
HOMILY TO THE DELEGATION “MOTHER OF THE CHURCH”

15/01/2024

We have just heard these words of Jesus: *“No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins. But one puts new wine into fresh wineskins!”*

What Jesus wants to say with these words, is that the ancient Jewish practices and customs are incompatible with the new religion He is bringing. In a sense, He does not disqualify the old wineskins, which may still be suitable for containing the old wine, but He decisively states that they are no longer suitable for containing the new wine of the Gospel. The message is clear: to accept the changes brought forward by Jesus, one must adopt a new behavior, a new style. In the context of our Congregation today, the message of the Gospel is an encouragement to find new means and suitable structures, so that the *“new wine is in new wineskins.”*

These words of Jesus and their profound novelty reach us in a very specific context. Gathered here, around the Table of the Word and the Eucharist, are the members of the “Mother of the Church” Delegation in Rome, along with the Regional Superiors of the nations it comprises, representing all its members scattered across six countries. This could be the last meeting of its extended council, given the likely restructuring being planned.

We are indeed facing a new context for the life of the Congregation, different from that of 2006, year in which it was created. At that time, the contextual framework of the old delegations *Our Lady of Westminster* (London) and *Queen of the Universe* (Boston) and the needs of small missionary presences in nations very distant from each other (Kenya, the Philippines, Jordan, India, and Korea) received a response from the Superiors that, over time, proved effective, successful, and fulfilled the Congregation's needs and expectations.

However, there are now new situations and challenges that the “old” solution struggles to manage effectively. I speak of the growth in mission nations, the need for greater decentralization from Rome in planning; I speak of strengthening the sense of family and, therefore, empowering all brothers in decision-making; I speak of a greater sense of autonomy, especially in the economic aspect; I speak of the right - I use this expression - that the Orionine brothers in each nation have to be on the front lines, protagonists of their journey of fidelity to Don Orione with a more direct relationship with the General Superior and his Council; finally, I speak of the greater representativeness that these new realities must have in the various communion and participation bodies of the Congregation, especially in the General Chapter.

It was precisely the last General Chapter that motivated us, through Action Line No. 3, to express “a new model of Religious Life,” achieved also through discernment about “relationship and governance structures.” Certainly, restructuring the delegation will not be enough to achieve this new model, but - yes - we can seize the opportunity of this canonical-constitutional restructuring to “renew everything!” as Don Orione wanted. However, we must remember that strategic operations in structures will mean nothing if there is no commitment to a true revolution of intentions, a revolution of the heart. The true possibilities of renewal (“new wine”) are those that renew hearts and not structures. This is why, in the future of these new realities (“new wineskins”), there must be an authentic commitment to realizing the dream that the Chapter proposed for “a new model of religious life,” i.e., transformation: *“from religious who conceive community as a 'hotel' to religious who live*

it as a 'fraternal' community; from consecrated people closed in on themselves to consecrated people 'going out,' capable of becoming close with the style of tenderness and compassion; from religious who operate in activities individually to religious who place themselves in a service style and as an expression of the community; from a lifestyle and language linked to the role to a more fraternal and synodal one; from standardized prayer to a more creative and vital one." For this, we must move with Don Orione's heart!

Dear Brothers, there is a great risk of thinking that a new structure will be enough to achieve results in line with the proposal of authentic Orionine consecrated life. If we settle for only a canonical-constitutional measure of multiplying delegations, a decree with new statutes, we risk failure, and it will happen as the Gospel says: *"the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins."* Keep this well in mind: a restructuring process in the perspective of "New wine in new wineskins" cannot leave unchanged the structures of life and relationship within the Congregation and within the involved nations. The future must see us "different," more consistent with our state of life, with a new way of being and doing. Everything must happen according to Pope Francis's thought, expressed with a paradox: "continuity in discontinuity," which in our case means maintaining "continuity" with the great principles of Orionine consecrated life, in the "discontinuity" of a new structural provision.

In 1926, Don Orione wrote to Don Montagna: *"For the good of this house... I deemed it necessary to make some changes in the Lord."* Today, these words are addressed to us because we are convinced of the need for changes. However, *"A change in structures that does not generate new convictions and attitudes will make those same structures sooner or later become corrupt, heavy, and ineffective"* (EG, 189). Therefore, the changes must be guided not only by strategic principles but by those of Religious Life that promote, in addition to restructuring, the spiritual and human conversion of the religious.

I ask you not to focus solely on the administrative organization of this provision, letting the vitality and dynamism of consecrated life diminish, with the risk that brothers fall into a state of "lukewarmness," i.e., a lack of enthusiasm in action, a lack of passion or conviction, a comfortable existence remaining more in the house or in the room than close to the poor. Don Orione assures us: It will be a relative evil if we lose the opportunity for a strategic provision, but the Congregation will be entirely lost if we tolerate lukewarmness! Pope Francis says that lukewarmness *"turns our life into a cemetery"* where our enthusiasm, our ardor in following Don Orione, our creativity, the possibilities of entering into people's problems and being instruments of charity to promote the transformation of their lives, are buried.

May the Lord free us from the temptation *"to adopt a purely functional and worldly mentality, which leads to placing our hope only in human means and destroys the testimony of poverty that Our Lord Jesus Christ lived and taught us"* (Pope Francis to religious, 16/08/2014). If there are to be new delegations, may they be "for the greater good of the body" that is the Congregation.

Dear ones, I ask you to feel these words of the Founder directed to you: *"What I recommend to you in the Lord is always to trust much in the heart of Jesus and not to be discouraged. In the servants of God, discouragement must not enter, nor should any sadness: it is unbecoming to lose courage under such a master: our hope, our trust, our courage, our very life, is all founded on our God."* (19/04/1927)

I bless you abundantly and encourage you! Hail Mary and onwards!

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