christ, and to allow ourselves to follow the breath of the Spirit.

Let us place the Word of God at the center of our work out of a desire to conform to what the Lord wants of us, in the knowledge that as of now the redesigning process requires us to undergo a profound conversion on all the levels of our life. It requires us to do some necessary “pruning” and to form new bonds of communion. It requires us to be ready to explore new ways of living and of collaborating with the laity.

And let us not forget to turn to our Father St. Paul with our questions, drawing on his experience and wisdom.

May Blessed James Alberione and Maestra Thecla intercede for us, asking the Lord to make our work fruitful. Let us look to the future with courage, trust and optimism because the Lord is with us!