

## **Meditation on the Apostolic Universal Preferences of the Society of Jesus today.**

### **Introduction:**

We all received a few weeks ago, the final result of the discernment on the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society for the period 2019 -2029. Two bigger questions come spontaneously to my mind and I want to share them with you in this retreat:

**1 - What "motions" the Letter of the General of 19 February 2019 awakened in me?**

**2 - And now, what's next? What do these preferences need to be done to practice these preferences?**

These two questions will constitute the two points of this meditation which can well be done by applying the way of praying with our three faculties (cf. EE [45]).

### **First Question: Possible motions after the Letter of Father General**

We can classify the motions, as St Ignatius indicates, according to their origin: from the good spirit and from the bad spirit. Let's start with those of the bad spirit:

#### **1 - From the bad spirit:**

**Desolation and scepticism:** Almost two years of meetings, trips and consultations, all to produce a document that tells us substantially nothing new, nothing different. These are guidelines that the five General Congregations had already given us since C.G. 32. In short: a document that does not involve changing our current ministries in anything. It will be another beautiful document, like all in the past, to enrich the Society's historical archive. We already know from experience how to proceed: instead of the dynamic "*see, judge and act*" the bad spirit leads us to "*see, criticize and archive*". Nothing will happen.

**Confusion and Perplexity:** In the General Congregation 35 we were given very specific priorities and specific countries and institutions were mentioned, but here the apostolate sectors are more general: Spiritual Exercises and Discernment, apostolate with the poor, refugees, etc., ministry with young people and the apostolate of ecology. And all this around the world, without indicating geographical areas. It is unclear how these four preferential apostolate sectors, that are so different can be integrated. And where was the intellectual apostolate? Is it no longer a priority? It does not appear that any of our current ministries have been changed, reformed, or abolished so that the conclusion would be: that each Jesuit should continue to do the same thing he was doing. Is that the new apostolic plan we expected?

#### **2 – Of the Good Spirit:**

### **This document is different from all of the above.**

First of all, it is not a decree, it is the result of discernment of our Jesuit communities at the local level as much as possible. It is not a decision of a group in Rome or of the Father General alone. It is the body of the universal Society and this gives it a different value. Another reason to consider it different is the fact that it was presented to the Pope, a Jesuit pope, not just to follow the protocol but really giving him time to read it in such a way that he not only approved it but that he would make it his mission today to the Society. This had not happened before historically either.

### **The ecclesial context of these preferences is that of "an outgoing Church"**

Since Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), and especially with Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation (2013), both of which are the fruit of two Synods of Bishops on Evangelization, the Church is living a reform period.

The choice of the name of Francis, evoking the figure of Francis of Assisi, manifests not only the Pope's love for the poor and his desire to see "*a poor Church for the poor*" (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 186-216) but also, like the Poor of Assisi, to "repair the house," the Lord's Church, in a time of crisis.

This is visible not only in recent documents and synods but in the renewal of ecclesiastical structures. So visible and real is the reform process that it has aroused mixed reactions and clashes even at the high levels of ecclesiastical authority.

"*Feeling with the Church*" at this moment has become a challenge, even for many Catholics. Responding to it is a duty that flows from the founding charism of the Society. These universal apostolic preferences, as the Pope himself points out, "*are in line with the current priorities of the Church expressed through the ordinary Magisterium of the Pope, the Synods and the Episcopal Conferences, especially from Evangelii Gaudium*". It is, therefore, something more than a document, it is a true "*sign of the times*", a true "*kairos*" or "*favourable moment*" for the mission of the universal Society.

### **It is a response to the challenges that arise from today's society**

The painful challenge, which has gone viral, of child abuse, is a real thing, but it is not the only one and is not the most important either. The scarcity of vocations with the consequent decline of our effective staff obliges us not only to regroup the administration of the provinces but to reorient the way we move forward with our ministries in collaboration with others.

These preferences are not so much about "*what to do*" but about "*how to do better*" what we are already doing. It is not first and foremost a question of closing or opening apostolate sectors, but of examining whether the way in which we conduct our ministries is in tone with the "*magis*" of better service to the Church and to the human society at the present time.

The four preferences are not well-defined apostolate 'sectors' but *common objectives*, conductive threads of all our ministries that must be taken into account for real renewal. There is no Jesuit who can feel foreign to or excluded from any of these four preferences. The planning by sectors of apostolate done in the past did not work as expected because many of our Companions did not feel challenged because they were outside of these preferential sectors. Now it is different because these preferences are cross-cutting, affect us all, personally and communally, whatever our status as Jesuits and our type of ministry.

## **2 - Second Question: What needs to be done to carry out these preferences in practice?**

The answer to this question is at two levels: personal (ad intra) and ministerial (ad extra)

### **A - Integration of the universal preferences into personal spiritual life:**

The four preferences are not a "menu" in order to choose the dish that we like. Either we take them all or better not take any because if any of them were missing the mission would be incomplete. That is why they must be integrated as they are actually inseparable.

