The VIII Plenary Council of the Order is finished

by Br. Paweł Teperski

ROME, Italy – the VIII Plenary Council of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin on the theme, ‘The grace of working’ was held from October 26 to November 19, 2015. The place of the meeting was the International College ‘San Lorenzo da Brindisi’ in Rome. The members were 44 Capuchin friars: 34 delegates from all over the world and the General Council of the Order. For a good four weeks they reflected together on various aspects of work understood as grace. Beyond these 44, there were also 30 other friars charged with various services.

The PCO was realized in two parts: in the first part, the delegates concentrated on what could be called, ‘listening to the observers.’ In practice, already on the second day of the PCO, the delegates were listening to experts who presented the issues of work under its sociological, biblical, and Capuchin-Franciscan aspects; in other words, there was the opportunity to reflect on work from many angles. These academic talks were flanked by some other presentations, offered by both friars from various parts of the Order and by priests and bishops working in many different services to the Church and to people, namely witness talks which offered a concrete resonance on what work means in its diverse fields of application. This first phase of listening concluded on Wednesday, November 4, with a day of retreat, dedicated entirely to prayerful listening to the Spirit of the Lord and his holy manner of operation.

In the second part of the PCO, on the other hand, the prospective became ever more specific, becoming a ‘listening to each other’; in fact, November 5 to 19 was the creative part of the Plenary Council. The friars dedicated themselves entirely to the process of developing the propositions, to the end of purifying, adapting, deepening, and living ‘today’ the grace of working in our Order, with the declared intention of being concrete and practical.

The Council concluded with a solemn celebration of the Eucharist on November 19.

Our General Minister, Br. Mauro Jöhri, who participated actively in the work of the PCO, left the following words in an interview at the end of this intense and strenuous month. (This can be found in the video-message on the website of the Order: www.ofmcap.org.)

“Dear brothers, after four weeks of work, of dialogue, but also of prayer and moments of recreation taken together, PCO VIII on the ‘Grace of Working’ is concluded.

“What brought us to reflect on the grace of working? In fact, there are many situations that are changing in the life of the Order: in some places pastoral work is diminishing; in others it is very difficult to live from our own work; in other places there is a need to take on new forms of work; in many fraternities we are taking it a little easy and we run the risk of having too many employees. There is also the risk of a lack of zeal, and so we dispense ourselves nonchalantly from work.

“It is not an easy thing to reflect on our daily life, but we have tried to do so, also inviting experts who have spoken to us on work, how it is seen in the society of today, by the mass media, by the Church. It was very enriching to also have among us some people who are wholly committed to work alongside the poor, in prisons...

“After all this process of listening, we tried to draft propositions to make a document which we don’t want to go right away to some library shelf, but which we want to put in your hands, dear brother, into the hands of your fraternity. Probably you will not find extraordinary things which will change the face of the Order. But from a serious encounter with the document and with our way of working changes can arise. Everything depends on whether we will have the courage to take new steps and be closer to the poor, more attentive to those who are less fortunate than us! In this we will take a path of growth and...
we will certainly be better sons of St. Francis.

“I want to thank all those brothers who, in spite of great responsibilities in their circumscriptions, have accepted coming here to Rome for a month in order to reflect together on the theme of ‘the grace of working’.

“We have realized once again that the Order today is very international and intercultural. If for some it is obvious to speak of ‘the grace of working’ for others work is something other than grace. Therefore we can affirm that this was a unique occasion to become aware of who we are, how we are, and where we are called to walk together, encountering each other, in dialogue, and above all listening to what the Spirit has to say to us today in the various contexts in which we carry out our mission, in the world and within the Church, contributing to the construction of the Kingdom of God.

“Dear brothers, I hope that this PCO VIII represents a true moment of grace and an occasion of formation to become aware of who we are, as Francis exhorts us: peace and good!”

With these words the VIII Plenary Council of the Order concluded. We now look forward to all that our Order, in this common moment of seeking the will of God regarding our work, will be able to make fruitful with its own work.

BARCELONA Cathedral, November 21, 2016. When, in the first part of the twentieth century, there was in Spain a persecution against the Church, many men and women religious were first expelled from their houses and were then killed in an escalating cruelty.

During the days of July 14 -16, 1936, the Capuchin Friars Minor of the Province of Catalonia were meeting in chapter in the friary of San Ana de Sarría (Barcelona), when the obedience was given to abandon the friaries and to hide in private houses in order to flee the violence that had already become a true and genuine persecution.

