



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE CONGREGATION
OF THE MISSIONARIES OF St. CHARLES (SCALABRINIANS)**

*Consistory Hall
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[Multimedia]

Extemporaneous speech of the Holy Father

Prepared speech of the Holy Father

EXTEMPORANEOUS SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER

I prepared some words to share with you but I consign these to the General Father and I prefer to speak from my heart and, if there is time, to offer the opportunity to ask some questions. First of all, I would like to thank you for what you do. I had the grace of knowing you before I was Archbishop of Buenos Aires because your students studied in our faculty. They were very good! Then as Archbishop I had your assistance in that city that had many immigration issues. Thank you very much! And now thank you for having given us one of the two Undersecretaries for Migrants. Both of them work very well.

“I was a stranger”: This word stirred a commotion in me when you uttered it. It is easier to welcome a stranger than to be welcomed, and you have to do both things. You have to teach, to help welcome the foreigner, and to provide the nations that have everything or have enough with every opportunity in order to use these few words which you expressed: how to welcome strangers. The Word of God truly strikes me: this is already emphasized in the Old Testament: to welcome the stranger “because remember that you were once a stranger”. It is true that today,

there is a wave of closure to foreigners, and there are also many situations of human trafficking of foreigners: foreigners are exploited. I am the son of immigrants and I remember in the postwar period — I was a boy of 10 or 12 years — when some Polish people, all of them migrants, came to work where my father worked, and how they were well received. Argentina has this experience of welcoming because there was work and there was also a need. And Argentina — in my experience — is a cocktail of migration waves, you know this better than I. Because immigrants build up a country as they built Europe. Because Europe was not born like this. Europe was made by many waves of migration throughout the centuries.

You once used a very ugly word: 'wellbeing'. But wellbeing is suicide because it leads you to two things: to closing doors so as not to be disturbed; only those who are useful for my wellbeing can come in. And on the other hand, to being unproductive, due to wellbeing. And we have this tragedy today: of a demographic winter and a closing of doors. This should help us somewhat to understand this problem of welcoming the foreigner. Yes he is a stranger, he is not one of us, he is someone who comes from outside. But how does one welcome a stranger? And this is the work that you do and that you help others to do: to form consciences in order to do this well. And I thank you for this.

But there is another dimension. We are not the masters who say: "Oh, if you are foreigners, come". No. We too are foreigners. And if we do not try to be welcomed by people, by those who are migrants and by those who are not, then there is another part missing in our conscience: we will become 'masters', masters of immigration, those who know more about migration. No. In your religious experience, there is a need to have this experience, of you too being migrants, at least cultural migrants. This is why I have always liked that your formation path also includes making the students travel, studying theology here, philosophy there ... so they may get to know various cultures. *Be a stranger*. And this is very important. From one's own experience of having been a stranger, whether through one's studies or postings, one's knowledge of how to welcome a stranger grows.

These two things, these two directions are very important and you must do these well. This is the first thing I wanted to say.

You also used another word: *pray*. A migrant prays. He prays because he needs so many things. And he prays in his own way, but he prays. It would be a danger — for all of us men and women of the Church, but more so for you, because of your vocation — to have no need of prayer. "Yes yes, I think, I study, I do things but I do not know how to beg; I do not know how to ask to be welcomed by the Lord, as I too am a migrant to the Lord". This is why I liked when you spoke about prayer: prayer which often is boring or brings you anguish. But being before the Lord and knocking on the door as does a migrant who knocks on the door. As did that 'migrant' in Israel — the Syro-Phoenician woman — who even managed to argue with the Lord (cf. Mt 15:21-28).

Knocking on the door of prayer. To be migrants within the experience of migration, as you do in your postings, and to be migrants in prayer, knocking on the door to be received by the Lord: this is a very important help.

And another phenomenon of migrants — let us think about the caravan that is travelling from Honduras to the United States — is “clustering”. Usually the migrant tries to move in a group. Sometimes he has to go alone but it is normal to cluster together because it makes us feel stronger in migrating. And in this, there is community. In soccer there is a possibility of ‘sweepers’ who can move according to circumstances, but there is no possibility with you. The ‘sweepers’ on your side fail. Always the community. Always in community precisely because your vocation is for migrants who group together. May you feel as migrants do. Yes, feel like you are migrants, migrants facing needs, migrants before the Lord, migrants among you. And for this reason, the need to cluster.

These three things came to my mind while you were speaking. These ideas which may help you. I thank you for what you do. You are an example. And you are also courageous because you often exceed limitations; you take risks. And taking risks is also a characteristic of migrants. They take risks. At times they even risk their lives. And this is something that helps: courageous, they know how to take risks. The prudence in you has a different tone from the prudence of a cloistered monk. They are different forms of prudence. Both are virtues but with different hues. Take risks.

There is still some time. I do not know if anyone would like to ask some questions to enrich the encounter. Come on!

I would first of all like to thank you for this encounter, even though the Superior General has already done so. To thank you on behalf of many migrants who asked me today to tell you that they love you very much. We would like to thank you for all your teachings, to thank you especially for what you do — the Superior recalled this today — and to ask you to never tire of asking the Church and us Scalabrinians, especially today, to be “evangelizers with Spirit”, as you said very well in ‘Evangelii Gaudium’ and in ‘Gaudete et Exsultate’. Thank you and always ask this of us!

