

FINAL MESSAGE OF THE 36TH GENERAL CHAPTER TO THE WHOLE CONGREGATION



CONGREGATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

SSS

CALLED TO THE CENACLE

“... the upper room, large and furnished...” Luke 22:12

1. We begin by remembering

Our **36th General Chapter** is a time of grace. Vicariously through this Chapter, the Congregation experiences a double blessing: the 50th anniversary of SSS presence in Vietnam and the preparation for the commemoration of 40 years since the Rule of Life was approved. We are brought together by God’s grace, who gave us the opportunity to share our experience of our spirituality and charism. This Kairos lived and witnessed by the capitular community provides an opportunity to re-read our life as a whole, with its joys and sorrows. It was also a time for appreciating and evaluating the fruits of our work.

Pope Francis, echoing the thoughts of our Founder, asked us to “ensure an evangelical witness, promote Eucharistic spirituality, strengthen our Eucharistic mission.” All this leads us to recognize with gratitude that during these days, ***we have received the gift of a Cenacle experience.***

2. The Cenacle puts us in communion with Father Eymard

Father Eymard, drawing from the disciple's experience, highly values the Cenacle, the "upper room" as:

- a place towards where everyone is called to converge, and to encounter the Risen Christ,
- a place where all are called to experience communion with Christ and with his family.
- a place from which everyone must leave as an apostle of new life.

2.1. The Experience of the Founder Today

Today, the Founder continues to pass on his experience of the Eucharist to the Church and the world through us. Starting with the Tables of the LORD'S Supper (*Word and Eucharist*), let's review the history of these 30 years of reflection on "Eucharistic Spirituality:"

1993: We chose to commit ourselves to a "renewed Eucharistic Spirituality" in three dimensions: fraternal community in prayer, in service and in mission. We promote unity and consider the Eucharist as a gift (Anthony McSweeney, General Superior).

2011: We have chosen to call it simply "Eucharistic Spirituality," dropping the word, "renewed."

2017: We highlighted the "gift of self" as a qualifying element of Eucharistic spirituality, in its three dimensions: life of fraternity, life of prayer, life of service. The "*Follow Me*" formation program is based on these fundamental principles.

2023: Today, the Spirit calls us to look deeper into the essence of Eucharistic spirituality. At the beginning of the Chapter, Father General invited us to live the experience of the Cenacle community, while Pope Francis's message to the Chapter urges us: "In the light of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that the universal Church has experienced in recent days, I invite you too to have a synodal experience that involves mutual listening and sincere dialogue."

The Memory and Discernment Commission is proposing the following path to the Chapter Assembly:

CALLED TO THE CENACLE TO LIVE THE EUCHARISTIC MYSTERY FULLY IN PRAYER, FELLOWSHIP AND SERVICE

a) Called:

“Gathered in the name of the Lord, we are called to live in the Church as brothers...” (*Rule of Life* 1). No one had earned their place at this meal. Everyone was invited (*Desiderio desideravi* 4, Luke 24:30-31). Our Eucharistic vocation is, above all, a gift, a call, a grace that makes us disciples. In this sense, the LORD calls us, **not only to DO**, but fundamentally **calls us to him to BE**. Our spirituality is not only a commitment or an effort to live something, **but a way of BEING**. The Eucharist is not a due **but a gift**, a free gift that God gives us despite our poverty.

b) The Cenacle:

The Word of God tells us that the Cenacle was **“the upper room”** (Acts 1:13, Mark 14:16, Luke 22:12): it is **“on the top floor,”** “the floor of the experience of the Incarnation.” It is the room of **“desire”** (“I have longed” Luke 22:14); it is the room of **unreserved “gift”** (“Take, eat, this is my body; Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood” Matthew 26:26-27); it is the **room of “service”** (“and he began to wash the disciples’ feet” John 13:5); it is the **room of “fellowship”** (“I no longer call you servants, but I call you friends” John 15:15); it is the room of **“mystical union of the Father”** (“As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” John 17:21); it is the room of **“waiting”** and of the coming of the Spirit (“When the Spirit of truth comes” John 16:13); it is the room of **“mission”** (“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” Acts 1:8); it is the room of **“prayer”** (“They were assiduous in prayer with some women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. Acts 1:14).

But unfortunately, it is also the room where the door was slammed shut, the room of **“betrayal”** (“Judas took a morsel and went out at once; it was night” John 13:30); the room of **“disappointment, of dead hope”** (“while the doors were shut for fear of the Jews” John 20:19).

