



Introduction to the Sixth Chapter of Mats Under Ten OFM - 2026

At the Heart of the Centenary of Saint Francis 1226–2026

Porziuncola, Saint Mary of the Angels, 5 July 2026 – Minister General

1. That Goes Before Us

Dearest brothers,

May the Lord give you peace.

We gather once again at the Porziuncola in a time that Providence offers us as a grace: in the year when the Order commemorates the eight hundredth anniversary of the Passover of Saint Francis, it is you – the friars in the first ten years after solemn profession – who are called together around the place where everything took shape and continues to begin anew.

You have arrived from every corner of the Order, from different continents and languages, bringing with you stories from flourishing Entities and from struggling Entities, experiences of first missions and already a few wounds. Yet beneath these walls, distances are gathered together, and we become once more simply Friars Minor around the house of the Mother.

2. The Mats and the Seed: The Place and the Time

We have chosen to call this gathering the Chapter of Mats. It is not a nostalgic label, but a memory that judges us and gives us direction. Tradition recalls the first friars gathered here by the thousands around this little church, without roofs or structures, stretched out on poor reed mats, with the Gospel and the bond of fraternity at the center. In those gatherings there was a multitude of brothers who discovered, with amazement, that they were capable of living together a life according to the Gospel, embodying it and doing so in minority.

To choose that name today means declaring what kind of Church and what kind of Order we desire: a people of brothers and lesser ones – a small remnant – who place themselves once again in listening to the Gospel in order to proclaim it through life and word. It is a name that precedes us and, at the same time, challenges us.

And we do so eight hundred years after the Transitus of Francis. The letter that we Ministers General wished to offer in this Centenary says that Francis is a seed of eternal life. For what Francis planted did not end with him: it continues to sprout from generation to generation.

It is therefore no coincidence that you, the Under Ten friars, find yourselves at this crossroads of place and time – and we with you. At the Porziuncola, where the seed was



planted and where it germinated through the encounter with “Sister Death.” In the Centenary, in which we ask ourselves whether that seed is still bearing fruit. Part of that answer has been entrusted to you.

For this reason, we shall undertake an exercise in listening. We shall listen to the Word, we shall listen to Francis, we shall listen to reality, and we shall listen to one another. This is how the Spirit continues to speak to the fraternity.

3. Your Season, in the Light of the Testament

I can say that I know the season you are living through. The first ten years after Solemn Profession are a delicate and, at times, painful passage. Here the idealism of initial formation meets the realism of daily life: communities that do not resemble those we dreamed of, structures that weigh heavily, pastoral efforts that do not bear the expected fruits. In this passage, disillusionment can creep in, and with it the temptation to cynicism or resignation. And we know it well: it is also the moment when affective loneliness, a silent and risky wound, begins to make its weight felt.

In recent months we have listened to you. Many of you responded to the survey with great sincerity, and the Commission will present what emerged from it. I do not wish to anticipate or repeat those findings. I do, however, want to tell you how I have read them. In what you wrote, I did not primarily find complaints: I found a longing for authenticity. You asked for authority lived as service and not as power. You asked for genuine dialogue between generations, where the younger are not ignored and the older are not abandoned. You asked that affective and psychological fragility not be hidden behind a mask but accompanied in truth. You asked how to remain credible on the digital continent – you who are the first generation of digitally native friars – without allowing yourselves to be devoured by speed and fragmentation. You asked to stand in the world’s peripheries as instruments of peace, where the poor, the discarded, and even war are found. In a word, you asked to be able to live the charism seriously.

Brothers, this is not a list of problems to be managed. It is the very place where the seed wishes to bear fruit.

We understand this by returning to the Testament. Francis does not recount a successful life without upheavals: he recounts a reversal. “The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin to do penance”: and that beginning was the encounter with the lepers, from whom he had previously fled. What had seemed bitter to him became sweetness; what he had avoided became the place of mercy. His fidelity was born not from the absence of difficulties, but from recognizing in them the passage of God.

There is a page that I love particularly. When a minister wrote to him asking how to deal with difficult brothers, Francis replied that he should consider those difficulties “as a grace.” Not as an obstacle to vocation, but as its path. I would like you to carry this word with you during these days. The tensions you experience, the fragilities you carry within, the struggles of your fraternities are not the opposite of your calling: if they are lived through in the name of the Gospel, they can become the concrete form of your fidelity. A fidelity that



is no longer merely romantic, but mature: capable of loving the community, the Order, and the Church as they are, and not as we dreamed they would be in the novitiate.