Thank you! Another courageous one?

Your Holiness in your perspective, which is universal, where should we go?

You are not so numerous as to go wherever there is need. Today, there is need everywhere. The choice of location is made with discernment, discernment before the Lord and before the needs there are in the world. And it is not easy, it is not easy to choose this. There are two words that might help me to give you an answer. One is always the *magis*: always more, always more, because God attracts in this way. To go more. To go without ever tiring of going further, further, towards new frontiers. This is a dimension of a good choice. And the other is a phrase which, in

the first part of *Summa Theologica*, Saint Thomas says, a “motto”, in Latin: is “*Non coerceri a maximo, contineri tamen a minimo divinum est*”. (“Not to be confined by the greatest, yet to be contained within the smallest, is divine”). And it is not easy to make choices amid this tension: “*Non coerceri a maximo*” no, to have a horizon without being afraid but to “*contineri tamen a minimo*”: “this is divine”. And this is what God does because God is God of the universe, of the history of salvation, he is the *Maximus*. He is the God of the sacrifice of the Cross: the maximum in love. And he is also the God who cares for each person, of the “smallest”. He is capable of opening the door of Paradise to a thief.

With these two criteria: the *magis* and also this tension, I believe you can make some good choices.

And a good choice is the *ability to say goodbye*. This does not happen only to you but also to others. Once the moment has come that God asks for obedience to Him, or obedience through superiors, to say goodbye: do it. Saying goodbye is not easy. There are good farewells: you are happy to leave the position of Superior General today. You are happy. But saying goodbye is difficult because one becomes accustomed to the work, and gets used to the community, used to the people, one gets accustomed.... And to say no and go backwards, it takes courage and holiness to do it well. The ability to say goodbye when it is God’s will, whether for obedience, for other reasons, for inspiration that tells you: “enough”. This helps us make good choices. I do not know if I have responded but those two principles will help enough.

I am from here, but since I was 16, I grew up in the United States, and I now work with Latin American immigrants, especially Mexicans. After 20 years in the United States, their greatest suffering is not being able to return to bury their fathers. I would like a message for them.

It is the work of mercy which is probably the least understood. It is the one, please allow me the use of the word, which is most underestimated: to bury the dead. We underestimate it because generally the elderly die and we say, “well at last he has stopped suffering and at last he has stopped being a cause of concern for me. And all forms of selfishness are combined here.

Forgive me, I am speaking in Spanish....

But when we are facing these people who suffer because they cannot go to bury their parents, we are faced with the greatness of our faithful people because behind this there is, not only the work of mercy, there is also the Fourth Commandment and the faithful People of God love the fourth Commandment. They have the sense to know that there is also a blessing there. The not-so-faithful Catholics, those who like to look forward, may have the temptation to forget their parents and to not support them. Once, while explaining the commandments — I was a child — my grandmother told me a story: there was a very Catholic family, very good. The widowed grandfather lived with them, but in the end the grandfather became too old and would stain his

clothes at the table, his broth would spill or even his food. And at a certain point, the father made a decision and explained to his children that, in order to invite friends over, the grandfather would have to eat in the kitchen by himself. And he bought a table for the grandfather, well made and of good quality, but by himself. That way the family would be able to eat without this issue which was not so nice. Several days later, on returning from work, the father found his youngest son working with a hammer, some nails and some pieces of wood. “What are you doing? — “I am making a table — “But why a table?” — “For you, so you can use it when you get old”. I never forgot this thing. A story, a story that touches upon what you said: love for one’s parents. And the faithful People of God love their parents, love the elderly. In general, today’s society, this culture, runs the risk of considering the elderly as throwaway material, if not of letting them fall victim to many forms of disguised euthanasia, like not giving the right medication or giving too little of it because it is expensive, and so they die sooner. We also all have spiritual grandparents, spiritual fathers, in the congregation too. Your question makes me wonder: are your spiritual fathers well cared for in the congregation? Do you do everything to ensure that they can live in community as long as possible, or are you too concerned with sending them to a retirement home as soon as possible? Forgive me, but you broached the subject.

From Central America, just a few words. I am on mission in Guatemala. At this time Central America is weeping, Central America is crying out. And we see signs of welcome and signs of closure, many of which are even from the lay people involved. With her bishops, the Church is beginning to open her doors wider, thanks to your words and to the impetus that you are giving. In the face of so much suffering and so much clamour, our greatest temptation is to feel that God is not listening to us and we bring this clamour to you here, which I know is familiar to you and that you feel. And a thank you from Central America for your words of encouragement, your words of strength. Thank you, your Holiness.

Thank you. I understand that temptation, I understand. It is a temptation but one must knock, knock, knock without tiring. But in community, everyone, everyone together. Do it together. Each of us, but knowing that the entire community prays for this people that suffers so much.