Between July 20 and 24, 1936, nine friaries of the Province of Catalonia, San Ana de Sarría (Barcelona), Ntra. Sra. di Pompeia (Barcelona), La Mare de Deu de l’Ajuda (Barcelona), Sant Antoni de Padua (Tarragona), La Inmaculada Concepción (Igualada), La Visitación ( Arenys de Mar), El Sagrat Cor de Jesús (Olot), La Mare de Déu dels Dolors di Manresa—in which there were three religious killed who are on their way to the altars in another cause begun in the diocese of Vic—and the residence Mare de Déu de Montserrat (Borges Blanques), indeed practically all the friaries of Catalonia with the exception of the friary of Mallorca remaining in the zone controlled by General Francisco Franco, were sacked and burned.

Thirty-six Capuchin Friars Minor, priests and lay brothers, found death and twenty-six of these, killed in odium fidei and massacred between July 28, 1936 and February 24, 1937, will be declared blessed on this November 21 in the Cathedral of Barcelona in a celebration at which Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, will preside by mandate of Pope Francis.

Here are their names: Fr. Frederic de Berga (Martí Tarrés Puigpelat), Fr. Modest de Mieres (Joan Bover Teixidó), Fr. Zacaries de Llorenç del Penedès (Sebastiá Sonet Romeu), Fr. Remigi del Papiol (Estève Santacana Armengol), Fr. Anselm d'Olot (Laurenti Basil Matas), Fr. Benigne de Canet de Mar (Miquel Sagré Forzaguerà), Fr. Josep de Calella de la Costa (Joan Vila Colomé), Fr. Martí de Barcelona (Jaume Boguñá Casanova), Fr. Rafael Maria de Mataró (Francesc de Paula Soteras Culla), Fr. Agustí de Montclar de Donzell (Josep Alcina Casas), Fr. Doroteu de Vilalba dels Arcs (Jordi Sampé Tarraga), Fr. Alexandre de Barcelona (Jaume Nàjera Gherma), Fr. Tarisici de Miralcamp (Josep Vilalta Saumell), Fr. Vincenç de Besalú (Julià Gebrat Marcé), Fr. Timoteu de Palafragull (Jesús Miquel Gibrán), Br. Miquel de Biañya (Pelayo Ayats Vergés), Br. Jordi de Santa Pau (Manuel Collellmír Senties), Br. Bonaventura de Arroyo Cerezo (Tomás Díaz Díaz), Br. Marcel del Penédes (Carles Canyes Santacana), Br. Eudald d’Igualada (Lluís Estruch Vives), the youngest victim at eighteen years and seven months, Br. Pacià Maria de Barcelona (Francesc Maria Colomer Presas), Br. Angel de Ferreries (Josep Coll Martí), Br. Cebrìà de Terrassa (Ramón Gros Balvè), Br. Eloi de Biañya (Joan Ayats Plantalech), Br. Prudenci de Pomar de Cinca (Gregori Charlez Ribera), Br. Félix de Tortosa (Joan Bonavida Dellà).

The political elections of 1936, though they still rewarded the two political forces already existing in Catalonia, the Republican Catalan Left and the Catalan League, which had tried to work together to distance themselves from the radicals, gave also a strong consent to the anarchists.

Once the war had blown up power passed from the government of the Republic to a ‘Committee of Anti-fascist Militants’ under the control of the anarchists. It was this Committee that was largely responsible for the persecution that was systematically organized against the Church. The persecution and the killing of priests and religious continued until the end of May 1937 and left the Church in hiding until the end of the war in 1939. Churches were closed and burned and the identification of someone as a religious meant death without process. The population was divided and fear brought the citizens to denouncing any suspect individual to the revolutionaries.

As the persecution exploded, the Capuchin fraternities were ready to send the friars to the houses of friends, acquaintances, or relatives
that had offered to receive them. All the friars had cut off their beards and taken off the habit in order to be able to go out, not fully aware of the danger ahead of them. The difficulty was great, however, because they couldn’t take refuge with family, for obvious reasons of security. Some friars succeeded in leaving Spain, but others remained in Catalonia, and already by September 1936 they had organized the clandestine Church, which had papal permission to celebrate Mass without vestments or proper sacred vessels.

The greater part of the Capuchin friars remaining in Catalonia were identified, some in private houses, others taken on the street or by the intervention of persons who denounced them. When they were discovered, however, they were killed summarily on the spot, shot without process. Others were even tortured with olive branches, struck with rifle stocks, and made to travel long distances with militants at their backs, humiliated and then shot.