The first integration we have to achieve is not from the outside but from within each of us in our personal spiritual life. It is not a theoretical acceptance but a practical "*more in works than in words*" (Cf. Spir. Ex. [230]). It is the difficult process that popular wisdom describes with the saying: "*From the saying to the doing, there is a long stretch*". But without this integration, the unity and effectiveness of these preferences would be lost. All of them aim to the greatest divine service and to preserve our Society "in its good being". (Cf. **Constitutions**, [135, 212, 657, 815] and Part Tenth, title)

Jesuits can produce new documents, but documents do not automatically produce new Jesuits. This is where the first preference concerns us and challenges us all. It's not that all of us have to become masters in Ignatian spirituality or in the Exercises, or necessarily writers. It is first and foremost about discerning and genuinely living what we are in the spirit of the Exercises. It's about incarnating this spirit in all our ministries. As far back as 1991, at the closing conference of the International Congress of Exercises held in Loyola, the then-Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach prophetically said:

*" There is no doubt that since the time of St. Ignatius, the Society has never wanted to jealously keep for itself the ministry of Spiritual Exercises; but God's people have the right to expect from the Society of Jesus and all those who draw inspiration from Ignatian heritage a preferential option and an ever-updated relevance of the Exercises examine whether the way in which we conduct our ministries is in tone with the "magis" of a better service to the Church and to the human society at the present time."*

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many of Our Companions did not feel challenged because they were outside of one or more of these preferential sectors. Now it is different because these preferences are cross-cutting, affect us all, personally and communally, whatever our status as Jesuits and our type of ministry.

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If we examine for a moment the four preferences and read them in the light of the four weeks of the Exercises, we will find that both come *"from above"*, from the same Spirit. However, the first preference that looks to our inner life and our relationship with God is rooted in the principle and foundation and that is why it is also the beginning and foundation of our universal preferences. In them we are reminded today of the ultimate goal for which we have been created, that is, *"to praise, to worship and to serve God and through this to save our souls."* Spir. Ex. [ 23].

The second and third of preferences are nothing more than concrete forms of service for the justice of the Kingdom, with a preference for the poor and the new generations. These preferences echo the eternal king's invitation "to work with Him in the day and watch in the night because then we will have part with Him in victory as we have had in the works" (cf. EE [93]). This attitude corresponds well to the spirit of the second and third weeks.

Finally, ecological respect for the 'common house' is one of the practical consequences of contemplation in order to attain the love of a God present in the world and in the created nature, "vegetating, giving life and "feeling" (cf. EE [235]). Our four universal preferences are not strange to the spirit of the Spiritual Exercises and feed all of them.

There is nothing unusual about Jesuits discerning about mission preferences today, they have integrated them, with great consensus and most likely without explicitly thinking, in the furrow of the Spiritual Exercises as a factor of integration. The first preference is the first, not only in the order of the list but in the order of importance.

Our Father General understands this in his letter in which he repeats Pope Francis' commentary: "The Holy Father insists that "the first preference is capital because it assumes as its basis the Jesuit's treatment with the Lord, the personal and community life of prayer and discernment." He adds: "*Without this praying attitude, the other doesn't work.*"

## **B - Integrating preferences into our mission as Evangelizers**

After this personal integration or "ad intra integration" of preferences, we have to seek "ad extra" integration, that is, in our ministries. The preferences are not a collection of disconnected elements, but rather interwoven threads that form the same rope that we call evangelization, as presented today by pastoral theology. In the Church, ministries are diverse but the mission is one and the same and has a name: evangelization. The four preferences are not four missions nor four ministries but four objectives, four dimensions of what constitutes the evangelizing mission of the Society of Jesus today.

The Father General, before a group of lay people, explained why the change from "priorities" to "preferences": We persuade ourselves that 'preferences' really reflects what we need and what we want to integrate. No priorities, as priorities, exclude: When you prioritize something, you exclude something else. This is not a "choice" between schools, universities or parishes. Preferences are vital guidelines for focusing all of our apostolates over the next ten years."

It is normal for some ministries to emphasize one preference more than the other, but all must be taken into account in each of our apostolates.

Pastoral Theology, now preferably called Practical Theology, considers that there are also four essential dimensions of all evangelization. They are designated with names inspired by Greek words, not by any eagerness for snobbery but because they are terms drawn from the

pastoral language of early Christian communities as described in the Acts of the Apostles. They are **martyria**, **liturgia**, **koinonia** and **diakonia**. A reading of our four apostolic priorities in the light of the dimensions of evangelization can help us not only for its integral understanding but also in the process of its realization.

**Martyria** means testimony. It is the proclamation of the Gospel message, not only with the proclamation of kerygma and catechesis (**didaskalia**) but with the witness of our own lives. Without the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ, Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, evangelization would be incomplete (EN 34). The whole process of mystagogical initiation and Christian education of young people finds its place within this dimension. More specifically, Ignatian pedagogy must characterize our entire educational ministry, from the primary level to the tertiary level. The witness of spiritual life is a fundamental criterion in the realization of every apostolic plan. Pope Francis likes to quote the phrase of his Patron Francis of Assisi: *"The Gospel must be proclaimed 24 hours a day and if necessary, we preach"*.