It is the room of human life; the room of the Church and we are all invited to enter this room. Despite ourselves, we will always find a table set and prepared with living food, together with our brothers and sisters, and the Risen LORD!

c) Eucharistic Mystery:

We approach with a contemplative gaze the Eucharistic mystery, a key Cenacle experience that defines our own spirituality. “Convinced that life cannot be fully

Eucharistic unless it is consecrated to both God and our fellow human beings, he left us an example of contemplation and apostolic activities” (*Rule of Life 2*).

We believe that this is a specific gift that our Eymardian Family has to offer the Church and the world. Contemplation, on the other hand, means letting ourselves be taken in by God’s love for us, listening to his heart, living with his gaze, welcoming his Word, marveling at his Presence and making Christ as the center, height and breadth of our life. From this encounter with Christ, we become bread broken for the life of the world.

d) Prayer:

In prayer, we are seized by Christ’s love. It is a life in God, in communion with him. “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Our whole life becomes an extension of the Eucharist that we celebrate. Prayer for us starts from the Eucharist, and teaches us to embody the attitudes of the celebration, such as welcoming, listening, forgiving, being grateful, sharing and being together.

Called to “... interiorize the celebration of his Easter with a prayer that makes our lives an extension of our Eucharists.” (*Rule of Life 28*). In the image of the disciples of Emmaus, we are impelled, “with our hearts burning” from encountering the Risen Lord at the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:13ff), to translate our interior journey into an active journeying with the “Church on the move.”

e) Fellowship:

For Father Eymard, the Cenacle is “where the Apostles, the disciples, the holy women and Mary prayed together in the first church” (*Correspondence of Father Eymard 674*), a fellowship of Christians that formed the first Church. This fellowship refers to a global and archetypical understanding of a family, of a community, where one experiences welcome, belongingness, mutual trust, security, and the love and care of all its members (*Rule of Life 6, 7*).

f) Service:

Service is our creative participation in the Incarnation of Christ as an offering to the Father for the life of the world. In the Cenacle, at the Last Supper, Jesus gives himself up. His whole life is summed up in this broken bread: this gesture gives us the image of a God of communion. He who was God became not just a man, but a servant: a servant with his whole life and a servant for his whole life (Philippians 2:6ff). This is not just an act of solidarity, but an act that reveals a profound obedience to the Father.

Our life in the Cenacle calls us to wash each other's feet and urges us to be bread broken for the world, filling the hunger of the human family (*Rule of Life* 3). The Cenacle is the ideal place of learning how to live together, to serve others, and to remain with the LORD (*Rule of Life* 10).

3. The Cenacle experience for Father Eymard

The Cenacle is a recurring theme in Father Eymard's spirituality. In the Cenacle experience, he aimed to form a "Eucharistic Cenacle," a group of men and women, of consecrated persons and lay people who are united by the Eucharistic mystery.¹ During the days of the Great Retreat in Rome that Father Eymard matured the passage from the Cenacle in Jerusalem to the "inner Cenacle," as he understood how it relates to the Gift of Self.

After the Resurrection, the Upper Room becomes the place of *shalom* and mission. The Risen LORD reveals himself to the gathered disciples. He is alive in their midst, and becomes the centre of their lives, because from there on, he acts through them, with them and in them. The Risen One gives them his Spirit and entrusts them with the same mission he received from the Father: peace, the proclamation of the Gospel, liberation from evil, forgiveness, the revelation of the heart of God. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). Called to be part of the Cenacle, we cannot but live and participate in Christ's mission.

4. From the Cenacle, to the World as Disciple-Apostle

This 36th General Chapter invites us as a chapter community, together with all our SSS brothers, to re-appropriate the spirituality of the Cenacle. Inspired by our Founder, we are convinced that with an "exaggerated love," we can face with boldness and generosity the pressing challenges that call us today:

- a) **Called to the Lord's Cenacle:** Jesus draws us with a "burning desire" (Luke 22:15), an "exaggerated love" **to celebrate the Liturgy of life and life in the Liturgy.** In this experience of encounter with the Master, through the Table of Word, Bread and Communion, we are formed as disciples who,

¹ "The Eucharistic Cenacle! This is the holy place of retreat, with Jesus, at the feet of Jesus, in Jesus; for is not Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament always the teacher, the grace, the end of the retreat? **The Cenacle is** the Tabor of love, the Eucharistic Sinai of the law of grace, the paradise of the Incarnate Word, the divine place of the recreation of fallen man in the grace of Jesus Christ.

The Upper Room is my home. I am its guest, its child. Retreat there will therefore be good and sweet to me. The disciples always remain in retreat and silence, at the disposal of the Holy Spirit, without knowing either the day or the moment of his coming; they are faithful and vigilant in all the exercises of retreat" (PE 5,1). Father Eymard's ordination retreat for the deacons of the Major Seminary of Beauvais, May 1861.

once sent out, become apostles. It is from this vital centre that we will start our work in liturgy, communion and service.

