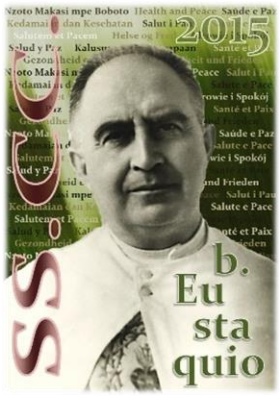


# Devotion

*Javier Álvarez-Ossorio sscc*
*Superior General*

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Both General Governments, sisters and brothers, had made our mind up to hold a joint session each year on an aspect of the SSCC charism.

This year, we met in Orvieto, May 13-16. The topic was the "devotion to the Sacred Hearts." Felipe F. Lazcano prepared a historical study and various proposals for spiritual and missionary updating, which served as the basis for the dialogue between us.

These study sessions are an interesting way to carry out our service as General Governments, given that we are jointly, in the final instance, the guarantors of the unity of the Congregation (Const. 8) and that unity is shaped by a common charism. I think that it would be good also if provincial governments of brothers and sisters had similar initiatives. We don't get together to discuss "work" or to talk about how our relationship is, but rather to go deeper together into our common charism, bring out the sensibilities proper to brothers and to sisters.

From everything we talked about during those two days, I'll just share with you two questions that were like doors to pass through into the mystery of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary:

## What pains me?

The hearts of Jesus and Mary are hearts that are wounded, in pain. Jesus' heart is represented as bleeding from the wound of the lance and encircled with the crown of thorns. Mary's is pierced through with the sword. Jesus is pained by hardness of heart (Mk. 3:5), the lack of

mercy (Mt. 9:13), the people who are abandoned (Mk. 6:34), the weeping of the widow (Lk. 7:13). In Gethsemane (Mk. 14:33-34), his pain reaches the extreme because of the abandonment of his friends, the violence that looms over him, the complete rejection of his Father's plan.

The Sacred Hearts are the symbol of the suffering of God, who is pained by evil, sin, the lack of love, the suffering of his sons and daughters. Those "devoted" to the Sacred Hearts enter into that suffering.

What pains me? Who causes me pain? What truly affects me, disturbs me, frustrates me? What causes pain does not leave us indifferent but rather gets us moving. According to the Good Father, what should motivate us is the desire to contribute to the salvation of our brothers and sisters. If that's not the case, if what pains me is limited to the small world of my personal interests, then I cannot be faithful to our vocation.

May the poor cause us pain, may those who suffer cause us pain, may evil cause us pain, may sin cause us pain, may the emptiness of not knowing God cause us pain…That's how we enter into the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. From there we are able to do what must be done.

## To whom do I belong?

"Devotion" means being bound closely to someone and being ready to love him/her without a second thought. For us, it means belonging to Christ. From Him flows all our other forms of belonging, primarily our belonging to the Congregation and to the Church.

For that reason I have to ask myself, to whom do I belong? In other words, who can count on me? The question is not at all theoretical. Our response is seen in the practical decisions that we make in the course of our life. It is put to the test when obedience calls us to a place we do not want to go or when friendships, family members or people with influence claim our attention distancing us from our mission.

To whom do I belong? Can the Lord count on me? Can the Congregation count on me? Can God's people and the poor expect my complete dedication?

Happy Feast of the Sacred Hearts!

Rice fields (India)

Detail from the façade of the Cathedral of Orvieto (Italy)

# At midway

*Javier Álvarez-Ossorio sscc*
*Superior General*

The General Government is at the half-way point in its term. It's a good time to stop along the way, speak with one another and reorganize our ideas.

May 10-13, the five members of the General Government were together in Orvieto for a time of dialogue and evaluation. We spoke about how each of us is doing personally in this ministry: what brings us joy, what is difficult and where we find support. We reviewed the "vision" of government, inspired by the General Chapter, that we came up with at the beginning of our term and which we published in INFO 65, January 10, 2013. We also reread INFO 84 of October 8, 2014, which was a compilation of what took place during the Enlarged General Council of the previous month of September.

Overall, we feel affirmed in the main directions we have taken in our work and the fundamental ideas that are guiding us. We have been able to achieve a better organization among ourselves respecting each one's ability. On the other hand, the interaction with the communities of the Congregation helps us get a clear idea of the possibilities and resistance that we encounter among the brothers. On many occasions, the dialogue with you, brothers, has made us change what we were proposing. Some of our interventions have really made a difference in the situation of the Congregation in some places. However, in other cases we had no alternative but to abandon ideas that we thought were good and necessary.