Let us recall with a brief gesture some of the experiences that the new blessed had to endure. Fr. Federico of Berga, the first on the list, had been guardian, missionary in Central America and Provincial for one term. At the beginning of the revolution he was guardian in the friary of Arenys. After having hid himself for some days in the mountains, he arrived in Barcelona and participated actively in the clandestine network of the Church which was forming. Not long before his death, in February 1937, he calculated that he had distributed, always in danger for his life, Holy Communion some 1,200 times. He celebrated the Eucharist in private homes where small groups of the faithful gathered, and was discovered and captured during a search of the house where he had been received.

Among the young Capuchin students killed we can highlight Br. Marçal de Villafranca, the youngest of four brother friars. Born on April 16, 1917, he was killed on August 20, 1936; he was just over nineteen. After two searches by revolutionaries who were looking for his older brothers, the family decided to move to another neighborhood, but a neighbor followed them and reported them to the committee of the area. Saying goodbye to his mother, he said, “Mamma, do not suffer for what could happen to me. My conscience is in peace with God.”

Fr. Modest de Mieres and Br. Ángel de Ferrieres were an older theologian and a young lay friar who were hiding in the house of another friar. The house went through various searches, during which they passed themselves off as members of the family. Br. Angel could have escaped, but he did not want to leave Fr. Modest and another friar who was sick and bedridden. Fr. Modest composed a prayer that they said together each day: “In this moment and certainly in the hour of death, if I should find myself in the right circumstance, with the help of the divine grace that I humbly trust you will grant me, I accept, O my God, willingly, in a way that is pleasing, humble and with whole heart, the death that you wish to send to me. Whatever it should be, I unite my death to the most holy death of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in this moment is being renewed in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and so united I offer my death to you, O my God, beseeching you humbly that you would condescend to accept it kindly, despite my wretchedness and misery, joined as it is to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of all my faults and sins, and of the faults and sins of all people.” Reported on by some neighbors, they were arrested and killed in the area of the friary.

These few words, even though brief, can help us nonetheless to understand the mood of the persecution, the accepting of death on the part of the friars, right from the beginning, after having tried to avoid it, or even more after having understood that it was inevitable. In every single new blessed one can trace anew, in the resignation, in the defense of the faith, and in the pardon of enemies, that scarlet thread that links, across the centuries, the tradition of martyrdom in the Church that even today continues to bear abundant fruit.

Well as some from the USA, South Africa, Mozambique, and Spain. Many Capuchin friars also came to share in the feast of the two Custodes of Mexico, the Provincial Minister of Spain, as well as some OFMs and Conventual friars. There were also present bishops and diocesan priests and a great many of the faithful who have accompanied our sisters with great affection.

Our General Minister, who presided at the Eucharist, invited the sisters to continue to move ahead and to continue to look forward in this story of faithfulness to God, offering a renewed witness of contemplation. People today have a desperate need for humble witnesses to prayer in order to enter into an authentic relationship with God. The Mass was followed by a common table for about a thousand people! With the typical dances of Mexico, we enjoyed the great cultural diversity and the musical rhythms of various regions.
On October 9 the ‘Santa Veronica’ formation house hosted the third day of festivities. This house has celebrated 25 years since its foundation, and has given a fundamental contribution to formation and to the improvement of relationships among the Capuchins in Mexico. In this setting, there was a meeting of the sisters with the General Minister, where it was possible to share the challenges of the present realities of the Capuchin friars and sisters, in order to look to the future without fear and with an authentic hope.

As the Capuchin family, the grace of celebrating this history, rich with perseverance and witness, gives a push to the future with the renewed conviction that strength comes from living fraternity, offering the gift of the Capuchin-Franciscan charism to the People of God.

Meeting of the Four Ministers of the OFM and TOR

ASSISI, Italy – As every year, at the Sacro Convento in Assisi, the four General Ministers of the OFM and TOR met on October 2 and 3. The meeting addressed various topics and had the occasion to stress the event Franciscan Friars of Easter 2018 is the deadline by which the General Ministers have been extended to the various historical circles of the OFM and TOR met on October 2 and 3. The meeting addressed various topics and had the occasion to stress the event Franciscan Friars of Easter 2018 is the deadline by which the General Ministers have been extended to the various historical circles of the OFM and TOR met on October 2 and 3. The meeting addressed various topics and had the occasion to stress the event Franciscan Friars of Easter 2018 is the deadline by which the General Ministers have been extended to the various historical circles of the OFM and TOR met on October 2 and 3. 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