

Homily for the 50th Anniversary of Ordination of Fr Adolfo Nicolás

17th March 2017

Readings:

Ephesians 1:3-14 (Praise for Spiritual Blessings in Christ)

Psalm 105:16-21

Matthew 21:33-46 (The Parable of the Vineyard and its Tenants)

*Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ.*

*It was the stone rejected by the builders
that became the cornerstone.
This was the Lord's doing
and it is wonderful to see.*

It is a joy for us to celebrate you Nico. I hope you enjoy it too, even if you do not like to be the centre of attention. We join friends around the world who bless you for all you have been for as a priest and as Superior General.

In the first Plenary Sessions of the 36th General Congregation, on the feast of St Francis Borgia, 3rd October 2016, you presented your resignation in the simplest manner, even with humour. When you left the *aula* your counsellors spoke to the circumstances of your request, which was then accepted by secret vote. After a moving farewell expressed in the exquisite Italian of Fr Frederico Lombardi, for almost two weeks we were orphans without a General until the election of Fr Arturo Sosa as the 31st Superior General of the Society of Jesus.

For almost nine years Fr Adolfo Nicolás was our representative and leader, the point of unity among us, our guide and compass, the keeper of our secrets. Now here he is, home again to Asia; here he is "Nico", he is a brother, "one among us" as a 'participant' at EAPI, a brother at Arrupe. Welcome home, Nico and thank you for all you have given of yourself in 50 years as a priest. You served faithfully in Japan, Philippines and most recently in Rome. Thank you for all you have done and been for us as Father General over these past nine years.

*"Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ."*

At the Congregation a refreshing image resonated: the experience of the first companions in Venice in 1537. They lived in a world of conflicts that displaced and impoverished many, and they shaped the Society in that context. They were few, as we are diminished today. They sought, as we must today, to be guided by the Spirit in our choice of ministries, to link discernment and decision. The ten companions went to Venice soon after gaining their Master's degrees in Paris and having taken vows together in Montmartre. Living in poverty, serving

in hospices and preaching on street corners, they gathered for three deliberations: on arrival early in the year, in July and finally in Vicenza in September after a forty day retreat in preparation for ordination. Then at the end of October Ignatius set out to Rome with Faber and Laynez, stopping on the way as we know, for the extraordinary experience of confirmation of mission at La Storta.

The first choice of mission for the companions, namely to Jerusalem, was not to be. War intervened. Consequently they had to re-think their mission, their bonds to one another and their identity. Community, mission, identity. Their newly understood mission would disperse them in many corners of the known world and beyond it, so, after discernment, they committed to remain nonetheless united with one another. They chose the name and person of Jesus to state clearly who gave them purpose and identity. They were "Companions of Jesus".

They were a prophetic and counter-cultural community, accepting Jesus as the rock and cornerstone on which their lives were to be built, but aware that following Jesus implied a life style at odds with the mainstream, in the world but not of it. They built their lives on Jesus, the rock that was rejected.

At this time they rotated leadership every week. Only later in the deliberation in Rome, it was decided that "one among them" should be the leader. In 2008, Nico was the "one among us" who was then asked to assume that heavy burden as General. Nico was taken by the Spirit of the Lord through a discernment of his brothers, to a new and unexpected mission - like Philip in Acts (Acts 8:26-40) who was told one day, "Be ready to set out at noon..." You looked around like Philip must have done, amazed at where the Spirit had placed him to preach the Gospel.

Nico as General was and is free, creative and wise. Nico remains who he has always been. He remains free, and that is a gift of God, who himself is free. He did not believe in the "lofty and mythical heights of Borgo Santo Spirito 4", he said. In governance he was dialogical and collaborative; he worked out decisions with his team. He moved us, by word and example, away from a Church of privilege, to open doors and windows for participation. As Francis said in his talk to Civita Cattolica, "Only a truly open thought can address the crisis and understand where the world is going, how the most complex and urgent crises are addressed, the geo-politics, the challenges of the economy and the grave humanitarian crisis linked to the drama of migrations, which is the global political node of our days." Only a free person can risk to see and understand Jesus both as a cornerstone and as a stumbling block, as the one on whom our edifice is built and the one who turns the world upside down.

Nico is creative. His ideas spark interest. The "globalisation of superficiality" was a fresh and insightful phrase coined in his Mexico address. In the same conference he said that Ignatius promoted the study of the classics because they stimulate the imagination. "Where do we look for the classics today?" he asked. "Can we look at China, Japan, India? Can we look at the classics of the indigenous communities in different parts of the world - Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere? What we need is to open the whole range of the human mind," Nico has the creative, fresh restlessness that gives peace to a Jesuit's heart as

Pope Francis remarked of Peter Faber, a “man of great desires, restless spirit, never satisfied, pioneer of ecumenism”.

Finally, as even these remarks indicate, he urges us to wisdom, to greater depth in prayer, studies and ministries. Nico calls us to depth, to face contemporary questions, to engage in a learned way in mission. As does Pope Francis, he urges that decisions should be the fruit of a discernment. That discernment, Francis told us, will place us in the Church, as ecclesial rather than clerical. We liked especially Nico, how you drew from your experience of the wisdom and peace of Asian cultures and religions, often with simple stories.

Nico called us often to rediscover our universality, the potential we possess as an international and multicultural body. Now missioned to EAPI and to Arrupe International, Nico has again the opportunity to live locally this universality which has always been part of the Ignatian vision of a “world-wide community” and “a network of local communities”.

To be free, creative and wise in living the Gospel implies that one is prophetic. Our Gospel today, the Gospel of Friday in the Second Week of Lent, Jesus implies that because religious leaders have resisted the prophetic messengers, the Kingdom will be given to a people that will produce its fruits. It is a warning for all of us. The tenants are thrown out, but the vineyard, the Kingdom remains and will surely bear fruit. But woe to those who do not heed the voice of prophets. It is a message for this time of Lent, a call to conversion, to turn to God and seek his Mercy, to bless him, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you Nico for your life and example of following Jesus and of being “one among us”.