4. Three Legacies as the Horizon of These Days

We do not celebrate Francis because he belongs to the past. We celebrate him because his future concerns us. The Centenary Letter therefore gathers into three words the legacy that Francis leaves us. I propose them again to you as the horizon of our work.

The first is mercy toward the poor and love for Christ crucified. Everything in Francis begins with two gazes: the eyes of the lepers and the eyes of the Crucified of San Damiano. Not with an idea, but with concrete faces. I ask myself, and I ask you: who are the lepers of our time, the faces we too are tempted to pass by? Your missionary zeal, your desire to dwell in the existential and structural peripheries, has its root here. Without these two gazes, our activity becomes sterile activism; with them, it becomes Gospel. The letter reminds us with a formula not to be forgotten: poverty without mercy becomes an idol; mercy without poverty is reduced to ideology.

The second legacy is the Church and the Eucharist: a poor but fertile soil. Francis chose to plant his seed not in an ideal community but in the real Church of his time, with all its poverty, while others judged it and abandoned it. He learned to love it without the spiritual pride of those who think themselves better. This is a demanding word for your generation, and also for mine: the Order we love is not the perfect one we would wish for, but this one, with its heavy structures and limitations. And precisely here, as in the humble bread of the Eucharist, the Most High continues to place Himself into the poor hands of all of us. To love this real soil is not resignation: it is the only way for the seed to take root.

The third legacy is fraternity without power, the source of peace. Francis did not want a pyramidal Order, but a circular fraternity: no one called prior, but all called lesser brothers, each washing the feet of the other; the superior as minister and servant, in the style of a mother, capable of closeness and care.

I know that this is one of your strongest desires: a real synodality in which your voice and vision truly matter, and where authority never slips into authoritarianism or clericalism. I have learned, not without suffering, that such fraternity is not received ready-made; it must be built. It begins with you – with the way you will exercise the authority that many of you already carry on your shoulders; with the way you will stand beside older friars, neither in rebellion nor in passive submission, but in a dialogue that safeguards belonging. It is from this style, and not from slogans, that the peace we are sent to bring to the world is born.

Mercy, Church and Eucharist, fraternity of peace: these are the three legacies. They are not topics to discuss and archive. They are the seed to be made fruitful in your lives.

5. Protagonists, on the Journey Toward 2027

For this reason, we wanted a Chapter and not a course. You are not here as recipients of formation, but as protagonists, with your proposals and your active participation.



The days ahead will be participatory and synodal. We shall have insights that open horizons, with new and stimulating perspectives; but above all we shall need your voice, your mutual listening, and the courage to speak truthfully and freely about what inspires you and what concerns you.

And there is a further horizon. What we mature here will not remain within these walls. We ask you to develop concrete proposals for the General Chapter of Pentecost 2027, which for the first time we shall celebrate in Asia, in Vietnam.

This is a sign that is dear to me: the voice of the younger generations will reach the discernment of the entire Order and help guide its journey. And the choice of Vietnam tells everyone that what may appear to some as a periphery is, in reality, a living heart of Franciscanism today.

For this reason as well, during these days you are not the periphery of the Order: you are its center.

6. The Seed Continues to Sprout

I conclude by returning to where we began: a seed.

Francis welcomed within himself the Spirit of Jesus until he himself became a seed of the Gospel, filled with fruits of eternal life. He did not leave us a static monument, but a living seed. Eight hundred years later, that seed is still in your hands: it is up to you to make it bear fruit.

This Chapter is born from an act of trust. The Order does not call you because you have all the answers, but because without your voice no answer will be complete. Here too the seed of Francis continues to sprout; it is up to us to make it bear fruit.

Not alone, however. We are pilgrims, not masters of the solution: we do not have all the answers, but we know toward Whom we are walking.

I entrust these days to Saint Mary of the Angels, Queen of the Order, beneath whose humble walls we have gathered, and to the intercession of our Seraphic Father Francis.

And may the Lord, who has begun this good work in you, grant you the joy of bringing it to completion.

May the Lord give you peace!

Br. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM

Minister General

Prot. 115453/MG-099-2026

Ministro generale