

Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord
Homily at the transition of authority Mass of the Province SEC
2 Pt 1,16-19; Ps 96; Mt 17,1-9

Dear Sisters,

We celebrate the conclusion of a six-year period of leadership and the beginning of a new one, with the delivery that Sr Joanne makes to Sr Colleen of the SEC Province of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. And it is beautiful that this important and significant event occurs on the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.

It seems to me a providence from the Lord who invites you to begin this new stage with the message of the Transfiguration, which St John Paul II had chosen as the icon of consecrated life, to remind us that it is called to climb the mountain, the place of God's revelation, and contemplate the shining face of Christ, so as to remain gripped by Him and by his Glory and want to remain forever with Him - "*Let us make three tents here*" - , to then descend to the plain, where the lives of men and women are at stake between joys and hopes, heartaches and tribulations, and make us compassionate. Here, my dearest Sisters, is the challenge of Salesian life in the United States and Canada today: to reflect the beauty of the face of Jesus in the life of the Sisters and communities, so that men, especially young people, feeling their tenderness and solidarity, bless and praise God.

This is in perfect harmony with what Consecrated Life seeks to live more intensely today: to be witnesses of God's love in the world. How beautiful, attractive and fruitful is the experience and reality of those who, having climbed the mountain and having contemplated the shining face of Christ, are able to radiate their radiance on others and become the light of the world. This is precisely the element that makes consecrated life significant and effective, because it is visible and credible! And what a difference compared to those who are like those stars whose light illuminates the earth, even if they have been dead for so many years. It is not a question of illusionism: it is true light but inert, which continues its journey through the ether, even if its source has already been extinguished for years. They have completed their cycle and closed their story.

Sometimes, in fact, it seems to me that religious life - here and there - is more similar to those stars that still light up without having any more life, simply because there are still structures that are standing and there are still activities, but there are no longer life, nor novelty, nor joy, nor fruitfulness, but inertia. In such a situation it is only a matter of time to disappear.

The transition of leadership is an opportunity to reaffirm the great convictions of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, because you are certain that you still have so much to do in this part of the world, that you cannot remain at the level of survival but of prophecy, provided that you renew the passion of the "*Da mihi animas*" and persevere in fidelity to the Life Project of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to its spirituality, to its pedagogical method.

However, it is important that we can be like Paul who, uncontrollable in his enthusiasm for the superiority and greatness of the New Testament, exclaimed with evangelical parrhesia: «And all of us, uncovered, reflecting the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are transformed in that same image, from glory to glory, according to the working of the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18).

That's what matters, to reflect the glory of the Lord and thus be transformed into the image of the Son! This is the true mission of consecrated life in the world today. And the key to reaching this goal can be found in the readings we have heard.

In the Gospel story we see Jesus leading his three closest friends to Mount Tabor, those whom he calls closest to share the mystery of his life. The Transfiguration, in fact, collects the synthesis of the

mystery of Jesus: divinity shines in his humanity. "His clothes become white as snow and his face shone like the sun". The Lord's human flesh is not only not an obstacle to revealing God, but finds its most intense expression and its truest beauty.

Religious life will only be able to renew itself, it will be able to become a reflection of the shining face of Jesus, and it will be able to be transfigured if it climbs the mountain, an image very dear to the biblical tradition to indicate the place of experience of intimacy with God. The Lord was transfigured by praying, and we too will be transfigured only by prayer. Without continuous prayer our life is not transfigured but disfigured. To be transfigured is to learn to see reality, namely our God, Christ, with wide eyes. And there we will listen to his voice, which invites us to follow his paschal journey as the only path to the fullness of life and happiness. Then we will understand how in Jesus Moses and Elijah reach their fulfillment. Then we will learn and be able to assume the logic of the Gospel and of the cross. This is the contemplation that transfigures and fills the disciples with enthusiasm, who do not hesitate to exclaim: «Lord, it is good for us to stay here; if you want, I'll make three tents here». And this is not alienation or intimism, because in fact Jesus makes them get up and go down to the plain, where men and women live and die, in the everyday life, gray and without light, to be in their midst a sign of God's presence.

How can we ensure that our personal, community and institutional salesian life be a transfigured presence of God? How can we ensure that the face of God shine on our face? Only through personal experience, like Peter, James and John who saw the greatness of Jesus, did they hear the heavenly voice proclaiming him the beloved Son, and therefore recognized themselves as bearers of a greater grace than that of the prophets. Thus they were able to confirm from personal experience, not from hearsay, the veracity of the prophecies, of which Jesus is the fulfillment.

We must therefore accept the invitation to withdraw to one side with Jesus, climbing up a high mountain: that is, to accept the effort of taking those concrete steps that distance us from an exaggerated pace of life and require us to drop useless burdens. If we know how to pause for a while in silence, we will perceive his radiant Presence. The light of Jesus on Tabor makes us understand that pain is not the last word, nor is death. The last and only Word is this beloved Son, made a suffering Servant out of love. Let us listen to him as he shows us the way to life: life resurrected because given. Let's listen to him, while he shows us the daily steps with absolute clarity. Let us listen to him as he invites us to descend with him towards his brothers. Then the morning star will rise in our hearts and, illuminating our inner gaze, will make us perceive - in the opacity of things, in the darkness of events, in the face of every man - God «all in all», eternal goal of the pilgrimage over time.

