

Fr. Frederico Lombardi's Address to the Congregation in Gratitude to Fr. Adolfo Nicolas

Monday 3rd October 2016

Dear Fr. Adolfo, I have been asked to address a few words of gratitude to you, in the name of the Congregation and in a certain sense of the whole Society of Jesus, on the occasion of the end of your service as Fr. General after the acceptance of your resignation. This work was entrusted to you by the Society of Jesus over eight years ago on the 19th of January 2008 at the 35th General Congregation in this same aula. The members of that Congregation elected you by a large majority and were confident that in entrusting you with the leadership of the whole Society they had made the right choice.

Today, looking at these years which you have been our Fr. General, we would like to thank the Lord for all that has happened for the good of the whole Society of Jesus, spread throughout the world, for the Church and for all the people we serve.

Thanks for your own personal style. All those who have known you and met you talk of your cordiality, spontaneity and the simplicity of your rapport with people, of your availability and your approachable demeanour, of your amicable relations with everyone, both with simple as with high-ranking people. Those who have spent these years with you in the Curia were struck by your simple and smiling appearance, by your good humour and never remember having seen you with a gloomy expression and certainly never angry.

Your participation has always been very cordial in the community meetings at which you were present. You have always attracted affection and confidence, openness and trust on the part of your brothers from all parts of the world, who have always felt encouraged in their apostolic work. You have been a superior who was looked upon with affection and you were always felt to be close and fraternal. I would say loved. Thank you for your ability to inspire us in our religious life and in our commitment to mission. You have continuously reminded us about the universal perspective of our mission, well-beyond the rigid borders of our regions, our nations and our provinces you have always invited us to a deep spirituality to avoid the risks of mediocrity and of superficiality. "Universality" and "depth" have been your two words keywords which we shall not forget. You have exhorted us not to be "distracted" Jesuits but "to taste and savour the interior things" to go to the heart of problems, to the apostolic challenges of our times, contemplating the world with the eyes of God using our intelligence and our heart. You have encouraged us to share the joys and sorrows and questions of our brothers and sisters, accompanying them in the search for the signs of the presence and the will of God, the movements of the Spirit below the superficial crust and the exterior form of this globalized and frenetic world, which is characterized by this new digital culture.

You have given us the example of serene wisdom expressing itself in rich homilies and in imaginative and deep points for our reflection, an invitation to coherence in our religious life, to concreteness in our daily conversion. Your homilies were born of your rich spiritual experiences and echo your apostolic experience on the great horizons of Asia. Your personal charism does not overshadow your commitment to fulfilling the mandate assigned to you by GC 35 concerning the governance of the Society. During these years, under your leadership and your dynamic guidance, we have seen an enormous work of restructuring in diverse parts of the world. You have invited the major superiors to take a long-term view in their planning and to discern about the multiple works and ministries

which are currently their responsibility. The provincial conferences and their precedents have been encouraged in their work to respond to the challenges which go well beyond their provincial borders and regions.

The General Curia has been a very dynamic workshop for experimenting and creativity in coming up with new ways of serving the Society. Your style of government has been decentralized and not individualistic, but you have been very capable of letting others help you, to involve your most direct collaborators in a common work and in co-responsibility and teamwork. You have effectively used groups and commissions to face complex problems in the construction, reorganization and the valuing of the secretariats, like those for Ecumenism and Inter-religious dialogue, for secondary and higher education... Even the Archives and historical institute have been reorganized; the workplaces have been restructured and made more welcoming and functional. The revamping of the Curia and of the *Via dei Penitenzieri* and lastly the renovation of the aula has been the appropriate crowning of all this work which have been done thanks to the whole team of Governance.

You have reminded us that the intellectual apostolate must continue to be one of the characteristics of the service that the Society offers the Church and the world. You have always encouraged the efficacious commitment of our whole Order in sustaining the institutions and missions which the Holy See has entrusted us with in Rome for the good of the universal Church.

You have promoted what we could define as a “culture of responsibility,” in the English language the word very often used is “accountability:” to give account of the works that have been entrusted to us. This holds for all our responsibilities, such as those apostolates of governance. You have been particularly attentive to cases where it was necessary to intervene, for example in the cases of abuse of minors. Like the rest of the Church, we have trod a painful path of responding to the abuse scandal for our conversion and purification. The journey is not yet complete till we become true protagonists in the process of preventing and protecting minors, but much has been done already. There are other important aspects of your leadership of the Society, which we would not like to forget. You have been very committed and have travelled widely. First and foremost, to know the universal Society, particularly in those areas that you knew less before being elected and also to be close and present and to encourage participation and to know in a deeper way such realities. You have written many letters and delivered many speeches and have had conversations and innumerable accounts of conscience listening deeply and attentively.

