

Reflection on Constitutions Chapter IX: Our Apostolic Life.
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I want to thank Mike Sullivan who asked me to share a short reflection on chapter IX of our constitutions concerning our apostolic life. For me, this is a great opportunity to renew my life in light of the Gospel and our Capuchin charism. I want to start introducing myself a little bit. As most of you know, I am from the Capuchin Province of Peru who came to this province two years ago to study for a master's degree in Bible at CTU. I am very grateful to God for giving me the opportunity to deepen myself in the study of God's Word and with all the brothers of this province who have been so welcoming. Although my first concern and responsibility is to succeed in my course of studies, however, I appreciate very much the opportunity that I have had in helping some of the ministries in our parish of Saint Clare of Montefalco in Chicago, with the youth group, catechism for Confirmation, and helping Augusto in a Bible study group.

Our constitutions presents our apostolic life as an essential aspect of our charism, which is founded in the obedience to the Spirit of the Lord who inspires our fraternity to serve to all people by bringing the Gospel in deeds and words in the church (Const. 146.4). In this way the prophetic dimension of our consecrated life is expressed by continuing Jesus's mission, who was sent by the Father to proclaim the Good News to the poor. Our evangelical life style is not just for the sake of ourselves but in order to contribute to God's salvific plan in the world. Our constitutions says that our apostolic activity should express the characteristics of our charism in forms best suited to the conditions of time and place. I want to highlight and reflect in three aspects of our charisms pointed out by our constitutions that shape and distinguish our apostolic life: our evangelical witness, the expression of our minority, and of our fraternal life as well in our pastoral work.

The text of the constitutions says that "the principal apostolate of a lesser brother is to live the gospel life in the world in truth, simplicity and joy" (Const. 147.2). Our mission starts with the fidelity to our evangelical life. One of the experiences that I have found is that people are not looking for teachers but rather for witnesses of the Gospel. People will not believe our words if first of all they do not see in us a coherence of our life and the Gospel. This is a big challenge for me, because I know that I am not perfect. However, as a follower of Jesus Christ, following him in the steps of Saint Francis, this statement invites me to be a brother, who in the midst of struggles, weakness and difficulties, may still believe that to live the Gospel in truth, simplicity and joy is possible. The constitution invites me to deepen my personal experience with God's love through Jesus Christ and to share with our brothers and sisters not of what I have read or heard, but of what I myself have experienced and of what I hope to live with God's grace as a lesser brother.

With respect to the kind of our pastoral work, our constitutions encourage us to look at the signs of the times and hear the voice of the Spirit that invites us to be creative and to help the church in the new challenges that the world presents to us. However, our pastoral work also should express our commitment of living as lesser brothers, in minority and in solidarity with

the poor and vulnerable of the world (const. 147.6-7). I appreciate very much the opportunity of being a witness of the radical options that this Capuchin Province of Saint Joseph has made concerning this aspect of our charism: the caring for the poor, the pastoral work with immigrants, the strengthening of the Capuchin charism among the Indian reservations in Montana, your commitment for social justice, etc. These bold options motivate me to return to my first love, and to reignite the desire to follow the poor and humble Jesus who came not to be served but to serve and gave his life for the salvation of the world. Our constitution challenges me to shake myself from the temptations of becoming complacent and deaf to hear the voice of the Spirit calling me to serve, and sending me to those places where nobody wants to go.

A third characteristic of our apostolic work that the constitution emphasizes is our fraternal life. Indeed, the work of a brother should be the expression of the fraternity (Const.154.3). This aspect of our Capuchin life prevents us from the temptations of individualism, and from making ourselves the center of our work rather than putting Christ in the center. Again, when I read this part of the constitutions I felt that God was calling me to conversion, by changing my human way of thinking. Sometime it seems that to work alone is easier and more effective; however, a true and intense fraternal life never limits us in our apostolic zeal, but rather strengthens it. The Spirit is calling me to make of my pastoral work expression of my fraternal life, and to work together with my brothers.

Finally, by reading this chapter of our constitutions, I reminded myself that the different aspects of my life should be integrated in a manner that through them I may express my Capuchin life. Thus, prayer and study are not opposed to pastoral work but rather they must help me to focus my life in a good tension (Const. 157). How can I talk *about* God if I do not talk first *to* God? The apostolic zeal is not an obstacle to cultivate a quality prayer life, but rather prayer is absolutely needed in order to keep and increase our apostolic zeal. In the same way the constitutions encourage us the study, especially the study of God's word in order to make our pastoral work more effective. I am very grateful for the opportunity of studying the Sacred Scriptures; however God reminds me that the last goal of these studies is not to fill my mind with knowledge, but to imprint in my heart the word of God, that I may be able to share with our brothers and sisters the gift of God's word.

In this ecclesiastical context of 'new evangelization' and after having read and reflected in Chapter IX of our Constitutions, I have to recognize that God has been good to me in many ways throughout all my life. And I have to admit that sometime I have not been generous in return to God. Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"?" (Rom 10:14-15). With God's grace I want to answer to God's calling by answering: Here I am Lord, send me wherever you want.