

HOMILY FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE VISITATORS' MEETING

18 November 2022

Dedication of the Basilicas of Saints Peter and Paul

Dear Brothers, at the conclusion of our meeting, the liturgy celebrates the memory of the Basilicas of St Peter and St Paul here in Rome, where the relics of the holy apostles, pillars of our faith, are venerated. This occasion allows me to take up the word *witness* that characterises the apostles Peter and Paul.

The service for our brothers that is asked of us as ministers and servants is, first and foremost, a witness before being something we do for others. And witness is possible, Revelation tells us, because we have accepted and made our own, even devoured, the little book of God's word.

We can begin to become witnesses when we accept this word and let it become one with us. It is not easy; in fact, the Apocalypse tells us that this little book will fill our guts with bitterness: "*For the word of God is living, and effective, and sharper than any two-edged sword; it penetrates even to the dividing point of soul and spirit*", as the letter to the Hebrews says (4:12). Witnessing is born out of this struggle, out of this letting oneself be truly pierced by the truth that only God can make of our lives.

All our claims to do something for our brothers to change them or the like are purified here. We can only fully pass on what we first let pass through our lives and transform them. Only this willingness makes us humble and minor before our brothers. Only in this way will we be able, God willing and permitting, to reach the hearts and lives of our brothers, especially those we call the most difficult. Only those who have allowed themselves to be pierced in this way, and have accepted that truth be made in their lives in this way, will be servants of the full life of their brothers.

This is the first word that concludes our meeting.

Another word comes to us from Luke's Gospel: The Church, our fraternity in it, is a house of prayer. This means offering to God the only worship that pleases him, that of life, as the letter to the Romans reminds us: "*I urge you, therefore, brothers, by the mercy of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God; this is your spiritual worship*" (Rom 12:1). Let us listen to the lives of our brothers and accept them, knowing that therein lies the spiritual worship that each one offers to God and therein lies the possibility for each one to grow in faith and the knowledge of the Lord. Our fraternity is a house of prayer if it allows love to live in the life of each and every one of us and in the lives of those we meet and welcome, the places where brothers work, the beds where sick brothers suffer, the road that many of us walk in fatigue or song.

The Christian and the friar minor, a living temple of the Spirit, can consecrate all the spaces of his life to make them Church, fraternity, a house of prayer, listening, and communion.

St Francis listened to the Gospel with all his heart, truly devoured it and became its herald. That is why he left us the Gospel as the only rule of life so that we could reveal it with our lives before our words once we had accepted it. So, in our service as ministers and servants, may the Lord give us the grace to show his Gospel with our lives, our gestures, our looks, and the availability and openness of mercy. May we promote all that we find positive, even if it is very little.

St Francis, Thomas of Celano tells us, "*was not a man who prayed, but a man who became prayer*" (2Cel, 95). It is not a matter of just saying a few prayers in our houses and having a chapel, but of living our whole life as the space in which we belong totally to the Lord, learning to turn to Him and welcome His presence ever more deeply. May the Lord help us to live our service as ministers and servants in prayer, ready to praise Him for the lives of our brothers and to return to Him all that we have received.

We will then be blessed with the beatitude of fraternity in which God our father makes us know that we are his beloved children. Wishing you a good journey of witness and prayer and living according to God's heart in the service you have been asked to provide.

Br Massimo Fusarelli, ofm

Minister General