In the numerous visitations to the provinces – nearly all – and in the encounters in which you have participated you were always welcomed with joy and gratitude and as a fount of inspiration, both by Jesuits and our collaborators and friends. In your services to the Society, you have not spared yourself, but you have been generous and joyful. You have not belonged to yourself, but to the Lord and concretely, in the last eight years, to us. We are all grateful to you for this.

During the Congregation for procurators which was held for the first time in Africa, in Nairobi in 2012, you took pains to talk at length on the State of the Society to offer us an objective and deep reading of the positive and negative aspects of our current situation to help us dutifully to make our examination of conscience. We have not forgotten your acute description of three types of Jesuits: “those who are fully available for mission, those, who although working well, are not free enough as the Ignatian magis would require and those who unfortunately have grave “unfreedoms.” To this day, that speech is a valuable document and has helped us the preparation of this General

Congregation that is currently underway. We do not want to forget the wisdom you demonstrated in seizing the opportune moment to commemorate the centenary of our Restoration in 2014 to revive in us the sense of our extraordinary history and the responsibility which derives from this, the awareness and self-understanding which is the foundation of our identity for our mission.

Your guidance has inspired us and encouraged us and has been appreciated even beyond the frontiers of the Society of Jesus. For a long time you were vice-President and subsequently President of the conference of Major Superiors. Members of both male and female religious congregations have appreciated and enjoyed your service. We cannot forget, as we have been reminded several times by Popes, that the Society has always had an important role and responsibility for religious apostolic life in the Church. You have represented and personified this responsibility and it is not by chance that the superiors general elected you as the representative on the occasion of the Synod of the last few years. Your interventions were marked by your freedom of spirit, by your originality, courage and a very wide perspective, showing the breath of your experience, your knowledge of different cultures, and different situations of the life of the Church and the need for renewal for the theology of mission.

We have reason to think that you have been also in some way instrumental in encouraging Pope Francis to renew the methods with which Synods are held and for this reason you have been part of the last two Synods on the family where you were specially chosen to take an active part in the commissions which worked on the synthesis for the redaction of the *Relatio*.

The General guides us, but also represents us in our relations in the other areas of the Church in its universal governance. You have been personally committed to guarantying good and constructive relations with the different dicasteries of the Roman Curia. You have often visited highest officials of the Holy See. Jesuits have always felt that they were in good hands when you took upon yourself the responsibility to deal with their problems and they were confident that you knew how to come to their defence with clarity and decisiveness when this was just and necessary. Jesuits have felt that they were guided with a serene security in an attitude of service and not servility, in the spirit of loyalty and a mature sense of *sentire cum Ecclesia*, according to the spirit of Ignatius and the characteristics of our Society.

Finally, you have been the first General to serve under a Jesuit Pope, who before being bishop and cardinal, had been a provincial and had participated in this same hall in two General Congregations and who now we see looking out from the *Loggia di Saint Pietro* dressed in white, a situation never imagined by the large majority of us. This is an unprecedented historical event, the full implications of which we have still to reflect on in this Congregation. But now we would like to thank you because you have established with Pope Francis direct and cordial communication of which the whole Society has experienced the benefits. You have done this with great simplicity and discreetly, which are your characteristics and you have avoided any embarrassment for us and for the whole Society in this new situation.

The Society of Jesus has continued to put itself at the service of the Pope for mission and at the same time has been in spiritual harmony with him, which comes naturally from our common identity and religious spirituality and which has increased our affection for and desire to serve the Vicar of Christ in his service to the Church and to humanity. We are living our mission in an outgoing Church which is called to announce Jesus and to serve at the frontiers and the peripheries, which is

journeying with the people of God, in solidarity with the poor and with all those who suffer, looking for and recognizing God present and working in all things to the furthest reaches of the world and to the depths of history...*Evangelii Gaudium*, the joy of announcing the Gospel, which is the mission of the Church and of the Society in the world.

Dear Fr. Adolfo, you have experienced in your life the joy to which you have invited our brother the vicar of Christ, you have witnessed his serene wisdom. Thank-you for having guided and accompanied us until today and in this spirit as the Body of the Society of Jesus. Thank-you and we wish you all the best for your future journey. May the Lord continue to accompany you always. We shall accompany you with our prayers.