Soon, when we recite the Creed, we will confess Jesus "God from God, light from light". Let us ask the Lord for the grace that, together with our profession of faith, our eyes be capable of recognizing his beauty in the humble appearances with which he clothed himself, because the Lord's transfiguration begins with a certain change in our gaze. May the Lord purify our hearts to learn to feel astonishment like Moses before the burning bush, because only the pure in heart have been promised the vision of God. We implore interior poverty, which makes us attentive to his Presence in daily life, capable of perceive a ray of his light even where everything appears dark and incomprehensible, thus passing from that drowsiness of which the Gospel speaks to authentic vigil, to vigilance of the heart. May the Lord make us silent and praying, because He is the Word that came out of silence, which the Father asks us to listen to, and when we awaken, we will be given the inexhaustible joy of the resurrection. Finally, let us ask for the gift of being true disciples of him, willing to lose our lives every day for him, for the gospel, while we reflect the light and beauty of his face in the young.

Dear Sr Colleen, here you have what God expects from you as new Provincial. You are called to do in the Province what the soul does in the body: it vivifies (therefore energizes), unifies (diversity in unity) and gives identity (sense of belonging and protagonism) to the person. It means to carry out your service in union with the Mother General, with charity and a pastoral sense, looking at forming a provincial sisterly community. With the help of your Council, you can animate the religious life and the apostolic action of the provincial community, take care of the formation of the sisters, especially of the novices and young Sisters.

Authority, in the religious perspective, is a charism, a ministry ordered to the growth of the Body of Christ. As such, it is a visibility of the only authority: that of Christ Jesus. Jesus, in fact, is not only the supreme Authority, but the only authority: he is the Lord! Whoever is appointed Provincial must be aware that she is only a vicar, a true and proper vicar of the One Lord, and that her authority is a diaconia, a service to the sisters entrusted to her, and therefore that her task is to leave the Lord Jesus to be the protagonist. Religious authority is a ministry fundamentally oriented to people, rather than to structures, to the human, vocational, charismatic growth of each of them, so that they can experience the Love with which God loves them. This is done – sure! – through acceptance, trust, dialogue, sharing of joys and sufferings, attitudes which, however, in order to become authentic and effective, must be signs and consequences of a previous personal identification with Christ: authority represents, does not replace the only Lord.

Authority, which etymologically means to grow, aims at the formation of humanly mature and accomplished personalities, the result of life criteria that help to discern in the various situations of existence, of well-motivated choices assumed as a life program, of a self-giving so generous that it allows to love to the end. And it is well known to all of us, because it is the evangelical law, that in order for others to grow one must diminish oneself: those who make themselves available can give themselves.

Religious authority, which exercises the service of animation, seeks above all communion through the care of unity in diversity, which is nourished by the experience of God, by personal and community prayer, and which is expressed in the experience of community, of fraternity, so that the sisters truly live and work together, with deep interpersonal relationships, with the ability to share one's own spiritual experience, with true sisterly friendship.

At the same time, religious authority favors the incarnation of the charism in different contexts, (and this Province is very multicultural), so that it could be effectively inculturated and enrich the whole Institute, whose unity cannot be confused with uniformity. In fact, the charism is called to take root in different cultures and express itself in language, in style, in the way of facing life and developing the mission.

Religious authority, precisely because it acts in the name of Our Mother Church, has the responsibility of strengthening the *sensus Ecclesiae*, putting the Institute in harmony with her magisterium, promoting openness and availability, collaborating actively in ecclesial life and in building the Kingdom.

Religious authority is attentive like an ever alert sentinel, according to the vocation given to Ezekiel; or rather, it is like a sensor of history, which registers the movements of the world, like a believing reader of reality, trying to interpret God's will in historical dynamisms (social, political, ecclesial), because the vocation is inseparable from the mission, because when God calls us it is because he has his marvelous plan of salvation in his mind and heart. Anyone who wants to make God's voice heard by others must be committed to listening to his Word: in the Church of Christ, authority is born of obedience to God.

And, last but not least, authority is government, and as such responsible for dynamic fidelity to the charism of the Institute, responsible for identity and unity, for the realization of the Life Project of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and for the historical project which takes place from time to time to implement the orientations and guidelines of the General Chapter.

Before this sublime and demanding picture, like the fact of having to be the mother of the provincial community, there is the consoling promise of the Lord that when he calls someone, he equips her with the necessary baggage and guarantees her the gift par excellence for carrying out the mission entrusted: «Do not be afraid. The Holy Spirit will come upon you» (cf. Lk 1:30.35), the Archangel Gabriel said to Mary, after letting her know that God was counting on her to make her the Mother of her Son.

Mother Mazzarello will undoubtedly be a model from whom to draw inspiration and criteria to animate this Province entrusted to you, dear Sr Colleen. And Mary will be your mother and teacher. Once again, our great thanks to Sr Joanne for the generous and outstanding service to the Province these last six years. And to you Sr Colleen the best wishes at the beginning of your service!

Don Pascual Chávez V.
Haledon – August 6, 2023