

## WELCOME ADDRESS

*Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan, Superior General*

With joy, we want offer you a warm and affectionate welcome to this Assembly Hall, which will be the “Upper Room” of our Chapter. We are here as representatives of the whole Congregation, perhaps with rapidly-beating hearts in view of the days ahead of us. Some of us are “veterans” of General Chapters, while others are participating in such an event for the first time.

May it be for all of us an experience of peace, trust and hope—days in which we “give wings” to our dreams for the Congregation so that it can respond with always greater openness and vigor to the plans of God.

We are in a very significant location: the Divine Master Retreat House, which our Founder wanted to be a place of spiritual refreshment for the whole Pauline Family—a house also chosen by Pope Francis for his Spiritual Exercises. We celebrated our last five General Chapters here and it was here that on the Feast of the Holy Trinity, 1961, in one of the rooms of the Giaccardo wing, Maestra Thecla offered her life so that all the Daughters of St. Paul would become saints. Let us feel very close to our Mother, who repeats to us today:

The Lord has given us the immense grace of a vocation, and the Pauline vocation! What a huge grace this is! And we have the promise of the Lord that he is with us.... We must have faith in this! In our chapels are the words: “Do not be afraid. I am with you.” If the Lord is with us, then what do we have to fear? Our vocation is so beautiful, so great!

It has also been said that a Chapter is an *epiclesis*—a continual invocation of the Spirit. Let us allow ourselves to be borne aloft by his *sweet breeze*, continually invoking in our hearts “the coming of the wind and fire of the Creator Spirit” so that he might regenerate us and enable new life to blossom in us.

The Spirit will be the true protagonist of these days, as he was throughout the entire preparatory phase. Pope Francis would say that the Chapter is “a protected space in which the Holy Spirit can work.” It is the place of personal and choral obedience to him.

We enter with trust into this “Upper Room,” the boundaries of which are the whole world, feeling close to all our sisters who, on every continent, are praying and offering themselves for us. In these days, our assembly truly represents the heart of the whole Congregation.

We enter this Upper Room together with Mary, unanimous and concordant in prayer, invoking with her, one in heart and soul, the fire of the Spirit so that he might design in us the features of Christ and fill our lives with ardor, courage and wisdom.

A Chapter is first of all a call from God—a call to a great responsibility. We are not here by our own will but due to the role we carry out or because we were directly elected by the sisters. It is a particular call that will leave its mark on our lives. But we feel very small when confronted with the duty that has been entrusted to us...

Our Founder too felt all his unworthiness but he was clearly aware of being an instrument of the Spirit, the depository of a gift, invested with the task of transmission. At the important *Assembly* at Ariccia in 1960, he confided:

Before God and man, I feel the gravity of the mission entrusted to me by the Lord who, had he found a person more unworthy and unfit, would have preferred him. Nevertheless, for me and for everyone, this is the guarantee that the Lord has willed and has done everything himself... (UPS I, 375).

As Fr. Alberione said, we are truly in the hands of God like half-blind people, like inexpensive paint-brushes in the hands of an artist.... The weakness, poverty and perhaps helplessness that we experience are a blessing for us. Our Father St. Paul teaches us that it is precisely in weakness, in the inadequacy of his instruments, that the power of God is revealed. It is the logic of the story of salvation.

Let us recall the experience of *Abraham*: a person without descendants, without hope on the human level, who leaves for an unknown land, sustained only by the word of God.

Let us recall the experience of *Jacob*, alone at the ford of Jabbok. He leaves everything—his wives, children, slaves, livestock, all his possessions—on the other bank (cf. Gn. 32:23-30) and wrestles throughout the night in order to receive God’s blessing and a new name.

Let us recall *Moses*: his life was a continual “going further,” leaving behind his customs, going beyond the frontier of his personal securities, so as to reach the mountain of God.

Let us recall the experience of *Gideon*: of the 20,000 men he had mustered to save Israel from the hands of the Midianites (cf. Jdg. 6-7), the Lord left him with only 300...a huge numerical disproportion that nevertheless allowed the people to enter into the logic of salvation and emerge victorious.

Let us recall *Goliath* and *David* (cf. 1 Sm. 17:12-57): a giant in war attire confronting a young shepherd armed with a staff, a sling and five pebbles from a stream.

And the same is true of *Mary* and the *sterile women*: the Lord intervenes when one can no longer depend on human resources and sterility is transformed into fruitfulness by pure gratuitousness, pure grace.

It is precisely in the light of the Word that we can reinterpret our own history, as did the people of Israel. Even in the darkest moments, the light of hope can be rekindled: on the night of the Exile, the People of God began a journey of humility and conversion that would lead to the dawn of the redemption.

### ***The Chapter: A Symbolic Event***

In the climate of the history of salvation, the Chapter is an *event of grace*. It is not something already prepared down to the last detail (even though there *was* meticulous preparation for it...). The Chapter is an *event*: it is open to the breath of the Spirit, who can turn our programs and projects upside down....

We can look upon the Chapter as a symbolic event. The Chapter Assembly is the living symbol of our Institute today. It bears within itself the dignity of tradition and the imagination of the present: memory and dreams. In each Chapter delegate there are seeds of the future ready to blossom. When the Chapter ends, the symbol will dissolve, but its symbolic contours will remain in the Chapter Document and in the persons whom the Chapter will choose to exercise leadership in the coming years.

We are therefore called to produce in this Chapter not only a document but above all concrete guidelines capable of making dreams sprout, engender prophecies, cause hopes to bloom, stimulate faith, weave relationships, impart a vision of the future brimming over with the joy of the Gospel.

