

Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Homily by Fr General Arturo Sosa SJ, 12 July 2017

(Readings: Gen 41: 55-57, 42: 5-7, 17-24; Mt 10: 1-7)

In our Gospel today, we hear the story of the Lord choosing and commissioning the twelve apostles. Jesus calls to himself twelve of his disciples and gives them authority to share his mission, a mission of freeing those who are held captive by “unclean spirits,” and of healing “every disease and every illness.” But what strikes me most today is the diversity of the men he chose to share his mission. They were so different from one another.

For example, we know Peter to be a reactive, impulsive man, who speaks before he thinks, like when he asked Jesus to walk on water or when he said he would never deny Jesus. On the other hand, we have Thomas, who seemed to be the opposite, so cautious, that he would not believe Christ was risen until he had proof. We have the brothers James and John, whom Jesus gave the nickname “Sons of Thunder,” Boanerges, perhaps they were so noisy and hot tempered that they wanted to call fire down on a Samaritan village that would not accept Jesus. On the other hand, there is James son of Alphaeus who must have been so quiet that there is no word of his recorded in the Gospels. Their political views must have been different also. In the group was “Matthew the Tax Collector,” who must have been some kind of collaborator with the Roman colonizers. But there was also “Simon the Cananean,” who is identified with Simon the Zealot, who may have had some connection with the Jewish freedom movement.

With all their diversity, Jesus sent them as a group, as an apostolic body, not just as individuals. Matthew says, “Jesus sent out these twelve.” The name “the twelve” became a recognizable group in the community of Jesus.

This Gospel is like a mirror for us who are gathered here today. We too are so diverse. There are Jesuits from different countries, like Indonesia, Germany, Myanmar, Thailand—and one from Venezuela! We have lay faithful, religious and priests; we have Christians and some who belong to other faith traditions. But we are united by our commitment to the mission of Christ: liberating those who are enslaved and healing those who are suffering, proclaiming the nearness of the Kingdom of God.

Diversity is a gift, but it is also a challenge. We know that we live in a world in which many are afraid of diversity, in which there is fear of those who are different, a fear that builds walls and sadly often results in violence. You know this sad reality too well here in Indonesia. Our recent

General Congregations have emphasized community as mission and collaboration among Jesuits and partners in mission. These two words, community and collaboration, are, I believe very important invitations to all of us today, precisely because we live in a world of so much division, polarization and fear of diversity.

How can we grow in our living of community as mission and in collaboration in mission?

478 years ago, in Rome, ten men of very diverse backgrounds and personalities gathered to discern together whether God was calling to remain united as a group. Some of their countries were at war with each other. Some came from noble families, others were from peasant origin. But, after much prayer, reflection and sharing, these first companions of Ignatius discerned that it was God's will that they remain together.

It would be good to recall what they recorded in the famous document, *the Deliberation of the First Fathers*: "Since our most merciful and affectionate Lord had seen fit to assemble and bind us to one another—we who are so frail and from such diverse national and cultural backgrounds—we ought not to sever what God has united and bound together. Rather, with each passing day we ought to confirm and strengthen the bond of union, forming ourselves into a single body. Each should have a knowledge of and a concern for the others, leading to a richer harvest of souls; for spiritual power, as well as natural, is intensified and strengthened when united in a common arduous enterprise far more than if it remains fragmented in many parts."

I think this text offers us two suggestions for improving in community and collaboration. First, we must constantly remember that we find ourselves together, not because of our choice or because we have similar tastes or interests, not because we have the same nationality or religion, but because God called us together. Just as Jesus called together the diverse group of apostles together, so the first companions were deeply convinced that, despite their diversity, "our most merciful and affectionate Lord had seen fit to assemble and bind us together." That is why they were convinced that they should not divide "what God has united and bound together." That is why they decided that, "with each passing day we ought to confirm and strengthen the bond of union."

Do I really, deeply believe that the brothers I live with, so different, so unique, are united to me by the call of the Lord? Do I truly believe that those with whom I serve in different apostolates are with me because the Lord also called them? How do I try, in concrete ways, "with every passing day" to strengthen the bond of union? What attitudes within me

or what actions or words from me create distance or division, instead of union, and how might the Lord be calling me to change?

Second, the first fathers wrote that “each should have a knowledge of and a concern for the others.” Too often we hear Jesuits say that their community is like a boarding house or a hotel. We have pleasant but superficial relationships with one another. We sometimes hear something similar in our ministries, among Jesuits and our partners in mission. That is why GC 36 insists so much on making space in communities “for encounter and sharing,” for “spiritual conversation.” (GC 36, D. 1, No. 10 and 12). GC 36 reminds us that “this disposition to attend to the Spirit in our relationships must include those with whom we work.” (No. 14).

Sometimes, we Jesuits are afraid of empty spaces. When there is an empty space, we fill it immediately with work or with distractions. GC 36 very clearly invites us to make space, to “make room,” so that we can know each other and show concern for one another more deeply. How can we make this more concrete in our communities and our ministries? Remember that this deeper knowledge and concern for one another is for the sake of mission: as the first companions said, it leads to a “richer harvest of souls.”

As we gather this morning, we pray that the Lord may bring peace and understanding to our divided, broken world. And we pray that, like the twelve, like the first companions, we may be better instruments of that peace of the Lord, by giving more credible witness through our living more generously and more joyfully community as mission and collaboration in mission.