

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

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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



Beatification of Federico of Berga and XXV companion martyrs

by Br. Carlo Calloni, General Postulator

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 growth for the whole Order. I greet you: 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, 2015. 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 Sarrià (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 Sarrià (Barcelona), Ntra. Sra. di Pompeia (Barcelona), La Mare de Deu de l’Ajuda (Barcelona), Sant Antoni de Padua (Tarragona), La Immaculada Concepció (Igualada), La Visitació (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 Penedés (Sebastià Sonet Romeu), Fr. Remigi del Papiol (Esteve Santacana Armengol), Fr. Anselm d’Olot (Laurentí Basil Matas), Fr. Benigne de Canet de Mar (Miquel Sagré Fornaguera), 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 Soterias Culla), Fr. Agustí de Montclar de Donzell (Josep Alsina Casas), Fr. Doroteu de Vilalba dels Arcs (Jordi Sampé Tarragó), Fr. Alexandre de Barcelona (Jaume Nájera Gherna), Fr. Tarsici de Miralcamp (Josep Vilalta Saumell), Fr. Vincenç de Besalú (Julià Gebrat Marcé), Fr. Timoteu de Palafrugell (Jesús Miquel Girbau), Br. Miquel de Bianya (Pelai Ayats Vergés), Br. Jordi de Santa Pau (Manuel Collellmir Senties), Br. Bonaventura de Arroyo Cerezo (Tomás Díaz Díaz), Br. Marçal del Penedès (Carles Canyes Santacana), Br. Eudald d’Igualada (Lluís Estruch Vives), the youngest victim at eighteen years and seven months, Br. Paciá Maria de Barcelona (Francesc Maria Colomer Presas), Br. Àngel de Ferreries (Josep Coll Martí), Br. Cebrià de Terrassa (Ramon Gros Ballvé), Br. Eloi de Bianya (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 Antifascist 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 Vilafranca, 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 an-

other 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 Mieries 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. Ángel 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, humbly 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.

350 years of Capuchin Poor Clares in Mexico

by Br. Leonardo González

MEXICO CITY, Mexico - With great joy, the Capuchin Poor Clares have celebrated the 350th anniversary of the foundation the first monastery on American soil. In fact, in 1665 the 'San Felipe de Jesús' monastery was founded in Mexico City by sisters from Toledo, Spain.

With the presence of the General Minister, on October 7, the Eucharist was celebrated in the proto-monastery, situated in the traditional neighborhood of Coyoacan in Mexico City and the new convent chapel, just built, was blessed. After all this, a dinner was shared that was offered by the benefactors of the sisters. Everything concluded with the sound of Mexican Mariachi.

On October 8 a great event was celebrated in the Basilica of Guadalupe, the house of the Virgin Mother and the house of everyone. It's a meaningful place in the history of the Capuchin Poor Clares, where they lived for centuries next to the old Basilica, and preserved prayer before the sacred image of the Guadalupana. Sisters from all over Mexico participated in the celebration, as



well as some from the USA, South Africa, Mozambique, and Spain. Many Capuchin friars also came to share in the feast—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. They treated various topics and had occasion to stress the event Franciscan Friars in Chapter, which will be celebrated on this coming November 28. It will be a meeting at the Seraphicum for the all the friars living in Rome: the declared objective is that of seeking ever more to create moments of initiative where the strengths, experiences, and the journeys of the friars of the various families converge on a path of union. Continuing this idea, next year, on July 11, there will be the day of Reconciliation.

A single Franciscan University! A path is being followed towards the realization of this common project. Clear signs have come from the General Chapter of the OFM, which has given its full support to the project, as well as from the General Council of the Conventual Friars which has given a favorable vote, and from the Capuchin Friars who are responsible for the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality. Taking advantage of the occasion of the meeting in Assisi, the General Ministers met with the Secretaries of formation and those responsible for the various schools and institutes. The General Ministers entrusted the task of coordinating the process to the Secretaries of formation. The Congregation for Catholic Education was informed of the project and declared itself ready to give all the support necessary to advance the cause. The date of Easter 2018 is the deadline by which the project is to be ready to be then put into place. The abbreviation chosen for the common project is UNIFRA. The reflection, then, has been extended to the various historical institutes, which the General Ministers have agreed should be involved in a process of unification.



Office of Economic Solidarity

by Br. James Donegan

From October 7 to 14 2015, the Project Managers and the Solidarity Commission had its annual meeting together with Br. James Donegan (PR New York-New England, USA), Secretary of Solidarity, and Br. Aklilu Petros (CG Ethiopia), Promoter of Solidarity, to consider the projects that have arrived this year at the Office of Solidarity. For this year, in fact, 88 projects were sent from the various circumscriptions.

The Project Managers began on October 7, discussing the technical aspects of each proposal and analyzing the financial plans to realize them. The members of the Project Managers group are friars from the various parts of the world: Br. Carlos Tavares (PR Minas Gerais, Brazil), Br. Celestino Arias (PR New York-New England, USA), Br. Constantino Alonso (CU Mexico-Texas), Br. Edwin Colaco (PR Karnataka, India), Br. James Boner (PR Great Britain), Br. Joseph Coz (PR France), and Br. Wojciech Gwiazda (PR Warsaw). Each, with his own particular experience living in one part of the world, shares information on the projects of his area with the other Project Managers and offers his own evaluation. Together, the Project Managers consider all the factors regarding a project and formulate a proposal for the Solidarity Commission.

The Economic Solidarity Commission began its meeting on October 13. Similar to the group of Project Managers, it is composed of friars from the various parts of the world: Br. Domingo Año Cebolla (PR Spain), Br. Hailemikaël Beraki (PR Eritrea), Br. John Pfannenstiel (PR Pennsylvania, USA), Br. Linus Fäh (PR Switzerland), Br. Mauro Miselli (PR Lombardy, Italy), and Br. Paul Alvares (PR Goa, India), tougher with

Br. Pio Murat (PR France, General Councilor) as President of the Commission. In this session of the meeting, the Project Managers present their proposals for the projects that the Office has received. After a sufficient time for the presentation of each project, the members of the Commission vote on the proposals of the Project Managers or make other recommendations, according to how the discussion goes. After this work, all the projects will be presented and recommended to the General Minister and his Council which, in the next meeting of the General Council planned for the first meeting of December, will evaluate them one by one.

At the end of the meeting, there was an evaluation of the service carried out and a conversation on what to do in order to obtain a good supervision of the projects that will be approved by the General Minister and his Council.

The work of the Project Managers and of the Commission is important in order to give unity to all the projects from the various circumscriptions of the Order and from all their missions. Of the 88 requests that arrived, 21 are for subsidies of Capuchin missions; 37 are for subsidies for initial formation in places that can be supported only with the help of other circumscriptions of the Order. 7 requests are for the Capuchin sisters, and 4 for other monasteries of Poor Clares close to our friars. The other 20 requests are for projects in our friaries and pastoral places in different parts of the world.

We thank God for the great generosity of all the circumscriptions in supporting the needs of the missions of the Order, present in the whole world.