



Homily in the Opening Mass of the VI Chapter of Mats Under Ten OFM

Santa Maria degli Angeli - July 5, 2026

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

This Eucharistic celebration has a special meaning for us Franciscan friars. With it, we inaugurate the Sixth Chapter of Mats for Under Ten is a meeting that brings together here at the Porziuncola about 130 young Friars Minor from the five continents, together with the friars of the General Government of the Order.

This meeting is called the Chapter of Mats, in memory of the chapters or assemblies that St. Francis and his brothers periodically celebrated here, at the church of Our Lady of the Angels, to dialogue and make decisions about their life and mission. One of these chapters is known as the Chapter of Mats because it was one of the last in which all the friars of the Order participated, who were so numerous, several thousand, that they had to be housed in huts of mats prepared for them around the small church of the Blessed Virgin.

As we celebrate the eight hundredth anniversary of the *Transitus* of St Francis, the Sixth Chapter of Mats for friars with less than ten years of solemn profession is intended first of all to be a concrete experience of international and intercultural fraternity, a sign of the beauty of a charism that continues to unite brothers from different peoples, languages and cultures.

It is also intended to be a time of listening and shared discernment, in which the hopes, questions and challenges experienced by the young friars can be welcomed and illuminated by the Gospel, so that paths and proposals for the future of our fraternity and our mission can emerge.

It is not a detail that this meeting is taking place right here at the Portiuncula. This is where our Order was born. Here St Francis understood his vocation more deeply. Here, he welcomed the first friars. Here he met twice a year with them to seek together how best to serve the Lord God. Here, eight hundred years ago, he wanted to return to end his earthly life.

St Francis was convinced that the Virgin Mary loved this small church with a special love. Moreover, he wanted the friars to always return here, to the source, when they needed to find the direction of the journey.

After all, we all need to return periodically to the sources. We need to rediscover what gives meaning to our lives, what sustains our faith, what renews our hope.

It is precisely to all of us today that Jesus addresses a word that seems written for this moment: "*Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*". Jesus



does not say: come to a doctrine, a system of ideas, a set of rules. He says: *Come to me*. He also adds: "*All of you who are weary and oppressed*."

Who amongst us does not carry some weight in his heart? There are the hardships of family, work, illness, and difficult relationships. There are worries about the future, the wounds of the past.

The friars who participate in this meeting also bring their questions and their struggles: the desire to be faithful to the vocation received, the challenges of the mission, fraternal life, pastoral responsibilities, perhaps received too soon, the cultural transformations of our time, the wars that bloody the world, and the many forms of material and spiritual poverty that we encounter every day.

Dear confreres, I would like to remind you that before being evangelizers, we are disciples. Before being responsible for something, we are brothers called by Someone. Before we take the gospel to others, we must allow the gospel to reach our hearts again.

Therefore, Jesus' answer is the same for everyone: *Come to me*.

The second invitation is: "*Learn from me*". Here Jesus surprises us. He does not say: learn from me to work miracles or to say beautiful words. He does not say: learn from me to be strong or powerful. He says, "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart." This is the true strength of the Gospel.

Francis of Assisi was also fascinated by this logic of God, the logic of the Beatitudes. He understood that true greatness does not consist in dominating, but in serving; not in possessing, but in giving oneself; not in putting oneself at the centre, but in leaving room for God and one's brothers and sisters.

The Porziuncola is the sanctuary of the little ones. According to biographers, St. Francis loved the Portiuncula because in it he contemplated, in a visible and concrete way, Mary's style: humility, poverty, availability and acceptance of divine grace. When Thomas of Celano recounts Francis' choice of the Portiuncula, he writes: "*Small in stature, humble in spirit and minor in profession, while living here on earth he chose for himself and his family a small portion of the world...*" (2C 18). Therefore, the chapel is small, St Francis considered himself small, and the fraternity wanted to be small.

The greatest temptation for every Franciscan generation is to forget the grace of the minority, seeking security in role, prestige, efficiency, structures, skills, and technologies.

The Gospel reminds all Christians that the Kingdom of God grows first of all through the little ones. This evangelical smallness is not weakness. It is freedom. It is the awareness that everything is grace. It is the ability to trust God more than one's own securities.

For this reason, Jesus, at the beginning of the Gospel, thanks the Father because the mysteries of the Kingdom are revealed to the little ones. The little ones are not naïve. They are the ones who have an open heart. They are those who know that they need God, who know how to discover and marvel at the signs of God's presence in the world, those who are able to open themselves to listening to others, always willing to let themselves be guided by the values of the Gospel.



The first reading, taken from the prophet Zechariah, presents us with a surprising king: "*Behold, your king is coming to you, righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey*". A king who destroys the weapons even of Ephraim and Jerusalem and proclaims peace to all nations.

It reminds us that God saves the world without the force of arms. His power is manifested in humility. His victory passes through meekness. His royalty is expressed in service. Is this not perhaps the prophecy that Francis embodied with his whole life?

In a world marked by competition, polarization, violence and wars, the Franciscan charism retains an extraordinary timeliness. The Brothers from countries wounded by wars or conflicts know this well. Our world needs men and women who proclaim peace not only with words but with their way of life.

The peace that Jesus gives is not only the absence of conflicts. It is a life reconciled with God, with others and with oneself.

How much we need this peace today! It is this peace that Francis received from the Lord, and it is this peace that he sought to spread everywhere.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us entrust all of us to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who is venerated here at the Portiuncula as Our Lady of the Angels. At the beginning of this meeting, we ask for the grace of fidelity and the joy of the Gospel for our friars.

Let us ask for the grace of unity and fidelity in mission for the Church. Let us ask for the gift of peace for the world.

In this way, returning to our homes and communities, we will be able to carry in our hearts the same certainty that sustained St. Francis: that God continues to work great things through those who entrust themselves to Him with humility and simplicity. Amen.

Br. Ignacio Ceja Jiménez, OFM

Vicar General