

The fruits of Social Apostolate in and through the death of Jesus

All Saints and Blessed of the Society of Jesus
Homily at the SJES Jubilee Congress, 5.11.2019

Dear Friends in the Lord,

We are celebrating, with quite a challenging leitmotif from the Gospel reading:

“Unless a grain of wheat dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

To enter this challenge, let us begin with an attitude of gratitude - for the heavenly and earthly fruits received and collected.

In the Spiritual Exercises, in the “Contemplation to gain Love”, the first Prelude consists of a composition, which is to see how I am standing before God our Lord, and of the Angels and of the Saints interceding on my behalf. **Imagine our Aula becoming such a place, putting me or us in the centre of Divine love.**

Similarly, in the meditation on the Call of the Temporal/Eternal King, st Ignatius helps us formulate an answer to the King calling us: *“Eternal Lord of all things, in the presence of Thy infinite goodness, and of Thy glorious mother, and of all the saints of Thy heavenly court, this is the offering of myself which I make with Thy favor and help. I protest that it is my earnest desire and my deliberate choice, provided only it is for Thy greater service and praise, to imitate Thee in bearing all wrongs and all abuse and all poverty, both actual and spiritual, should Thy most holy majesty deign to choose and admit me to such a state and way of life.”* Again, I stand at the heavenly court, surrounded by Divine love, committing to a life of service in poverty. And, since heaven means an eternal celebration with the risen King, the standing could be transformed in dancing. So we dance with all the angels and saints in God’s glory.

This combination of our dispossession (poverty) and celebration (dance) sends us, while on earth, to the margins. We cannot hold and occupy the centre unless for the most divine and free and selfless Eucharist. For that we move towards the periphery in order to empty the centre for something greater than us while we only hold the space at the margins. At the margins of this Aula, at the margins of the Vineyard and the broader society. **We hold the space without occupying it in order to allow something greater to be born.** We serve, poor and with poor, in celebration.

From a theological standing point, let us ponder this challenge given to us to “produce much fruit”, through service. The service we are called to undertake is not any kind of service. Those *serv*ing our Lord must also *follow* this same Lord: *“Whoever serves me must follow me.”* In the logic of today’s Feast, the service, which hopes to bear much fruit, is intrinsically connected to the following of Jesus, and this ultimately means, in more theological terms, that **if the glorification of the Son of man occurs in and through death, so does the glorification of those serving and following the Lord.** As servants of

Christ's mission of Justice and Reconciliation, and as the Companions of Jesus, we too follow Jesus' glory in and through death.

What glory, what heaven, what eternal bliss: in and through death! Oh Lordy!

Away from the centre to hold space in order to give life and birth.

Once upon a time, there was a man who enjoyed walking. He would walk, he would go on a hike, enjoying nature, rural and urban settings. Hiking, he enjoyed being in good company. He would invite friends and people at different pathways of life to join him on the way. People from different cultural, religious, political, economic and other backgrounds joined him to walk together. These hikes eventually became, in a sense, pilgrimages of Justice and Reconciliation. They offered the partakers a taste and an exercise of being "*on pilgrimage to heaven*". For this sake, at the end of this homily you can find a prayer with the words of the Preface for the Feast of all Saints and Blessed of the Society of Jesus. Back to the story, these numerous hikes offered a taste of reconciliation, a taste of walking, overcoming and living together. A nuanced taste of heaven.

Besides the action of "walking with", "in a mission of justice and reconciliation", the man started a special mission related to "Caring for our common home". He did not call it that way; These are the words we are using now with the new and invigorating language of Universal Apostolic Preferences. Yet, this man was genuinely Caring for our Common Home. You would wonder, how did he do so? **By planting a garden.** A big garden, the size of a farm. In this nurtured garden, like he did in his walks, he welcomed friends and people of all life pathways. Categories were not relevant to him, he invited the old and the young, the healthy and the sick, the hungry and the satisfied, the rich and the poor. As a side clarification, this is a short excerpt from a wikipedia entry: *This "farm had vineyards and gardens in which much of the work was done by people with disabilities, providing an unprecedented resource in a society in which such people are usually hidden from view".*

In that garden, he cared particularly for **the Youth, paying special attention to those being outcasted for their disabilities.** Instead of excluding what the majority considered abnormal, the farm offered a place to create "a hopeful future." Not only for the youth, but also for those journeying the Youth.

On the one hand, this garden produced fruit from the grain they sow to satisfy the basic needs of human kind. On the other, the farm provided nourishment that came from pleasure and joy of savoring the fruit of the garden in the company of others. Much fruit, offering once again a nuanced taste of heaven.

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As cruel as the end to this story was, five years ago, this man was shot dead, twice in the head. He was murdered because he did not want to abandon those who lived and suffered with and like him - as they walked with the poor and outcast, journeyed with the Youth and

cared for our Common Home. By this, he showed the way to God, through an arduous discernment on whether to leave his diminished community when having being offered alternatively transportation by an international convoy. For him, the fruit and conclusion of such a spiritual exercise was clear. He was a man of the Spirit. He chose to stay. He chose to die. Perhaps to bear one last and enduring fruit.

Frans van der Lugt, or **abuna Francis**, was a “Jesuit priest from the Netherlands, who established a community centre and farm near the city of Homs, Syria, where he worked for the betterment of people with disabilities and for harmony among Christian and Muslim people. He was shot dead in the garden of the community centre in 2014.”

What is the last and enduring fruit? *“Sustained by their prayers, our Society is to go forward in strength, advancing your glory throughout the world, and working with greater zeal at the task you have assigned to it.”* (Preface to the Feast). Today, with our saints and blessed, and with abuna Francis, **we commit to live and work with a greater zeal, a zeal as great as those of martyrs.**

Frans did not only die for the Lord, who called him to be with his people. Moreover, Frans died not only for his community, outpouring his life through friendship, joy, care, struggle. **Fr. Frans also died for us, so that we renew our zeal.** So that we fight for what needs to be fought. So that we truly live and bear fruit, much. So did many other Jesuits and collaborators from who we received the legacy to pursue Justice and Reconciliation.

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Contemplating God’s love for us, in gratitude for the Saints, Blessed, Martyrs and many other people of virtuous example, whether known or unknown, we stand or dance today before God and before the Angels and the Saints interceding for us. Hence, we ask to be renewed, deeply, with and through becoming men and women of the Spirit, sustained by the knowledge of God and sent to bear fruit in our societies in showing the way to God.