

Regional
assembly
Montreal August
14, 2016

With this solemn act of God's covenant with us we conclude this Year's assembly. We have worked hard. I think that we did something important.

Today is the feast of St. Clare. I do not know how many times I went to Assisi during my six years in Rome. It is one of these unforgettable places because of what happened there in the 13th century. St. Clare was the first woman who wrote a rule of life for women. Christians have been at it for a long time to write a Rule of Life for Christian Life. Always the question arose, how do we follow Christ? We keep trying to find ways of doing that also in our time. We have a rather beautiful Rule of Life that came out of our gatherings in the 1970s. Despite the relativistic culture that has come out of the search for objective truth in the Enlightenment period, we don't quite know how to do it today. However, we still seek ways of living an intimate union with Christ. Our time has found it difficult to discover a pattern of religious living that is appropriate.

What we have discovered, however, is that religious life is about people, about community, about relationships. That discovery is both ancient and new. Religious life particularly in the Eastern Church, made community its hashtag. The religious community was a model of Church, God's new gathering of the human race. The community of religious, gathered around an abbot, showed what was the greatest gift of the Spirit: the new community of humanity that was able to overcome the divisions of the human race into tribes, and families, and lately of nation states. The community was to overcome the oppositions of Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. However difficult its everyday reality, with its uniform dress code, its strict schedules, its lengthy times of prayer, its monotony of days, the community was a sign.

In the West, we never took over the model that originated in the East. The West was much more concerned about individual salvation, the care of my soul, the fear of being excluded. In the West communities gathered not because we symbolized being Church, God's gathered, but because the community was the school under a leader who would guide us on the path to individual holiness. We have found it difficult to accept with Vatican II and the renewal to place community as the center of our religious life. We still think that the apostolate, our distinctive ministry, sets us apart. It is the answer to people who ask us what we do, what sets us apart. We say it is our work.

As we age as a group, we are called more and more away from the model of religious life based on our work. We are being challenged to become religious in a different way. Actually, it is not retirement that we are called to, but to another way of living religious life. It is in this context, that what we have found most difficult about religious life is our living together. Our challenge is to be church. Community becomes hereby what is most central to what we are about. It is what is most religious of religious life. That is what we were about in the last three days. What

is the quality of our life together? How are we taking care of one another? How do we take care of other communities in our Region beyond our own community? How are we signs of the covenant? Perhaps, more strongly, how are we as lovers? Do we have within us what we

proclaim is the highest force of life, call it the Holy Spirit, or call it Love, with a capital L? Do we in our communities proclaim and witness to what or who we call God?

This morning we are calling forth three men to assume the leadership, the task of gathering our communities into our mission of life. Last week Monday, the Toronto community confirmed Fr. Aegi as their superior. Today, I would like to ask Gustave and Paul to come forward and accept the call of the communities of Montreal and Ottawa to become their spiritual guides. We ask them to accept their role as the gatherers of their communities into the likeness of Christ and in the power of the Spirit. We as a community will pray over them and with them as they accept their ministry.

Our communities would do well if they would take as an examination of themselves, Chapter Four of *Amoris Laetitia*, the post synodal text on Marriage and Family of Pope Francis. Chapter Four is entitled "Love in Marriage". It is a text equally suited for the religious community. It is a reflection on the lyrical poem of love by Paul. As it shows the features of love in a couple and a family, it is equally valid for us a religious. We too need to be patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, not arrogant or rude, not insisting on our own way, not irritable, not resentful, not rejoicing at wrong.

Love is our calling. Love is, as Fr. Dehon and our charism tell us, the experience that we must trust.

John van den Hengel scj
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