



Homily September 28, 2017

Closing of the Annual Ongoing Formation Conference

My dear brothers, the Lord give you peace!

The theme of this year's session for ongoing formation has focused our attention on the interpersonal and intercultural dimensions of our lives and our work as brothers here in the Curia, in service to the mission of the Order. The speakers have called our attention to the importance of learning how to listen to the life experience of the other without judging, and opening our lives to the possibility of a "second conversion" that has implications not only for our individual lives but for the life of the fraternity, and by way of our service, for the life of the Order.

One very important aspect has emerged in all of the presentations: the importance of dedicating time to listening, accompanying, and developing an ever greater capacity to welcome another brother, another person without condition, allowing them share their vision of life in a way that is mutually enriching. All of our presenters have attempted to demonstrate what can happen to us if we become capable of receiving the gift of the other person in his or her totality: the deepening of our own awareness of those hidden elements of meaning (culture) that we have appropriated, that help us construct our lives, provide us with meaning and enable us to welcome the life experiences of others in a way that enriches our self-understanding, and our capacity to express love, mercy, and compassion.

"And he kept trying to see him," we are told of Herod in the Gospel story today. What was Herod trying to see? What did he hope to learn or experience from an encounter with Jesus? Perhaps the answer to this question is found in the first part of the Gospel where we hear about Herod's dealings with those who did not think or act according to his ideas. John the Baptist's fate, his beheading, came as a direct result of Herod's refusal to listen, to try to understand, or even to simply allow or tolerate alternative expressions or ideas of how the world works, and of how people might live well with one another. It also is clear that Herod simply had no times for those who did not accept his vision of life, of how people are to relate to one another, and how they are to relate to power. In the end, Herod's narrow mindedness literally and imaginatively 'killed' the dream of others as the reference to the beheading makes imminently clear. How many times have we, because of our inability to open our minds and hearts to others in fraternity, in the Order, in the Church, and beyond, how many times have we killed the dream of others, seeking to impose our understanding of life as the only 'true' or 'authentic' way of life?

There is yet one more element contained within the Gospel that is most relevant for the theme that we have been exploring together these days. St. Matthew tells us elsewhere in the Gospel that the only way for us to come to 'see' or 'experience' the person of Jesus is for us to come with open hearts, hearts that are pure, that are sincere. We must be willing to take our shoes off, to enter into Jesus' world, his vision and life experience, taking to the road with him in his pursuit of the Kingdom of God. So many of the Gospel stories reveal to us that it is only when we 'take to the road with Jesus, walking with him, listening and learning from him, that our lives might be transformed. This is certainly what happened in the life of our Holy Father Francis.

My brothers, we must not underestimate the incredibly positive fact that we already are on the road towards Jesus, walking with brothers from different cultures, different theological, ecclesial, geographical, and socio-cultural realities and ways of perceiving the world. And we also know that for us Friars Minor, the only way for us to come to a deeper and more authentic experience of Jesus is for us to keep walking together, learning from one another, experiencing the amazing gift of personal and collective transformation as we enter more deeply into the mystery of the Trinity, and as we enter more deeply into the lives of one another. Let us begin...