

Homily for the Sending Mass of our Brothers for South Sudan

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, Superior General

The Founder in the first meditation for the time of Retreat reminds us of the message of Paul to his disciple Timothy, a message that has inspired hundreds of generations of Brothers in their missionary service: God wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2,4). It seems to me that we cannot find a better motive for Brothers Anton, Marco Antonio and Agustín at the moment when they are to begin their mission in Sudan, being sent not only by the Institute but also by the combination of men's and women's Religious Life which at the level of the two Unions of Superiors General has made its own this important project.

Being part of a plan of salvation does not mean considering oneself superior to others, and, within the messianic plan, bringing them a richness that they do not possess. It is a matter rather of being humble instruments so that each person may discover that he/she is infinitely loved, that his/her life is of worth and has full meaning. It is a matter of coming close to people, sharing their lot and their hopes, their sufferings and yearnings, acknowledging their values and letting oneself be evangelised by them. This is undoubtedly a grace and a stimulus for all of us, for our Institute and for the Church, called above all to be present where circumstances of pain and poverty make our presence more necessary.

It seems to me that the words written by Mons. Pierre Claverie O. P. in 1996, on the occasion of the martyrdom of the seven Trappist monks in Algeria, just forty days before being assassinated himself, are the best explanation of the missionary project on which our Brothers are being sent today:

From the beginning of the Algerian drama they often asked me: What are you people doing there? Why do you stay? We are there because of the crucified Messiah. For nothing more and for no one else. We have no interests to safeguard nor influence to preserve. Nor are we motivated by any masochistic perversion or suicide. We hold no power. We remain in Algeria as at the bedside of a friend, reaching out a hand in friendship to him, soothing his brow, because of Jesus since He is the one who is suffering in this violence which pardons no one, newly crucified in the flesh of innocent thousands. Like Mary, like John, we stand, here at the foot of the cross on which Jesus is dying, abandoned by his own, ridiculed by the people.



Is it not perhaps essential for a Christian to be there, in the places of suffering, of abandon? Where could the Church of Jesus Christ be except there above all? Though it may appear paradoxical, the strength, the vitality, the hope, the fruitfulness of the Church come from there. In no other place and in no other way. All the rest is just smoke in your eyes, a worldly illusion. The Church deceives itself and the world when it presents itself as a power in the midst of other powers, as an organization, even a humanitarian one, or as a spectacular evangelical movement. It can shine, but it cannot burn with the love of God strong as death" (Ws 8, 6). In effect, it is a question of love, before everything else love, only love. A passion for which Jesus has given us the taste and marked out the way: A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." (Jn 15, 13)

Brothers, you too are called to begin this mission because of our crucified Messiah. You are not a power or a powerful or prestigious organisation. You have no interests to safeguard, no influences to preserve. For you it is a matter rather of love, and only love, of a passion which like that of Jesus should bring about the creating of opportunities of life in abundance for the South Sudanese, far beyond the ethnic and religious differences of those you are being called to save through the education and formation of teachers which represents one of the privileged ways of loving the Lasallian charism.

The Institute and the Religious Life are accompanying you. Rest assured that our support and our prayer will not be lacking for you. Last week at the Conference of the Brothers Visitor of RELEM (Europe and the Near East) I saw with pleasure how this South Sudan project was mentioned several times, and various Brothers called upon the Region to make it their own and to give it their full support. In the important historic moment that it falls to us to be experiencing, uniting our efforts with the members of other religious congregations, we are sure that you will contribute in an efficacious way to the current normalisation process that Sudan is experiencing, inspired by the Gospel values of pardon, mercy, justice and peace.

In the name of the Institutes accept our profound gratitude for your witness, and the promise of our prayers to the Lord that he may continue strengthening you in faith, hope and love. Sudan and you Brothers are an icon for us of what it means to have open eyes and burning hearts in the way our last General Chapter invited us.