**Liturgia** includes more than rites. It is the dimension of worship, public and private prayer, of "oblation of our own lives as a spiritual sacrifice" (cf. Rom 12:1-2), It is the practice of the sacraments and in general of "familiarity with God in spiritual things" to use the expression dear to Saint Ignatius. The liturgical dimension was regarded by the Second Vatican as "the culmination and source of the whole life of the Church" (cf. SC 10) both the evangelizing and the evangelizing. It is not only those Jesuits who work in parishes who must keep this dimension in mind, but it must be present, in various degrees and modalities, in all our ministries. **Koinonia** indicates communion. It is the community and ecclesial dimension of evangelization. It is the building of the community of the Church, guided by the Spirit, that evangelizes; not the isolated individuals and sometimes enclosed in an individualistic prominence. This dimension reminds us that we are "Society", that is to say that we work in collaboration, between ourselves and with other people and institutions, in order to contribute towards the construction of a **human koinonia**, based on justice and reconciliation and a communion that overcomes the barriers of discrimination, wars, hatreds, revenge and other factors of division and conflict in society. The promotion of justice, peace and reconciliation, as well as the care of the common house, are apostolic preferences that are perfectly integrated into this dimension, as St Paul wrote referring to the various gifts of the Spirit "for the common good". (Cf. 1 Cor 12:4-7)

**Diakonía**, as the name implies, is the attitude of service in all its multiple human, material, spiritual and intellectual dimensions. It is evangelization as a service to the human community in all its aspects. It is the whole complete human being who must evangelize and the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* is there to remind us: *"The joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties of the people of our time, especially the poor and those who suffer, are both joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties of Christ's disciples. There is nothing truly human that does not find an echo in his heart."* (GS 1). The desire to walk alongside the poor, and the discarded from the world, is embodied pastorally in this dimension.

It would be very long to develop in detail all the concrete applications of these apostolic preferences, which is not my task at this time. That would be more our task during the time of reflection and prayer of this short retreat.

My goal was only to present them as integrative factors of the mission that the Society is proposing to us today. These dimensions are both indicators that help us evaluate our ministries and know the extent to which our apostolic preferences are active in them. Our priorities must be understood as the Society's evangelizing mission today. It is these preferences that can make a difference and give Ignatian identity to our apostolic work.

What is new is not in the content of preferences but in the way of understanding them as concrete objectives and as motivations that can renew our lives and all our ministries. What's new is not so much in what needs to be done but in how we should do it. What's new is within us.

### **Conclusion: A "New Pentecost" for the Society.**

On the past June 9th, we have celebrated the Solemnity of Pentecost. When Pope John XXIII proclaimed the convocation of the Ecumenical Council, there was the talk of a "*new Pentecost for the Church*" and it was no less in fact. The fact that we are still trying to realize the ideals proposed by the Second Vatican Council is proof of its prophetic vision and its renewing capacity. It was, without any doubt, the most important ecclesial event of the twentieth century and marked the beginning of a new era in the life of the Church.

I would dare to think that something similar, keeping the proper proportions and without pretensions of media publicity, has happened with the General Congregation 36 and the spiritual discernment to which that Congregation gave rise. Not because the previous Congregations have fallen short, but quite the opposite: because the Congregation 36 with less duration and fewer decrees than the preceding Congregations, triggered a process of discernment that continued and continues in the life of the Society thus confirming the principle proposed by Pope Francis in "*Evangelii Gaudium*": '*time is greater than space*' (EG 224-225). It's better to launch processes than to occupy spaces. Congregation 36, besides giving us a new Superior General, harvested the ripe fruits of a long and sometimes painful process of renewal of the Society in our time, which began with Congregation 32 under the prophetic guidance of our unforgettable General Pedro Arrupe. Isn't this a new Pentecost for the Society?

Now it is up to us, fortunate harvesters of the discernment of several generations of Jesuits, to gather that fruit today and to launch the process of carrying them out. Today we can repeat with the psalm: "*Those who sow in tears shall reap among songs*" (Psalm 126:5). May the joy of the harvest not make us forget the heavy responsibility that awaits us.

Ignatius warns us: "*Love must be put more in deeds than in words*" (Spr. Ex. [230]). Specialists tell us that the use of verbs in Ignatian language is an indicator of that love that must be put into works. The same is true of the letter of the Father General in which he formulates the

four apostolic preferences for us. Each begins with a verb: The verbs mentioned in preferences, *show, walk, accompany and collaborate*, manifest the action Spirit for the mission in our hands. That is why we are invited to pray that the same Spirit who guided the Society in discerning to renew our mission, may guide us and give us strength and courage to transform and carry them out.

Let us live these preferences as a program of life, the fruit of the spiritual discernment of the body of the Society, in close communion with the supreme Pastor of the Church. One could not think of anything more Ignatian so as to "*feel with the Church*" and serve today "*under the banner of the cross*". During this short recollection, let us ask the Lord for his "abundant grace so that we may feel his holy will and may fulfil it".

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