

For preaching to the General Congregation of the Jesuits (2 October 2016)
(Ha 1, 2-3 ; 2, 2-4 ; Ps 94 ; 2Tm 1, 6-8.13-14 ; Lk 17, 5-10)

Lord, Increase Our Faith !

This pressing request to the Lord is the most beautiful prayer that one can imagine to « open » the celebration of your General Congregation. And in the Gospel that has just been proclaimed, Jesus points out two reasons why this prayer is so right. This faith is necessary - even if it remains as modest in appearance as a mustard seed - because it is about daring to aim for the improbable: « you can say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you ». It is even more necessary, because it is to understand that, even if we aim for the incredible, it is about daring to say : « We are unworthy servants : we have only done our duty » ! An assembly such as yours, rooted in a tradition of such rich evangelization, carrier of so many and such varied experiences, will without doubt move between the duty of constantly calling the Society to dare the audacity of the « improbable » and the evangelical willingness to do it with the humility of those who know that, in this service where the human engages all his energy, « everything depends on God ».

But is it possible for us to have this audacity of the improbable, this audacity of the Gospel, the audacity of your founder Ignatius who founded his Society, small as a mustard seed, in a time of crisis, of a need for brotherhood and faced with immense challenges? It is, it seems to me, the question which torments the prophet Habakkuk, « How long Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? or cry out to you, Violence!, but you do not save ? ». Many among you could list the curses of the Prophet which explain the strength with which he calls on his God. Still today the world is disfigured by those who accumulate what is not theirs, who pursue first their own interests, who build a world on the blood of a multitude of forgotten and manipulated people, who continuously invent new idols. Violence, which disfigures the face of the human in individuals, in societies, and in peoples. The most improbable thing, in this context, may not be to reverse, with our human hands and within the limits of our minds and our capacities, these acts of violence so as to reset the world. We must, of course, dare to seek how to mend what is torn. But the real audacity of the improbable is it not to make heard, at the heart of this work of « re-sewing », the voice of the One who against all odds, led his people and gave them the strength to live by his faithfulness? May the Lord grant you the grace, throughout your reflections and discernment, to be guided, engendered, in this audacity to make heard through your commitments, your words, your solidarity, the always unexpected voice of the One in whom the world hopes, who reverses death and establishes life, the One to whom you seek to give the greatest glory?

Far from being naive, this audacity is realistic. Paul the apostle , in his Second Letter to Timothy, helps us to understand why. It is a realistic audacity, first, because it is based on a primary gift : « revive the free gift of God », an invitation that echoes others formulated by the apostle: « Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord » (Rm 12, 11), « Do not quench the Spirit » (1 Th 5, 19), « Do not grieve the Holy Spirit » (Eph 4, 29). It is probably the main task of a Congregation such as the one that opens for you today: to draw on the audacity of the improbable in fidelity to the work of the Spirit. To find the strength and creativity of fidelity in the breath in which the Spirit holds us as he leads us to encounter and to listen to the other, who creates a well of compassion in the heart of the person, who consolidates the unbreakable alliance with those who are entrusted to us. But this audacity of the improbable is realistic also because it seeks constantly to be in unison with the One of whom Paul, enduring his suffering, is

made herald, apostle and doctor, the Saviour Jesus Christ who has done the improbable when he destroyed death and made life and immortality to shine through the Gospel (v. 9-12). The audacity of evangelization is oriented towards the face of this Saviour whose voice it seeks to make heard and whose mystery it seeks to make known. The mystery of this voice is that its only claim is to affirm that it is in the humble confrontation with the absurd that the life given opens in this world the path of a new birth to life.

Increase our faith, asked the Apostles. But, how did this request come to them ? How, in our time, are we to respond to the urgent need to live as men of faith, contemplatives in action, men whose lives will truly be given for others? You remember that in the Gospel of Luke, the passage that we have heard today comes after Jesus' teaching about life shared between brothers. It is inevitable that scandals happen, and you must be on your guard not to lead even one of these little ones into sin. Then comes the teaching on forgiveness tirelessly given to the brother, once, seven times... And here comes the request of the Apostles! Deep down, it is always the same thing: just like the Kingdom, the unlikely is never far from you. Yes, of course, it is a passionate search to open in this world ways for wisdom, paths on which the human words and projects have the meaning of trying to build a hospitable world for human beings. But what can be given as the inner fire of this passionate search, is the concrete experience, sometimes so banal and often so difficult, of forgiveness. This experience of overcoming the offense to give, again, without condition, life in abundance. This experience which makes us discover that in ourselves we have a life that is so much stronger, so much more beautiful, than the one we thought we possessed, a life which finds its full truth when it extricates itself to be offered to the other. Experience of the fraternal life, witness to which is so important today. It seems to me that it is not for nothing that in the Gospel of today, Jesus continues by evoking this simple servant. Of what, precisely, are you the servant? Of a table, a table of sinners, a table of welcome for all to which are invited the blind and the lame, Pharisees and publicans, adulterers and good people. Your founder, Ignatius, prayed like this: « Lord Jesus, teach us to be generous, teach us to serve You as You deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and to ask for no reward save that of knowing we are doing Your will ». Is this not an invitation, once more today, to place ourselves, all of us, at the service of this table ?

The table of Emmaus, where the simple servant learns his profession by allowing himself to be guided by his first companion, the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Lord, Increase our Faith!