WELCOME OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
Introduction to the Members of the General Chapter
9. Juli 2007

Dear Sisters,

today we begin officially the 22nd General Chapter. More than 30 years ago the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious called a Chapter a "Paschal Celebration". That make surprise us, because many a times we experiences or experience a Chapter more as a burden than a celebration. But when we take into consideration that each Chapter is a time of „re-creation", of „new creation", of renewal, then it is indeed a Paschal event, an event in which the Risen Christ is with us on the way, however not recognized by us immediately.

Perhaps we cam – like the disciples of Emmaus or the apostles in general – with many questions and some doubts and concern (demur): questions which besiege (beset) us rightly, mainly when we think of the future of the Congregation; questions which remained without answer. Why do we only have so few vocations (entrances)? Why do young Sisters leave our community again? Why do we have so many sick Sisters, even in younger age? Why do we have to give up again an apostolic activity? Etc. Each one of us could add to this list of questions. And we may have concerns, doubts whether such a Chapter could change something at all. "But we had hoped!" We had hoped that he would „deliver" us from the problems which are apparently accumulating. But seemingly nothing is changing – in any case not to the better, as we have to realize. And we do not notice that our gaze is getting blear (dull) so that we do not see the ONE who is with us on the way: Jesus Christ.

It is important that we – in spite of all that – remain <u>together</u> on the way, because then he is always already present among us. He gives us time to express our disappointed expectations. He knows that this can already liberate (relieve) our heart and opens it for his Word, for his mandate, his mission which is combined with his word. "Cast the net over the right side" – even if it is against all logic (if it seems absurd). This mission (mandate) can provoke (cause) a "crisis" in us. Shall we get engaged in his Word (venture on his Word)? Or it is more meaningful to continue our familiar tasks as long as our strengths allow it? Why take a risk of which we do not know the out coming?! But in some way we feel also in this crisis that "our heart is burning", that is (or He?) urges us to get involved into his mandate (mission).

Dear Sisters, perhaps we are right now in midst of this time of transition, because each crisis is marked by transition, change, transformation. During the crisis, this process of change it is important not to lose sight of the greater goal and to move toward it. If we only circle around our internal problems we are not longer instruments in God's hand who wants life, life in fullness for all, as he himself says. Butt hat can only be reached through growing, change, transformation. I do not say that our internal problems are not important, as for example our concern with regard to the ministries, questions with regard to our life in community, life of prayer, vows, government structures etc. But all that is not an end in itself but is oriented towards our mission. Who is called to follow Christ, is called to be with him and to be <u>sent</u>. "As the Father has sent me so I send you," Jesus says to his disciples short before his Passion. When we lose sight of this "so I send you" then our Religious Life, yes, our Christian life has no meaning, no right to exist, because the sacrament of baptism is a call to mission. The theme of the General Chapter – To be a living memory of Christ's life and action – reminds us of this "As – so"

Dear Sisters, important is that we recognize anew and more profound this being sent. At the end of each Eucharist we are sent. When we take seriously our Eucharistic life-style then the Eucharist is not only a ritual, but continue during the day. We shall be "bread broken" where people are longing for a participation in the fullness of life. We have to be willing to be sent. Go into the deep! Cast the net over the right - the right(!) - side! Dare also to undertake what seems senseless! Let go your own

“wisdom” and trust in the wisdom of God which consists always in the Paschal Mystery, that is in the mystery of the grain of wheat.

But just therefore it is indispensable that we anchor our life more and more in Jesus Christ. Daily he speaks to us in his Word, in the Eucharist he transforms us into him, he comes to us in our Sisters with whom we live, and in all who are entrusted to us. To be a living memory of Christ’s life and actions challenges us to embrace in our world of violence, exploitation, hunger, corruption, war an alternative, contra-cultural way of living, to swim against the current. As Jesus was a sign of contradiction so also we shall be so. That has much to do with a life-style which makes clear that our life, built on Christ, is meaningful. As Sisters who shall continue the mission of Mother Pauline we are called to live a spirituality which is anchored in the Word of God and in the Eucharist. Fidelity to the charism means to live it in creative fidelity. We may not forget: In all our considerations is the vitality of our charism today the crucial point, not this are that ministry. We have to discern and study whether our praxis is still in line with the needs of the people and the Church and whether it is still in accord with our charism. Our basic engagement should not be directed to our institutional survival. Important is rather the prophetic witness of hope, life, joy. “The prophecy of hope and of life is for us an imperative because we ourselves, like all the people of God, need to have our inner strength sustained so that we may truly believe that another world is possible,” said the president of the UISG, Sr. Therenzinha J. Rasera, in her welcoming talk to the 850 General Superiors of the UISG Plenary. “See how former predictions have come true. Fresh things I now foretell, before they appear, I tell you of them” (Is 42: 9). For that we need the contemplative gaze, that is the gaze of God, perceiving the human beings, the world, our closest surrounding and ourselves with the eyes of God, who wants life for all, life in fullness. When we during the coming weeks will search for orientation fort he next six years then MISSION has to be the guideline. To be a living memory of the life and action of Jesus can be a “dangerous” because it challenges us to let go the self-made securities and to “launch into the deep.”

I hope that this Chapter will open us for our mission here and now, because only then we can build our future. The five areas, to which the General Superiors at the end of the UISG Plenary committed themselves, can help to get involved in the challenges of our time. I mention here only the keywords, the „five threats“, as they were called: the woman, integrity of creation, inter-religious dialogue, immigrants and displaced persons, laity. During the Chapter we will go into details.

Let me close with an appeal which the president of the UISG addressed to the 850 Superior Generals, because I think that these aspects are so important that they may be a guide for our considerations.
The point is

- to reach beyond a traditional religious Life that is activist, self-sufficient and secure, towards a religious Life that is powerless, simple, humanized, sharing of the same destiny as the poor;
- to reach beyond an ‘intimist’ spirituality, consisting of a stream of words, far from the realities of life, and advance towards a mystique founded on the Word of God that nourishes our passion for God and our passion for humanity;
- to reach beyond a style of religious Life that is professional and well adjusted to the rules of the system, towards a religious Life that is prophetic, audacious, capable of suggesting new alternatives;
- to reach beyond special offers and temptations of consumerism, of secularism, of individualism…. to a religious Life centered on the defense of the dignity of human life and of all creation;

- to reach beyond the superficiality of exterior appearances to go towards a religious Life that lives from within, from the essential of the human heart, exploiting its humanizing strengths and its capacity to love;
- to reach beyond stability and security to live on the dangerous frontiers that challenge, where the marginalized of our world suffer. This demands of us a less structured religious Life, less bureaucratic, poorer, freer and more migratory;
- to reach beyond our fears and our human limitations to let God mould us, transform us, save us and send us always and again towards some situation in our life, no matter which, so that we may be *credible and luminous signs of the Gospel* of Jesus Christ.

Dear Sisters, I invite all of us to enter into the Paschal event of the Chapter in a climate of prayer, of openness and of sensitivity, of listening to one another and to the Spirit of God in us.

May the Trinity bless us, Mary with her Yes to God's plan remind us of our Yes and Mother Pauline intercede for us that "we all may be one." I wish us a creative, joyful and blessed Chapter.