

Echoes from the Plenary Council - 23rd November 2019

Last week had been quite heavy for a lot of work was done, inputs were given, group sessions and of course the plenary sessions were held at regular intervals. It all involved a lot of listening and trying to be faithful to the methodology to see just what we had achieved but above all to see just how we could move forward with even more enthusiasm and drive for the mission that has been entrusted to us. By the time Saturday came some were already whispering that maybe the session programmed for that day concerning 'the Charism' would finish earlier so that there would be some time to relax. On top of that Sunday was foreseen for our visit to our formation house in Jinja and that would mean the whole day with a good few hours of travelling involved.

In fact, Saturday was to be like the previous days for the whole day. The topic was given by Reginald Cruz, a Xavarian brother who is a lecturer in Tangaza. For those of us who may have been somewhat apprehensive, because it might prove to be tiring, we were delighted to realize that at the end of the day, despite a certain fatigue, we had all been very positively inspired by the whole day. Reginald came across as a talented and skilled presenter and there was no way that we could have fallen asleep even though at times the presentation could be quite condensed.

The charism is very much concerned with identity and Reginald was able to put us truly back on track with his enlightening presentation. This was accompanied by a powerful powerpoint presentation. The content itself was very rich and of course the link with all that had been discussed during the week was very clear. The charism must reside in the receiver so that he can discover, accept, nurture and eventually be able to live and share that charism. He must be part of the story, he must part of the melody and for that to happen we must be careful not to suffer from historical amnesia. Grounded in the present surely, but it is also important to be grounded in the past, grounded in memory. Our present reality must be informed by the past for it must guide us in our discernment today. As Pope Francis states clearly we must ask for, and preserve, the grace of memory and that certainly will help us to remember and to recall but also it is an imperative to re-establish our connectedness with the story, with the charism that the founder transmitted.

It is for us members to live it, safeguard it, constantly deepen it for the understanding of the charism is in the hands of its members. It must never become a museum piece, or like water in a bottle – it has to flow and it can only flow through us. We, in the final analysis, are the ones responsible for it and its transmission today. If we take our task lightly; if our living out of our charism is merely arbitrary or ambiguous then we will fail to be the worthy stewards of what has been preciously entrusted to us and the consequences will be felt and we may well lose our way. What is worse we will merely stumble in the darkness we have created. But let us remember the charism is a result of the Spirit. The charism of the founder must be seen as an expression of the Holy Spirit.

Fidelity to the founding charism and its subsequent spiritual heritage alongside our desire to live fully the gospel we preach is the story that we must identify with, it must become the song we sing, the narrative that is ours. May it not slip through our fingers like some fine grains of sands but let it embolden us as we confidently embrace the future.

Francis Barnes