Finally, as Pope Francis says: “in perfect continuity with the Incarnation, we are given, by virtue of the presence and action of the Spirit, the possibility of dying and rising again in Christ” (*Desiderio desideravi* 12) in every liturgy. *Desiderio desideravi* calls us to discover the beauty of the liturgy and its importance in the life of the baptized². In the Eucharist and in all the sacraments we meet the LORD and are touched by his grace.

- a) **Laudato Sí:** Nature and history also converge in the Eucharist. As an Eymardian family, our praise and thanksgiving (*Laudato sí*) should also be continually expressed in the care of the environment, the protection of children and vulnerable people, and in the care and respect for human life.
- b) **Fratelli Tutti:** In the Cenacle, no one is excluded, everyone is invited, even Judas receives a morsel of friendship. In a world marked by acts of injustice, violence and rejection, our SSS communities become Cenacles of welcome, trust and sharing (*Fratelli tutti* 83, 86).
- c) **Internationality:** Internationality enables all the members of the Congregation to appreciate the opportunities, difficulties and challenges we face as a shared reality within the charismatic family. Internationality enriches experience, knowledge and diversity. It allows us as a fellowship to recognize that, despite individual differences, we share the same charism. As a repercussion of our Eucharistic vocation, internationality enriches and enables us to be and stay as one family, thanks to the wealth and diversity of our sensibilities. As internationality encourages and promotes unity within the Congregation, we reaffirm that the Eucharist is a true sacrament of unity, enabling fellowship among people and communion between brothers (*Rule of Life* 8).

To live and commit ourselves to the path of internationality as a congregation, with the Eucharist at the center of its life is to affirm forcefully that to live by the Eucharist is to denounce division, dispersion and opposition, and to promote friendship, communion and unity. Interculturality urges us to widen the space of our tent (cf. Isaiah 54:2), in the spirit of a “church on the move” according to Pope Francis.

² "...we work at liturgical animation and formation, using the resources available to us, and we seek, in line with the Church's directives, expressions better adapted to the needs of the faithful, so that every celebration becomes an experience of faith and a source of commitment" (*Rule of Life* 40: Liturgy).

- d) **Charismatic family:** This chapter, a time of grace, was an opportunity to experience true fellowship within the charismatic family, composed of the Religious of the Blessed Sacrament, the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, the Servitium Christi and the Aggregates. The awareness of being a charismatic family will strengthen our witness to the Eucharist and consolidate our unity and sense of belonging. Living and acting as a charismatic family, by collaboration and sharing of experiences, strengthens our common identity and enriches the synodal church (cf. *Rule of Life* 32, 34, 35).
- e) **Synodality:** The Spirit of God gives us the impetus to extend our communion in the Upper Room by journeying together with the whole Church: lay people, religious, clergy. He makes us joyful evangelizers who set the world ablaze with Eucharistic fire (*Rule of Life* 3). Our mission flows from our experience of the Upper Room, the experience in which Jesus becomes incarnate in our midst to bring about the Reign of God in the modern world (John 14:25-26, *Rule of Life* 36).
- f) **Formation:** The Congregation looks at the future with the same anticipation of the first Cenacle for the Kingdom of God (*Rule of Life* 1, 3)³: in a spirit of preparedness and joyful expectation. For this reason, we recognize that the task of shaping tomorrow's Eucharistic communities of prayer, fraternity and service rests on integral formation for all its members (cf. *Rule of Life* 47).

Religious in formation are now also called to make a deeper commitment to preparing themselves to serve the poor and marginalized (Luke 14:14, Proverbs 19:17) and to learn to speak the Word of God “through the tongue of foreign people” (Isaiah 28:11). SSS priests, deacons and perpetually professed brothers, journeying together as equals in dignity of vocation, are called to constant renewal in view of forming themselves and the entire SSS charismatic family.

The call to the Cenacle transforms our discipleship, empowering us to become the apostle of the Holy Eucharist, faithfully witnessing together to the Eucharistic charism of our Congregation. Thus, we propose the following statement as the central message of the 36th General Chapter:

³ An echo of the motto of the Founder: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum, Thy kingdom come!*

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TO LIVE THE EUCHARISTIC MYSTERY FULLY
IN PRAYER, FELLOWSHIP AND SERVICE.**

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Thu Duc, Vietnam

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Solemnity of Christ the King and

50th anniversary of the SSS presence in Vietnam

