

HOMILY FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE PROVINCE OF EUROPE SOUTH

Dear Fr. Gennaro and members of the Provincial Council,

Confreres present and those accompanying us from their communities via Streaming,

The authorities here present, Priests and Religious,

Laymen and Laywomen who have come to participate in this celebration.

1. Today we celebrate two important feasts: the Conversion of St. Paul and the inauguration of the Europe South Province. What do these two feasts have in common? I will point to three elements: **a life story, a conversion story, and the proclamation of the Gospel.** In this sense, today's date is significant because it touches on a man who went through an intense process of conversion and became a missionary, an apostle of the Gospel of Jesus. With this inauguration, then, the new province continues a history of evangelization, taking the best from each of the previous provinces and creating itself in this new one with intense missionary ardor and pastoral zeal. "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16), said St. Paul. And today he says it to us! Therefore, with this celebration every confrere and lay person is sent in the name of the Lord. We are not fulfilling here a mere canonical formality, but we are starting the new Province in the name of the Lord. This Province is born in the name of the Lord, on the feast day of the Apostle Paul, this tells us so many things!...
2. The provinces that are coming together - Rome, Naples, Madrid, Lisbon and Paris- each have a life story. They were born to pursue the Gospel as the goal of their lives. Each has made history and built on its own soil the history of plentiful redemption. The life story of the brethren, the men and women the poorest and most abandoned who have seen their lives transformed by the power of the Gospel we proclaim and who have also seen our weakness and frailty. Beginning with Alphonsus, until today there are many confreres who have spent their lives on behalf of those who "were weary and exhausted like sheep that have no shepherd" (Mt 9:36). How many memories of Redemption are present in this history that each one has written and continues to write! And now in this new chapter of our Redemptorist history, we are writing this history on stone, and this stone on which the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer was founded is the rock of Christ.
3. Listening to the Lord of History speaking to us through the Spirit, the Congregation makes its road to Damascus. Perhaps in the beginning, like Paul, we were blinded because we did not see the new road on which the Lord is leading us. It is on our road to Damascus, with our persecution and falls, that the Lord converts us. So, what we are celebrating is a story of conversion of heart and mindset as a Congregation that

meets the Lord, opens its eyes and wants to be faithful to him. What we are celebrating today concerns the whole Congregation, because we are one missionary body (cf. Const. 2).

4. The plurality of culture and mentality in the new province should not be an obstacle to mission. On the contrary, the experiences of evangelization tested by the hermeneutics of history must be brought into dialogue and from there extract the beauty of the experiences of proclaiming the Gospel and creating something new. Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Paul's conversion, how many things Paul did again after he discovered the Lord! And how many things our Redemptorist History, in equal measure, inspires us to do and create something new. Creative faithfulness, a gift of the Spirit, helps in this task. Just like Paul, every brother is called to be a servant of all, a Jew with the Jews, under the law, weak with the weak, for all to save them at any cost, all for the sake of the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 19-23), so that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). All of us are one in Christ Jesus. All this, dear brothers and sisters, in order to proclaim the Gospel to every creature (cf. Mk 16:15-18).
5. Dear confreres, do not be afraid of this new moment in history! Either we believe it comes from God or we make it a gift of the Spirit, or we turn away from Alphonsus and our charism! We are Missionaries of Hope in the footsteps of the Redeemer: "Strong in faith, rejoicing in hope, burning with charity, on fire with zeal, in humility of heart and persevering in prayer [...] and, denying themselves and always ready to undertake what is demanding, they share in the mystery of Christ and proclaim it in Gospel simplicity of life and language, that they may bring to people plentiful redemption." (Const. 20). This is very important for us: "denying themselves, they are always ready to face every trial to bring to all the abundance of Redemption."
6. The same Lord and His Spirit who was present at the founding of the Congregation is here today and sends each of us, in his name, to proclaim the Gospel. The Spirit who was with Jesus in the synagogue inspired Alphonsus, and He is here with us today. We will not go alone! We will go with Mary, our Saints, blessed, martyrs and our predecessors who will accompany us on our way to Damascus to always meet the Lord and the poorest and most abandoned on the side of the road whose cause we are destined to care for the Redeemer to whom we have promised to give our lives. Here we are, and the Spirit is with us! This Spirit speaks to our hearts; He invites us to go beyond our borders; He invites us to be faithful to the Redeemer; He invites us to read the signs of the times; He invites us to take on our hands the history that God has entrusted to us today and with the help of all, let us go forward. The Province is not created by a decree. The decree is merely a formality... The Province is made by the sweat, blood, faith and hope of every brother who presents himself to the Lord and says his daily "yes," with his joys, weaknesses and humanity. This is the Province! The Province is built of humanity, heart and blood! It is not an abstract entity. That is

why I wish all the brethren here, that they may take into their own hands this beautiful history that God has given us to continue to write on the rock that is already founded, the Redeemer. So be it! Amen!

Fr. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R

Superior General

Rome, San Gioacchino, January 25, 2024

(Original in Italian: Translated by Sanjay Tirkey, C.Ss.R.)