Thank you, your Holiness. I am a Colombian, engrossed in the work of mentoring in Australia and Asia where the Lord is blessing us with numerous vocations. It is a great blessing for our Congregation. A message for our seminarians, not only the Asians but for the entire Congregation and for these people of the East.

Good; I will say something summing up what I have already said: that they be migrants in order to work with migrants. Migrants of God, migrants with the community, migrants of a people who feel they are on a journey, on a journey. And that they be migrants of God who bring practical things to prayer: that prayer is to fight, to fight along with God! And if one fights then one can achieve things. Tell them this: to have courage.

Now let us pray to Our Lady: *Hail Mary*....

PREPARED SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER

Dear Brothers,

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of your General Chapter and to address my cordial greeting to each one, beginning with the new Superior General, whom I thank for his words and to whom I wish all the best for his ministry.

At the heart of your reflection in these days you have placed the theme *Encounter and journey*. “*Jesus walked with them*” (cf. Lk 24:15). The reference is to the narrative of the disciples of Emmaus, who encounter the Risen Jesus along the road. He approaches them to walk with them and to explain the Scriptures to them. The Chapter represents a privileged moment of grace for your religious Family, called to assume this twofold manner of the divine Master in regard to those who are the objects of your pastoral care: *to proclaim the Word to them* and *to walk with them*. It is about finding ever new ways of *evangelization* and of *closeness* in order to achieve — with dynamic fidelity — your charism, which you place at the service of migrants.

Faced with today’s very extensive and complex migratory phenomenon, your Congregation draws the necessary spiritual resources from the Founder’s prophetic, ever current witness, and from the experience of many confreres who have worked with great generosity, since your origins 131 years ago, up to today. Today, as yesterday, your mission is carried out in difficult contexts, at times characterized by attitudes of suspicion and prejudice, if not outright rejection, toward the stranger. This spurs you ever more to a courageous and dedicated apostolic enthusiasm, in order to bring Christ’s love to those who, far from their homeland and family, are at risk of also feeling distant from God.

The biblical icon of the disciples of Emmaus shows that Jesus explains the Scriptures as he walks with them. Evangelization is done while walking with people. First and foremost it requires *listening* to people, listening to the history of the communities; above all the dashed hopes, the heartfelt expectations, the trials of faith.... First of all listening, and doing so with an attitude of ‘compassion’, of sincere closeness. How many stories there are in the hearts of migrants! Beautiful and awful stories. The danger is that they may be removed: the awful ones, obviously; but also the beautiful ones, because remembering them causes suffering. And thus the risk is that the migrant becomes an uprooted, faceless person, with no identity. But this is a most grievous loss, which can be prevented by listening, by walking alongside migrant communities and people. It is a grace to be able to do so, and also a resource for the Church and for the world.

After listening, like Jesus, it is important to *offer the Word and the sign of the broken Bread*. It is

fascinating to introduce Jesus to people of different cultures through Scripture; to recount to them his mystery of Love: his incarnation, passion, death and resurrection. To share with migrants the wonder of a salvation that is historical, is positioned, is even universal, is for everyone! To taste together the joy of reading the Bible, of embracing in it God's Word for us today; to discover that, through Scripture, God wants to give to these real men and women his Word of salvation, of hope, of liberation, of peace. And then to invite them to the Table of the Eucharist, where words cease and the Sign of the broken Bread remains: the Sacrament in which all is summed up, in which the Son of God offers his Body and his Blood for the life of those wayfarers, of those men and those women who risk losing hope and who, in order to avoid suffering, prefer to erase the past.

The Risen Christ also sends you, today, in the Church, to walk together with many brothers and sisters who travel as migrants on their road to Jerusalem and Emmaus. An ancient and ever new mission: exhausting and at times painful, but also capable of making one cry with joy. I encourage you to bring it forth with your own style, matured in the fruitful encounter between the charism of Blessed Scalabrini and the historical circumstances. Part of this style is the attention that you pay to the dignity of the human person, especially where it is most wounded and threatened. This includes the educational commitment with the younger generations, catechesis and family ministry.

Dear brothers, let us not forget that the condition of every mission in the Church is that we are united to the Risen Christ as branches of the vine (cf. Jn 15:1-9). Otherwise we are engaging in social activism. Therefore I repeat to you too the exhortation to *abide in Him*.

We first need to allow ourselves to be renewed in faith and in hope from Jesus, alive in the Word and in the Eucharist, but also in sacramental Forgiveness. We need to be with him in silent adoration, in the *lectio divina*, in the Rosary of the Virgin Mary.

And we need a healthy *community life*, simple but not banal, not mediocre. I appreciated when the Superior General said that the Spirit calls you to *experience among you communion in diversity*. Yes, as testimony but first and foremost as a joy for you, as a human, Christian and ecclesial richness. I also encourage you to continue the journey of sharing with the laity, facing today's challenges together; as well as attending to permanent formation courses.

Brothers, I thank you for this meeting. I pray for your Chapter, that it may bring you many good fruits! Let us ask it through the intercession of Mary our Mother, of Saint Charles Borromeo and of Blessed Giovanni Battista Scalabrini. I wholeheartedly bless you and all the Scalabrinian Missionaries. And you too, please, do not forget to pray for me.