In any case, we like initiatives that get us thinking together. For that reason, we will have two Enlarged General Councils during this term and we attend all the conference meetings and all the chapters that we can.

To give focus to the time still ahead of us as government, we read the part of *Evangelii Gaudium* where Pope Francis presents four principles, taken from the social doctrine of the Church, which should orient life together and the building of a people, and for that reason, can serve as inspiration for our work in the service of this "people" that is the Congregation. Those principles are:

1) Time is greater than space (EG 222-225)
2) Unity prevails over conflict (EG 226-230)
3) Realities are more important than ideas (EG 231-233)
4) The whole is greater than the part (EG 234-237)

With that as a starting point, we asked ourselves what are the main things we should work on during the three years that remain in our term.

I am not going to report all that we said. However, I will give some accents that I personally consider very important and that I would synthesize in three verbs: pray, insist, broaden the way of looking at things.

## PRAY

Pray so as not to forget God. He is the Lord, we are his coworkers. Pray because what is most important turns out to be impossible for us: to touch hearts, reconcile people, stir up enthusiasm, provoke conversion. Pray in order to know why we are together. Pray to seek light, because we almost never know with certainty what we have to do. Pray to see things from the perspective of the Kingdom of God and to not lose heart when things do not turn out well or in the face of silence and hostility. Pray in order to ask forgiveness, because we are sinners. Pray because we have been entrusted with the ministry of reparative adoration. Pray for each of the brothers. Pray to stay awake and not fall asleep.

The more we get into the service of authority, the call to prayer becomes more urgent.

## INSIST

We must not tire of repeating what is important, even though it seems like talking to a wall or a waste of time. Processes are slow. The good penetrates little by little, like drizzle soaking the ground, like the rope that carves a groove in the wall of the well.

You know the things we usually insist on: life in common, daily adoration, poverty that is transparent, real contact with the poor, availability for obedience, that we regard one another with heartfelt kindness, initial formation that is demanding and well done, overcoming barriers among us, checks on our power and our clerical reflexes, preventing abuse, the need to clearly face cases where brothers experience conflict in their vocation, resistance to those who would attack the community, interest in the spiritual and missionary richness of our charism, sharing faith among brothers…

You have heard us speak on all that and other points from the General Chapter a thousand times and you will continue to hear us over the next three years. We are very happy to see how in sync with these things so many of the brothers are. However sometimes we are left with the sensation that brothers listen patiently, but just waiting for us to leave so that they can go back to what interests them personally, which can take a very different direction.

We will continue to push the program of spiritual and missionary animation that we have already designed (though it seems that the implementation of the activities proposed for the years of the martyrs, Damien and Eustaquio is not very wide). We will continue to insist on initiatives such as the Poitiers program, the six months of joint preparation for perpetual vows in Asia or the gathering of novice masters scheduled for next year, for a more effective formation in the charism. We will continue to emphasize the orientations of the last General Chapter.

## BROADEN THE VISION

We understand very well that the provincials and the brothers attend before everything else to their respective responsibilities in their communities and the work that has been entrusted to them. That’s how it should be. It is our role as the General Government to remind everyone of what can be forgotten when one is stuck too much at the local level. This tension between the local and the global shouldn’t disturb us. It’s part of our life as an international Congregation with more than two centuries of history.

We continue to believe that our service as government must invite brothers, communities and provinces to broaden their way of looking at things. To broaden their vision to the whole of the Congregation, which forms a single body. Broaden the vision so that everything affects everyone, so that some communities unite, so that provinces collaborate with one another, so that there are brothers who are open to leaving their place of origin. Broaden the vison also beyond clerical ministries to which we are accustomed, because there are so many other possible ways of fulfilling our mission. Broaden the vision in order to experience ourselves as part of something bigger than ourselves: part of the Church, of humanity, of the mission of God.

Broaden the vison to see the poor who are near us and who dare us to do something concrete for them and with them. Broaden the vision to go to places where the Congregation has never been. Broaden the vison to overcome resistance to doing things that we think don't fit into what we have already organized. Broaden the vison in order to boldly decide to move toward the margins even though we don't have everything programmed, nailed down, well set out in an overall strategic plan or solidly financed.

As for what falls more directly under our responsibility we are trying to broaden the vision by encouraging projects like the new community in Louvain (which will welcome people getting out of prison), giving hospitality to immigrants and homeless people in the Generalate, collaboration between Germany and Africa for some work involving reconciliation, a possible foundation in Morocco etc. Some provinces are doing the same kind of things.