Along with Pope Francis, we find it unconceivable to envision a Chapter that does not relaunch prophecy, dreams, passion for the Gospel and for the people of today. The Pope invites us to abandon the complacent attitude that says “we’ve always done it this way,” and to be bold and creative in rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization... (cf. EG 33).

Among us too—in fact, among us above all—in these days the Spirit is acting, reminding us of the words of Pope Francis that can have transforming power: “Consecrated life is not survival; it is not a preparation for *ars bene moriendi* (*the art of dying well*). Instead it is new life.... It is a call to the new surprises of the Spirit. Christ is alive in us and he wants us to be alive!” (cf. ChV 1)

## ***Practical Information***

I would now like to provide you in anticipation with some information that we will return to in greater detail at the opening of the Chapter, after the Spiritual Exercises.

First of all, however, I want to thank, also on behalf of all of you, the Commission that prepared the Chapter so carefully and that now concludes its work: Sr. Anna Caiazza and Sr. Shalimar Rubia, General Councilors; Sr. Anastasia-Anna Nduku Muindi from East Africa, Sr. Paola Fosson from Italy, Sr. Anna Plathara from India and Sr. Leonora Wilson from the United States. We are deeply grateful to these sisters who worked so hard and so well. May the Lord reward them with many graces and blessings.

The Chapter will concretely get underway on 12 September with an official opening, the approval of its *Iter* (Mode of Procedure) and the setting up of the Chapter organisms. We are now in the Chapter's *introductory days*, guided by the Temporary Central Commission, made up of the Superior General as its president, the Secretary General as the Secretary of the Chapter, and the Chapter's two youngest sisters—Sr. Mariangela Tassielli and Sr. Matilda Akinleye Oluwakemi—in the role of tellers.

Several sisters who are not Chapter members but who have been asked by the General Government to carry out various services in view of this event are also present among us.

*The task of simultaneous translating has been entrusted to:*

|                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Sr. Julia M. Darrenkamp | English language |
| Sr. Anne Joan Flanagan  | “ “              |
| Sr. Antonia Park        | Korean language  |

*Management of the paoline.org website will be done by:*

Sr. Teresa Braccio, Sr. Daniela Son, Sr. Parichat Jullamonthon

*Picture-taking in the Assembly Hall will be done by:*

Sr. Shalimar Rubia and Sr. Christine Hirsch

*Technical services in the Secretary's Office will be carried out by Sr. Saveria Kim*

Liturgical animations during the Spiritual Exercises will be provided by the sisters of the General Government.

At the opening of the Chapter, we will inform you about other services entrusted to Chapter delegates.

## ***In the Mystery of the Covenant***

In this particular time, we are called to enter with greater awareness into the covenant, the heart of our faith; to perceive the overwhelming love and fidelity of God who has never failed to fulfill his promises; to set out on our journey, allowing ourselves to be inspired by the concrete experiences of several women who *collaborated with the Spirit* and lived in a special way a mutual and spousal relationship with the Living Christ:

**Mary**, “Ark of the presence of God; Ark of the covenant of love that God made in a definitive way with all humanity in Christ” (Pope Benedict XVI, 15 August 2011); “the living Tabernacle of Christ” because she bore Jesus within her and communicated him.

**Mary of Magdala**, “apostle of the new and greatest hope” (Pope Francis), who had the grace to discover, in the Risen One, the most disconcerting *coming* in human history and who raced to announce it, heedless of the darkness of the night. In that garden in which the Lord had been buried,

Mary Magdalene invites us to listen to his voice, see him, touch him...recognize him as the Living One, embrace his feet affectionately and reply with immense love: "Rabbouni... Teacher!"

**Thecla**, a woman who "never resisted the Spirit," who yearned to lend her feet to the Gospel so that it could race ahead..., who wanted to reach the point of complete self-surrender, of living in continual adoration, of transforming her life into a "magnificat."

Like these *women of the covenant*, who opened themselves fully to the mystery of salvation, we welcome the ardent invitation of the Living God, addressed to us personally: "I am here once again to renew my covenant with you. I need you!"

### ***"I sent you to bring fire"***

We believe that the Holy Spirit will guide these days, take the initiative, fill us with his riches, and pour out a flood of consolation, tenderness and light upon us.

Let us allow ourselves to be invaded by his fire so as to communicate it. "Communicate fire because I sent you to bring fire!" These words, written by Fr. Alberione to Fr. Giaccardo back in 1933, are still a program of life for us today.

We need the fire of the Spirit to burn in our hearts and open us fearlessly to his action. We need to revive our awareness of being branded by fire with the mission to bring light, bless, enliven, raise up, heal and free (cf. EG 273).

Warmest best wishes that this Chapter experience will cause the fire that the Spirit deposited in us on the day of our baptism and profession to "re-explode," strengthen our faith in his Promise, and enable us to wholeheartedly welcome his invitation to *arise* and *set out on our journey*.

Let us live these days in the joy that springs from the awareness that we belong to the Lord. The Congregation is his: he wanted it and he still wants it.

There is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills (EG 280).

And with Pope Francis, let us pray:

Holy Spirit, harmony of God,  
you who turn fear into trust  
and self-centeredness into self-gift,  
come to us.  
Grant us the joy of the resurrection  
and perennially young hearts.  
Holy Spirit, our harmony,  
you who make of us one body,  
pour forth your peace upon the Church and our world.  
Holy Spirit, make us builders of concord,  
sowers of goodness, apostles of hope (Pentecost 2019).