

Homily of the Father General in Oies 29 / 01/22

I first visited Oies in 1992. There were three of us from San Gabriel, Austria, and we had gathered here for spiritual exercises before taking perpetual vows. Rudi Poehl, one of our confreres from Sudtiro, accompanied us. Of course, I had already read something and heard so much about Oies. But being there in person, especially during the wonderful summer days, was a special experience. Then I wondered what had induced Giuseppe Freinademetz to leave such a beautiful place to go far away.

I found the answer in the Bible, in a verse of the psalms, which I had read several times in San Gabriel on the door of the office for vocations ministry. In psalm 18, verse 20, it says: "The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness" This verse challenged both me and my Swiss colleague Hans Weibel in such a way that we chose it as the motto for the feast of perpetual vows. Yes, it is God himself who leads Giuseppe Freinademetz and all of us out to sea.

And this God is the God of hope, as St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, in the first reading we heard today. Hope is open spaces: hope opens up prospects, hope dares the uncertain, and the unknown. Those who hope have the courage to leave and take risks. Vaclav Havel, a fervent pacifist and first President of the Czechoslovak Republic, recalls that: "hope is not the belief that something has a positive outcome, but the certainty, that something makes sense, however it ends up."

I believe that being a sign of hope is the vocation of Christians in our time, and this is also the deeper meaning of religious life and of being missionaries in our Church. This is the sense of holiness in our world. The situation in today's world would offer sufficient reasons for despair. Precisely in such a situation we are all called to be signs of hope.

Referring to today's readings and inspired by the life of Saint Joseph, I would like to illustrate three aspects of hope, which are relevant to the mission to which we are all called and enabled.

The first: hope founds communion, community. There is hope if we know that we are not left alone. Hope is a longing for communion, for being together with others. Whoever hopes cannot keep the reason for his hope only for himself, but he wants to share it. And so hope brings people together and creates communities.

Hope alongside love and faith is one of the three cardinal virtues. It helps us to overcome the difficulties of life, because hope teaches us that what exists now is not everything. Whoever believes in God has hope, because faith in God is the reason for our hope. Hope makes love possible and love means believing that the other man has the opportunity to grow, that the other person is on the way to do the best of himself. Love opens up the future, and the name of the future is hope.

Giuseppe Freinademetz attached great importance to the fact that the missionaries stayed united and got along well. A few months before his death he wrote to Father Heming, the director spirituality of the brothers: "Try above all to promote good relations among the brothers. Much depends on this". It is important to make sure that the people in the home feel accepted and understood, forgiven and encouraged.

The second: hope makes perseverance possible. Those who hope do not give up easily. He also sees opportunities in challenges. He remains confident even in the difficult moments of life, because at the end of the tunnel there will be a light.

In the Gospel, Jesus made it clear to his disciples that they would not be spared difficulties. There are situations where they are rejected, where they have to ask if it really makes sense. However,

the announcement remains: The Kingdom of God is near. It is close wherever men are close to each other, especially in the dark days of life.

Giuseppe Freinademetz lived on this hope and spread it throughout the world. He spent the last weeks of his life in Yenchowfu, where he and the Steyl nuns took care of the victims of a typhus epidemic. He wanted to accompany the sisters and the patients. On January 16, 12 days before his death, he wrote a long report to Bishop Henninghaus with the names of the victims of the epidemic. The mission had suffered a lot, however he clearly stated: we do not want to fall into pessimism, but to continue to work with greater courage.

The third: hope sees the positive in other people without going blind to their weaknesses. The man of hope is not fixed on the dark sides of others, but he always strives to recognize their positive qualities and to promote them.

In the first reading, St. Paul writes: "My dear brothers, I am also convinced, as far as you are concerned, that you too are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and capable of correcting one another. However, I wrote to you with a bit of audacity, somewhere, as if to remind you of what you already know ". Paul writes in explicit terms, not to belittle others, but so that the goodness that is in them may further develop for the benefit of all.

This was also the strength of Giuseppe Freinademetz. He explicitly said that he did not have much interest in the administration and that he was not very intelligent either. But he had a big heart for his confreres and for the Chinese. As Provincial he had to write a report each year addressed to the parent company in Steyl. And so, for example, he writes about one of his brothers: "When he arrived in China, he studied Chinese assiduously. Now, after three years, he is able to speak it very well. He is diligent, devoted and observes the rules. But he is also, in a certain way, a pessimist, he demands too much and writes very harsh letters about his brothers, so he is not very well liked by many. But in time he will surely become a good missionary". Hope sees the positive in others, without going blind to their weaknesses.

Dear sisters and brothers ...

All of us, the baptized, are missionaries, because God himself is a missionary. To live our missionary vocation and bear witness to it, let us take St. Joseph Freinademetz as an example and let us entrust ourselves to his intercession. Because for St. Joseph the missionary is not an offer of himself that he makes to God but a gift that God gives him.