

## Meeting of the Presidents of the Conferences

*Homily 22nd November 2024*

Listening is a key word in our service as ministers. Even before that, it is a fundamental human dimension. Moreover, it is precisely the importance of listening that gives us reason for how it is not an easy virtue. We ourselves, in our service, are often convinced that we are listening; In reality, we should check ourselves well and realize how many times we already have the answer, we rather try to convince the other and we struggle to mature a cordial and attentive listening.

Luke's Gospel today presents us with a simple people who even hang on Jesus' lips to listen to him, while the leaders of the people want to shut Jesus' mouth, to silence his voice, not only not to listen to him, but to prevent everyone from listening to him. This short page of the Gospel is very dramatic. Not listening has consequences and can lead us to deny the other.

Those who are called to listen and serve, as the seer of the Book of Revelation told us, receive a "little book". As if to say: we do not have to listen to Scripture in order to understand and digest it all together. A word is addressed to us for every day, for every mission, for every moment of our service, a word that we can listen to, digest slowly and then proclaim it. Let's stay true to listening!

Revelation 10 that we heard has a parallel in Ezekiel 3, where the book completely satisfies the prophet and is as sweet as honey. With the psalm we repeated that the Lord's promises are sweet to our palate, that is, his word rejoices us whilst he nourishes us.

The prophet is then called to listen to and assimilate the word of God. Its sweetness indicates that in the beginning, when the word of God is received, there is joy; therefore, it is sweet because of what receives it (Psalm 118:103); but later it is bitter because of the suffering it causes:

*What has been sown in the stony ground is the man who hears the word and immediately welcomes it with joy, but has no root in himself and is inconstant, so that as soon as tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he is scandalized. (Mt 13:20-21).*

Let us be the first to verify ourselves in our service to our brothers and sisters. What sweetness and bitterness do we experience in accepting the word of the Lord? In Scripture, certainly, but also through the lives of our brothers and sisters, of our Entities and of the Order. This sweetness and bitterness also touches our body, as the Testament of St. Francis says, that is, our whole person in its entirety. Listening is not just intellectual, it involves the will and the affections.

Revelation 10 v 11 reminds us that John still has to prophesy about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings and this brings with it suffering because of the word of God. This is also what the Roman martyr Cecilia whom we remember today experienced.

We too still have to prophesy, that is, to bear witness to our brothers and sisters the word of God and the sweetness and bitterness that adherence to our form of life brings. We recognize how much we are still called to grow in listening and how hard it is often to carry within us the alternation of sweetness and bitterness, especially in the face of deafness, non-acceptance, passive resistance or sometimes even the opposition of some of our brothers and sisters.

Becoming men and women of listening, in the bitterness and sweetness of the word received and proclaimed, is a central part of our vocation and mission as ministers and servants of fraternity.

Let us ask the Spirit to grow in this and not to tire of being the first to assimilate the word that gives us life and to experience together the sweetness that is at the heart of our life as Friars Minor and the bitterness that asks us to renounce ourselves, in the evangelical sense of giving our lives for our brothers and sisters.

May the Lord accompany us on this journey, guarded by St. Francis.