



Closing homily
Br. Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General
Our Lady of the Angels, 19th July 2024



Dear Brothers,

May the Lord give you His peace!

It is a beautiful gift to be able to celebrate the Eucharist that concludes this meeting of the temporarily professed friars of Europe right here at the Portiuncula, this small plot of land that Francis had chosen for himself and his brothers as a permanent memory of the Lord's presence in his life. Here Francis established his home and finished repairing it at the beginning of his call (cf. *1Cel IX, 21*); he himself said *"that he knew by divine revelation that the Blessed Virgin, of all the churches erected in her honor, loved that one with particular predilection; and therefore the saint preferred it to all the others"* (cf. *2Cel XII, 19*). We can say that Francis *"here virtuously progressed; here it happily reached completion"* (*LegM 2:8*). Pausing in this blessed place reminds us that the form of life we have embraced remains a path of conversion, of permanent growth.

In particular, the time of temporary profession *"perfects the initial Franciscan formation in its various aspects, theoretical and practical, so as to make the Friar fit to lead more integrally the life and mission proper to the Order in today's world, and to prepare to make solemn profession"* (RFF 204). Perfecting means bringing to completion, making it grow, allowing development. It is therefore a question of accepting the promise that the Lord made to each one of us by calling us: for *"He who began this good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus"* (Phil 1:6). Today we renew our trust and our trust in God's work in us. Vocation comes from Him, who brings it to fulfilment in us along the different stages of life. The word of God today shows us King Hezekiah about to die and for this reason deeply frightened and depressed, as his tears suggest. For him it is the moment of truth, in which he is laid bare. This produces a "crisis", that is, a passage, a reversal of ideas and values. The hour of death and openness to a new encounter with the living God allow man to become aware of a different possibility of life, of a choice that opens up the future. God himself answers: if he had first declared Hezekiah's death, then he accepts the nuances of the human heart and is ready, consequently, to change his plans. The king will be able to live longer to complete the mission that God has entrusted to him.

The Lord still gives us time to live our lives as friars and minors in this time and in Europe, in a context that is increasingly post-secular and alien to any religious aspect. We may feel relegated to the margins of society and with little possibility of still being influential in it and in its increasingly plural cultures. Is it the end of Christianity and with it of religious life or the possibility of a new beginning? I strongly believe that this is the time to start again, but we must take the right path, what the Spirit shows us. It is not enough to reproduce models of the past in the illusion that they work, nor to launch ourselves without a vision and an evangelical

inspiration towards a future that we only imagine. Like Hezekiah, let us live in the present, even when it is one of fatigue and death, and let us still surrender ourselves to the power of God who opens a new future, which is the risen Christ Himself, living in the Spirit, Alpha and Omega of the cosmos and of history.

The Gospel of Matthew has given us a key word for this journey, which is precisely that of Francis: mercy. The context of the pericope is that of Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders of His people. This increases as Christ reveals Himself and the kingdom of God. When the truth enters, it sheds light, unmasking the darkness, removes what prevents us from seeing our reality and the love of God who wants to make us grow, to bring to fulfilment our life that He has called. It is the Lord Jesus Himself this light, this truth, this life. Saint Bonaventure reminds us that *"If anyone wants to attain Christian wisdom, he must necessarily begin with Christ"* (*Hexaëm.*, I, 10-11, in OSB VI/1, p. 53). "implementing mercy" grew in Francis through the encounter with lepers - his teachers of formation! – which opened him to that with Christ. Our brother's whole journey is therefore marked by the experience of mercy. It is the revelation of the authentic face of God, of who we are before him, like Hezekiah, of the content of our journey of conversion. Our fraternity, into which you have entered and in which you are walking together, also needs mercy very much. We are brothers who cannot hide our weaknesses and who no longer want to do so. We are all seekers of meaning, forgiven sinners, fragile and loved. If we allow the Good News of Jesus Christ to open us to this proclamation of mercy, it will be able to flow amongst us and around us, also thanks to your firm and joyful response, your patience with us, your firmness in asking us to live as Friars Minor, embracing the life we have freely chosen, shaking ourselves from torpor and sloth, rediscovering the paths of today's men, especially those of the little ones and the poor of these opulent societies of ours and at the same time in crisis. May the Virgin Mary accompany us on this journey and make us angels for our brothers and sisters and for the many today who proclaim a full life and inexhaustible mercy. I wish you all a good journey towards fulfilment, for a beautiful and good life, given totally to becoming a proclamation of the Gospel that saves.