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Experiences and Impressions of Fr. General's Visit

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De Nobili College (DNC), Pune, was the base from where Fr. General carried out his visit to JDV Campus. Naturally, DNC was spruced up to welcome him. The whole community had gathered at the Grotto in front of DNC to welcome him with Marathi shawl and Peshwa turban and the Chotanagapur Adivasi drums and dance. This was his first visit to DNC which houses the largest number of Jesuit scholastics under one roof! As he got off the car in which he was traveling with the general assistants, Frs. Vernon D'Cunha and Lisbert D'Souza, he put us at ease by his broad and gentle smile and a warm embrace. I had known him for several years in Rome, his becoming General had not changed his warm human qualities. He merged into the Jesuit crowd as if it were homecoming! He seemed to carry lightly on his shoulders the burden of his important job. His general demeanour put everyone at ease. He obliged the young men to take Selfies with him when they approached him. He was a good listener and when he spoke, he spoke frankly and honestly. He did not shy away from the problems the Society or the Church were facing; lack of vocations, many scandals and the downward slide in our credibility. He stressed the need to select candidates carefully. Quoting the Constitutions Part 5, Ch. 2: [516] he said, "No one will be

admitted to any degree of belonging unless he is judged fit in the Lord. For profession it means, thorough screening through protracted and exacting tests, and clearance from the General, who will have reports from other superiors and individuals whom he has asked to testify.” He pointed out that the time of Formation is also the time of Probation, and only when one has fulfilled the requirements of a particular stage, he should be allowed to move to the next.

He said that our primary vocation is to consecrated life; priesthood is only one of the means. In the Society coadjutor brothers and priests are primarily consecrated persons. They are incorporated into a community of consecrated persons and can be sent on mission. The most important moment for a Jesuit is the Final Vows and not ordination or diaconate. In the Formula of the vows, the requirement to be a member of the Society is that you “understand all things according to the Constitution.”

During his interaction with the Scholastics, he pointed out the importance of unity of our life and mission. He said that some Jesuits considered mission as work. They were very busy doing many things; they gave minimum time for community and prayer. He cited the example of our founding fathers at Venice, while they were waiting to go to Jerusalem. Their work was followed by prayer, Eucharist and spiritual conversations (communal discernment) and vice versa. Some people ask why one should be a Jesuit if the same work can be done by laypersons? For the Jesuits, the process is more important than the projects and the results.

The unity of life and mission and discernment are gifts given to the Society by the Holy Spirit (I suppose it means the special Charism of the Society.). This helps us to live as friends in the Lord, superiors, directors of works, prin-

cipals, deans and other members of the community. It is our responsibility to safeguard this gift in the Society. It is in this context, the recent General Congregations have stressed the community itself as mission because it is in the community we experience this triple unity. Community as mission draws from the unity of life and mission. He urged, let us be an active and positive member of the community. Some tend to give minimum time for the community. However, a Jesuit community is a dynamic group. We change regularly according to the needs of the mission. Our life of unity will be manifest in the way we celebrate the Eucharist. The disciples of Emmaus recognized the Lord at the breaking of the bread, they ran back to Jerusalem to share their experience with the others. Formation must help us to grow in this unity of life and mission.

Discernment in common: A Jesuit must not have any attachment to any place or anyone. They offered themselves to the Pope to be sent out on mission to any part of the world. Some Jesuits these days tend to get attached to work, province, place etc. In the Society we do not ask, ‘what do you like?’ It is an order. We search and find God’s will and follow it. The superior, who gives the order, pays attention to ‘cura personalis and cura apostolica’, the persons and the circumstances. The superior is responsible for the life and mission of the person. Creativity is necessary and it is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Persons, places and circumstances have to be taken into consideration. Mission is not individualistic; there must be discernment between creativity and obedience.

He continued that we are entering into an era of change in the Society and the Church. The Pope has endorsed the Universal Apostolic Preferences as also Church’s preferences.

Now we must take responsibility for these preferences whether it is development, ecology, migration or the youth. We need to make changes in our personal and institutional life; e.g. use of plastic, water, energy, consumerism etc. By the practice of Spiritual Conversation and Communal Discernment UAP must impact us to form enduring attitudes and praxis in our life and mission.

Jesuit ministries are always learned ministries. Discernment and ministries are backed up by intellectual depth. Therefore, mediocrity is not an option for the Jesuits. When we teach or preach we must ask ourselves “what about us?”. We must walk the talk if we want to be credible. (Jesus always asked his disciples to follow him!) Jesus is the only way for us. He has not given us an easy task. If we follow in his footsteps we may have to pay a very high price, even with our life.

In order to stay the course in our life and mission, we must follow the practice recommended by St. Ignatius, Daily Examen. Besides personal Examen, there must be community and Institutional Examens also. We cannot expect personal, community and institutional transformation if we neglect daily Examen.

Fr. General planted a tree at the premises of the Marian Grotto at DNC. The scholastics made sure that all the materials used for the welcome and the decorations were eco-friendly. Fr. General visited also DNC’s “Pope Francis’ Herbal Garden”. On 6th March at 7.00 am Fr. General blessed the “Centre for Ignatian Spirituality and Research” at De Nobili College. All these in some way were pointing to UAP in practice for the coming ten years or so. AMDG