

Opening Address – Manila Election Chapter, January 3-4, 2013

Dear (still) M. Prioress Lumen Gloria,
Dear Mo. Irene,
Dear Sisters of Manila Priory,

*“ When your little boat
Anchored in the harbor for a long time
Gives you the deceiving impression
To be a house,
When your little boat
Starts to create roots
In the immobility of the pier
Launch to the deep*

*It is necessary to save at any cost
The traveler soul of your little boat
and your pilgrim soul.*

*Accept the surprises
Which turn your projects upside down,
Disperse your dreams,
Give a total new dimension
To your day and, perhaps
Also to your life.*

It is not by chance.

*Give freedom to the Father
So that He Himself may weave
The thread of your life....*

Helder Camara

We are in the Philippines and it seems to me that this poem of Dom Helder Camara, late Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Brazil on the boat of our life fits very well. It fits not only for Mother Prioress Lumen Gloria, Vicaress General elect, it fits to all of you in this crucial situation and it fits very much to the Prioress who will be elected.

After only one year you are assembled again for the election of your Prioress. In a hurry you scheduled Discernment Days for the different clusters. I am sure it is not necessary to speak here again about the qualities of a Prioress. We know them all, but there is nobody to have them all, and precisely this is our chance. It is our opportunity to become aware again that our religious life, our Missionary Benedictine life, is not only a task (which

needs qualification) but first of all it is a GIFT, a gratuitous gift from God to be accepted and lived.

Our world in turmoil, the poor who cry in their need, human beings who thirst for life, the threatened creation – they call for our action, demand from us a response. You, the Sisters of the Manila Priory, engage in this task, in education, social work, advocacy, etc with qualified Sisters and you are doing excellent work. But there is something more about it; you do it as persons gifted with the Missionary Benedictine charism.

Now, the Prioress will be taken from you. Her task from now on will be different. She will have to put her energy in developing the GIFT of Missionary Benedictine Charism, in each Sister in each community and mission, in the Priory as a whole, irradiating to the whole Congregation, as we are one body in Christ.

What does this mean?

Each Sister to be able to fulfill her assigned task properly needs to be happy in her vocation. She needs to live *Conversatio Morum* as an answer to the loving call of our Lord. And she needs a community of peace and love.

The main task of the superior therefore is, as our Constitutions say clearly, “to work for the upbuilding and renewal of the community, to cultivate a spirit of peace and joy in the community, to strengthen the Sisters in their commitment to the Lord.” (Const. VII).

We are members of a missionary Church. Religious life by itself is missionary and our way of life as Missionary Benedictine Sisters adds to this missionary responsibility. Once, in a training for Superiors, I heard the speaker say: In a religious community all Sisters have to have an outward look (meaning being missionaries) - all Sisters except the Superior, who has to look inward (meaning she has to create conditions that Sisters can be true missionaries) While there is some truth in this statement, it may also mislead us because it is really not possible - nor feasible - that the upbuilding and renewing of the community, the cultivation of a spirit of peace and joy, unity and love is the responsibility of the Superior alone. These can only be achieved when each Sister gives her best contribution to this task. After all, a Superior alone does not make a religious community.

Therefore when we talk about the qualities of the Superior, we must stress that those qualities should be qualities found in one or the other way in all Sisters. Then it will not be so difficult to find leaders for our communities. Again during our last General Chapter the request for preparing leadership came up. You will find in the General Chapter Message page 7 Direction I on *Conversatio Morum* something about leadership but without further explanation you might just overlook it. The sentence reads: “*Conversatio Morum helps us to look at leadership not with the secular eyes of dominance and power but with the eyes of faith. The exercise of our leadership concretizes the monastic and Missionary Benedictine values of humble service and faithful living of our charism*”.

The fact is that the recommendation to prepare leaders has been repeated in many past General Chapters. Why do we have a lack of leaders? The thinking of our outgoing Generalate was - what I tried to say above: The qualities we expect from a Superior should be nourished from the beginning of the Missionary Benedictine Formation. They are written nicely in our Constitutions:

**seeking God's will, humble service, love for the Sisters,
kindness, firmness, initiative , open mind and heart,
woman of prayer, deep faith in Christ, aware of her
capabilities and limitations, trust in God.**

Other qualities - or better – skills, for example, administrative skills - can be acquired through studies and courses. Yet unless the basic Missionary Benedictine values have taken root in her, the sister will not be able to develop the GIFT of leadership that we need in our communities.

Dear Sisters, being aware of the unique contribution of each Sister, not only in this election but in the life and mission of the Manila Priory, and being aware of the gift and the task entrusted to us, let us with all openness trust in the Lord who gave us the gift and the task to be his followers as Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing. The Holy Spirit be with us all in this process which we are about to begin.

Last but not least: take courage! St. Benedict puts the central piece (according to Sr. Aquinata) of the 64th chapter on the election of the Abbot in a wonderful way: The abbot should mistrust his own weakness and should remember that the bent cane should not be broken !!!!! (RB 65, 13)

With this in mind, we shall now start our Election Chapter, which I herewith open officially.

M. Angela Strobel OSB
Prioress General