



**Feast of the Founder's Homily Homily at General Chapter of the FSC
Mons Gianfranco Agostino Gardin ofm**

May 15th 2007

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks for the invitation given to me to preside at this celebration on the day dedicated to Saint John Baptist de La Salle. I would also like to assure you that, through my poor person, it is the salutations and best wishes of the whole Dicastero for the Consecrated Life that I bring you, together with our gratitude for the life of educational commitment of your great and meritorious Institute.

I would like to be allowed to express a personal greeting to Br. Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverría whom I hold in great esteem and with whom I share a sincere friendship. His contribution to the life of the Union of Superiors General has been great and appreciated by all and his most amiable disposition has gone down very well with everyone.

The apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* affirms that “*General or particular Chapters (or similar meetings) take on a special importance; in such frameworks each Institute is called (...) to discern, in the light of the Spirit, the appropriate means for preserving and bringing up to date, in the different historical and cultural situations, its charism and its own particular spiritual patrimony*” (No. 42).

Well, if there is a specific charism which is unchangeably topical, it is yours: the necessity and the very precious duty of education and of instructing the new generations which keep appearing, will never diminish. On the contrary, in societies which are becoming more and more complex and in which very diverse conceptions and projects of life intermingle and bring about the disorientation of children, adolescents and young people, the education proposition becomes a ministry of extraordinary importance.

One can be in no doubt that you, sons of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, possess a particularly rich spiritual patrimony, the fruit of the spiritual intuition of your Founder, to whom one can well apply the words of Ecclesiasticus which we have heard: “Everyone will praise the intelligence of the wise man and he will never be forgotten; his memory will not be erased and his name will remain living up to the last human generation”.

Your rich spiritual patrimony continues to call upon you even today. Especially on an occasion as full of charismatic meaning as well as the institutional dimension that is a General Chapter, which is calling on you to ask yourselves: what does it mean for us to be true educators, able to teach by our lives even more than by word or doctrine? What do we need to do so that our educational institutions will be places in which, while one is acquiring the indispensable ideas which the school must offer, one also learns how to live as mature persons, loving the good, the true and the beautiful? And what should we do so that our schools resound - in an effective manner and attentive to the cultural context - with that Word without whose announcement one cannot believe? In fact Saint Paul says to us: *“How can they believe in Him without having heard Him spoken about? And how will they hear Him spoken about if there is no one to announce Him? And how will He be announced if there are not persons sent for this?”*

You, therefore, are “sent” to form human persons who are mature and capable of taking on the often arduous path of life, but who are also Christians aware of the vocation which comes from God. And this is your precious spiritual patrimony, which you ought to feed by means of an interior life systematically nourished by listening to the Word and meeting with God: *“He applies himself from the morning to go to the Lord who has created him, to pray in the presence of God the most high”*. Only a passionate following of Jesus will arouse in you that love and that welcome for children, that is to say those for whom your education is destined, described by Mathew in the brief Gospel extract we have heard.

I would like, before I end, to underline one aspect of your religious Family which has always struck me. You are “Brothers”: your Founder wished his educators to be thus, that is to say not priests, with what, in my opinion, was a very happy intuition. And that, as Pope Pius XII wrote, so that *“they do not turn away from teaching, convinced that this function is a very effective means of progressing in virtue and reaching holiness”*.

Allow me to add: within the male Consecrated Life, where the vast majority of Institutes are clerical, you are a strong reminder of the value of religious consecration in itself: you therefore help in understanding that this is in a position to fulfil and give a deep meaning to existence, even without, so to speak, superimposing the ordained ministry.

And this also: your condition of “Brothers” becomes a strong and effective reminder of the value of fraternity. I say this, in particular, in reference to all the countless persons who, in your institutions, collaborate with you in the delicate ministry of education. To announce to the world the “Gospel of fraternity”, through communities rich in truly fraternal human relations, united around the Lord Jesus, is an important mission which the Church confides to the religious life.

To you all, my wish that this Chapter, through the intercession of St. John Baptist de La Salle, will constitute an important stage in the life of your great religious Family.