

Lay Associates' General Assembly

Third Assembly of Priest Associates

Martillac, September 25-28 2012

Opening Address

Introduction ...

Most of us present here have come from the Congress Assembly, during which we had a good experience of journeying together as one Family, experiencing ONENESS in our diversity. (Those who have just arrived will be helped to enter into this experience) Now living out of that awareness of the Whole you will be, as it were, reflecting more directly on your particular vocation as a priest or lay associate always remembering that you are part of a bigger Whole and that what you do here has an impact not only on your specific vocation but on the Family, the Church, society and the whole of life.

During these days we experienced a great desire to understand and deepen our identity as Family. We had a tangible experience of this identity here in Martillac and perhaps we are more aware now that the dynamics that are moving in each vocation and between vocations have an impact on the Whole. In the light of what we have lived during these days it may be good to recall that in the time of our Founder **all** were associates; so we had lay, priest, apostolic, secular, contemplative associates – today we might say members; and that the Association, as it was called then, was, in the mind of our Founder. **ONE** before it was diverse.

We hear the call to a new way of thinking and acting, we recognise our common responsibility to live our spirituality and mission in a new and dynamic way for the sake of God's reign in our world. We desire to be part of the transformation that is taking place through the work of the Spirit. In order to live effectively our mission as Family, each part, each vocation, must become more active, responsible and vibrant while always remaining inter connected, involved and committed to mission as one Family.

I think it is true to say of all vocations in the Family, that we are more used to reflecting on our own specific vocation (i.e. focussing on parts) and so tend to ignore the bigger picture to which we belong. The Assembly we have just lived called us to go beyond that. When our focus is only on our own vocation we tend to:

- see our part of the Family but not the whole.
- see what is happening with us but not what is happening in the other groups.
- be unaware of how our reality impacts the other vocations and how theirs impact ours.
- be unaware of how all the parts (groups) influence one another.
- be somewhat disconnected from what is happening around us, in our locality, in our world, to our planet, in our Church etc
- live separateness rather than communion.

So today as we continue our journey – let us not forget the bigger picture to which we belong – Family, Church, Society, Earth, universe - and let us make a conscious effort to remain connected to the Whole and

to remember that what we do or say here has an influence much greater than each one's particular vocation.

Since we are speaking of celebrating 50 years of Vatican 11 these days it is good to remind ourselves that in the teaching of Vat 11, Lumen Gentium, Chapter 2, the understanding of Church is grounded in the holistic image of the "**people of God**" – and that we still have not really grasped this concept in a way that enables us to live it consciously and allow it to influence our way of relating in and of being Church. As a Family we have a privileged opportunity to witness to this call in the Church.

I would like to share just a few short quotations from Lumen Gentium:

All people are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the decree of God's will may be fulfilled. In the beginning God made human nature one and decreed that all God's children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one. (117)

All the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit. (120)

This document also affirmed the equality of vocations lived according to each one's specificity.

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.

This characteristic of universality which adorns the people of God is a gift from God. By reason of it, the Catholic Church strives constantly and with due effect to bring all humanity and all its possessions back to its source In Christ, with Him as its head and united in the Spirit.

The laity, however, are given this special vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth.

The importance of being aware of and co-responsible for the Whole to which we belong was also underlined.

In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase.

Building on the theme of the Church as the People of God, Lumen Gentium (39-42), stresses the universal call to holiness. We can say that holiness is that deep attachment to Christ through the Spirit which enables God's love, gentleness and compassion to be visible in the world. It is that desire to seek always God's will in all things. We, Holy Family, speak of this as "*loving, seeking, desiring God in everything.*" All the different vocations in life are a means to holiness and one is not higher than the other. Holiness, in tune with God's will, seeks to promote communion.

In today's Gospel Jesus enlarges and widens the concept of Family well beyond that of family of origin, our own relatives ... when He says: *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.* (Luke 8:21) Let us enter into this experience with open ears and hearts to "hear the word of God and do it."

Margaret Muldoon

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