

## Topic 1: Our Redemptorist Identity (1)

---

### Part One: Vision of our Redemptorist Identity

Scripture: Luke 4:16 -21

Constitutions: 1; 2; 21

### WHY A REFLECTION ON OUR IDENTITY?

"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". This is the conclusion of the passage from Luke that we know very well because, from the beginning of the Congregation, it has been considered the central point of reference for us Redemptorists: Jesus pronounces these words after proclaiming from the scroll of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... He has sent me to bring good news to the poor." We want to keep this passage (Lk 4:16-21) in mind, preparing ourselves to reflect seriously on our Redemptorist Identity.

We can ask ourselves immediately: why is it considered necessary to reflect on our identity in the context of this General Chapter?

The answer to this question is certainly important when one considers how quickly our world is changing and how increasingly difficult it is to make long-term commitments or a lifetime commitment, as our vow of perseverance asks of us. It is certainly a challenge that affects many of our confreres who, after their very first steps as Redemptorists, decide to leave the Congregation, disappointed or disillusioned and not infrequently without clear and concrete reasons. In addition to these there are many others who remain in the Congregation but lead a life similar to that of diocesan priests, and isolate themselves from the community, sometimes even going so far as to live alone.

These are uncomfortable situations that require attention and serious intervention, especially in the area of formation.

However, what prompts us to reflect on this issue of our identity is not so much these sad cases, but the need to continue the process we started in Phase I, in which the working document, gathering the concerns of the confreres, invited us to re-imagine our Redemptorist identity.

In the five reports of the First Phase of the General Chapter there emerges a strong request to drink from the founding sources of our Congregation, from its purpose "to follow the example of our Redeemer Jesus Christ in preaching the Good News to the poor, as he said of himself: "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*"; and further on it specifies: "Follow the example of Christ" with the apostolic life, which blends together the life of special dedication to God and the missionary activity of Redemptorists. In the reports it emerges that for many Apostolic Life means only what we do, while it is clear that by the words *vita apostolica* we must mean both our life as religious and our mission. To reflect on our identity it is certainly important to keep in mind also Const. 2, which reminds us that, "urged on by the apostolic spirit, and imbued with the zeal of [our] founder .... We continue the tradition developed by [our] confreres in the "past". We are sent "as helpers, companions and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of redemption".

The community aspect is also essential: "...an essential law of life for the members is this: that they live in community and carry out their apostolic work through community." (Const. 21). And in a reconfigured and continually reshaped Congregation, it is more evident than ever how important it is that each confrere, while attending to the his own ministry, is joined with others to form **one missionary body** (Const. 2).

The community aspect is also essential: "... it is an essential law of the life of the members to live in community and to carry out apostolic work through the community" (Const. 21). And in the reconfigured Congregation, which is a new reality, which is being redesigned, the importance of confreres "living in common, they constitute a single missionary body and, according to the ministry proper to each one" (Const. 2) becomes ever more evident.

These are some of the points on which the reports of the First Phase of the 5 Conferences invite us to reflect.

## **PART TWO: What we have heard from Phase I and other sources.**

In Part Two we offer some contributions and impressions regarding Redemptorist Identity that emerged from the confreres and the conference reports from Phase I of the General Chapter.

- *We look forward to the XXVI General Chapter making a bold statement articulating a **revitalised or re-imagined Redemptorist identity** in line with the 21st century.*
- *The original identity of **Apostolic Life** has become dichotomised and the community is often not directly animated or influenced by our apostolic life. Missionary dynamism, which is usually expressed in availability, has been eroded by the success and lifestyle of the community.*
- *Although we talk a lot about ourselves as **one missionary body**, the reality is that we have lived a very decentralised lifestyle for a long time.*

*Pope Francis has said several times: "we are not in an era of change, but in a change of epoch". The Church is not immune to this change, which is exacerbated by revelations of abuse (sexual, financial, of power). Mistrust and disbelief are becoming more widespread and common.*

*New forms of social understanding of family and intimate relationships are emerging, along with the emergence of movements such as LGBTQ+ and others related to those who have suffered marginalisation and violence such as 'Me Too' or 'Black Lives Matter'.*

*It is impossible to have a complete and clear view of reality without recognising the importance of the digital world and the overwhelming challenges that 'artificial intelligence' brings.*

*Another socio-cultural trend of our time is the growing awareness of our 'Common Home' and the need to take seriously the issues it poses. We recognise that the environmental reality is also fundamental to us and challenges us.*

*We believe that individualism and materialism greatly affect our dynamism and missionary effectiveness. Self-fulfilment is becoming more important than serving others. We believe that Partners in Mission are equal. We believe in diversity and affirm that diversity is a strength.*

*The presence of other cultures from other continents, often seen in its problematic aspects, can be seen as a gift. We can and must connect with it and immerse ourselves in a humble and fruitful missionary dialogue. This offers us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the synodal journey that the Church is experiencing as a dynamic and principle of spiritual fidelity.*

Even negative aspects such as individualism, relativism, secularism can turn into a **new Kairos**: *in such a changing world, in a changing Church, we are also in a changing Congregation. We see our multilingual, multicultural and multi-ecclesial nature as a light. But this light also reveals a shadow. We recognise the need to learn creative and effective ways to talk to one another, to dream together and engage in multicultural and multilingual ministry.*

*If we accept that the Congregation has moved from a position of strength to one of weakness, recognising that we are now a minority, we have a number of missionary challenges/opportunities.*

*That is why we have the conditions - and probably the need - to make this General Chapter the most courageous and decisive since Vatican II.*

But this can only happen on the condition that we fully recover our Redemptorist identity, returning to our Constitutions and to our Apostolic Life that allows us to live our religious consecration joyfully, knowing that we are sent to the most abandoned, and among them, especially to the poor.

It is important, therefore, to consider that talking about identity concerns every aspect of our Redemptorist life as religious and missionaries.

It directly concerns the field of formation: *"Without a strong Redemptorist identity, we also weaken our formation programmes: "What are we forming our formandi for? "Our formation programmes sometimes seem to be focused primarily on preparation for ordination rather than on orientation towards the wider Redemptorist mission/charism".*

It also concerns the field of: leadership *"The other aspect affected by the weakening of our Redemptorist identity is that of leadership."*

#### **- Questions for reflection and conversation:**

**1. When have you felt most Redemptorist and why?**

**2. What are the essential characteristics/components of Redemptorist identity?**

**What do you want the Chapter to say to help confreres and lay partners reimagine and strengthen their Redemptorist**