

**CELAF AT THE SERVICE  
OF THE CHURCH IN AFRICA**

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**The mission of the disciples.**

If there is a passage of the Gospel liable to inspire the orientation of a new academic year, a passage which has something to do with the school and has something to say to educators in these fine surroundings of the CELAF, I believe it is the Gospel passage which the Church proposes today, Saturday October 3rd, in the 26th week of "ordinary time".

At the outset, this Gospel passage seems to be a lesson for the Christian school, in its pedagogical dimension -the relation of disciple and Master- as well as in the values and finality of every educational activity.

The 72 disciples Jesus sent off on their mission came back happy, saying, "Lord, all the unclean spirits are subject to us in your Name".

The 72 are sent after the Apostles have been sent and the passage retains the same structure and the same perspectives. Every member of the universal Church is sent to participate in this mission, as disciples, sons and daughters of the Creator of all things.

There is no mission without being sent, without being called to follow a Leader, to live like him, and be "in His school". "Who are you looking for? Jesus asked the two disciples of John. They answered: Master, where do you live? And Jesus said to them: Come and see! They followed Him. They saw where He lived and they stayed with Him." To be at the service of people, ... to be committed to helping people to realize their full potential.

**Education.**

The crisis in education which has been discussed for decades is due primarily to the absence of leaders who set an example. And nowadays if students protest, it is because they need people who witness to the truth, to justice, who are credible in the pursuit of an ideal.

This crisis has shown, today more than ever, the importance of training competent and reliable teachers. So all of us gathered here today must ask ourselves the question: what kind of educator do we wish to train, so that, accordingly, we may be trained by the Master.

Giving the example, pursuing an ideal, these are fundamental values of education. That means: it is the Master who sends and who welcomes; that means that education is a necessity. And that is not easy...

The sending of the 72 by Jesus is a symbol of the universal. Education is a necessity since everything is learned: one learns how to talk, to walk, to eat. One is taught how to think..., to live..., to be a person. Education is a necessity for humans, now more than ever.

**In Africa.**

Africa is crying out for education. What is happening today, in politics, is not yet very democratic. People are protesting after decades of dictatorship, of the misappropriation of public funds, oppression and exploitation. All that is a result of what? A lack of education... of the heart, of man. As they say in my village: "but you were born without being educated!" If all those had received at least a basic education, one would respect the fundamental human values of man, values which our peoples, our societies, our continent long for.

**Education at the service of people.**

As a result of having lived with Him, the 72 disciples learned to live and follow His example. And they said: "Lord, even the unclean spirits are subject to us in your Name." And Jesus replied: "I saw Satan falling from heaven like lightning". "I gave you power to crush serpents and scorpions and power over the might of your enemies and nothing can harm you". That is the answer of Jesus which we find in Mark 16, at the point where they are sent on their mission by the risen Christ: "These are the signs which will accompany those who have believed in the Good News. They will cast out devils, they will speak in tongues, take up serpents in their hands and if they drink deadly poisons, they will not be harmed; they will lay their hands on the sick and they will be cured." And this is the main concern of the missionaries of the Gospel: responding to the needs of people.

People are afraid; people are ill; people are plagued by evil spirits. The educator -who has been sent on a mission- is at the service of people and their needs. We need educators who look after the pastoral needs of the people. Now we are no longer caught up in academic abstractions.

Confronted with people's needs, Jesus first sent the Apostles, then the disciples, to carry on the work he was doing. And we need that: the people of Africa are waiting for that. There is no room and no future for fine speeches and fancy theories and worthless projects. And when we talk about the crisis in education, the split between school and real life, we are talking about the present state of affairs.

We learned a lot in school but we have forgotten almost everything. There is a split between school and real life. We learn a lot at University, at school..., we have visions of the future ... and then we realise that all that we have learned has no impact on our daily lives. That is what the crisis is about, it is a question of values rather than a question of unemployment-

ment. There are few jobs available for those with diplomas, of course, but what they have learned is of no practical use.

The world has become a laboratory of technical experimentation. As long as we are ineffective, unproductive, dreaming up magnificent projects, we are going to miss our appointment with Africa. We must be able to say: "I have spoken". I am a sacrament, an effective sign and instrument of salvation among us!" Otherwise, our people will turn to the sects, who continue to insult us, even during the night, on the radio; they criticise us, accusing the leaders who are ineffectual and who wait.

### **The effectiveness of the mission.**

What is the value of social education? Effectiveness! Jesus acts and he sends his disciples to do the same.

During this academic year, I urge you, the students, to search, to explore your possibilities, to experiment, to stretch yourselves to the limit to discover your potential and to surpass yourselves and in so doing, change yourselves. What we learn, what you are going to learn, is not an end in itself: it is rather a means, a means for what? To let yourselves be transformed by Christ, in Christ.

The experience of the sacramental efficacy of Christ is still in each one of us, in our words, in our persons. Having experienced this, we can be sent on the mission. Education is at the service of these real needs. And today, we implore the Creator of all things to give us the grace of discernment which is reality. The lack of this sense of reality is the problem of our continent.

We must take a long, critical look at our continent. We are afraid to do this. Many are discouraged and talk about afro-pessimism. And we get used to this mentality. "Things are pretty bad around here ... People try and help us..... We are getting nowhere..."

We continue with the same dependant structures, the same begging mentality, etc. But we should be faithful to an image of God which forms our humanity. Black! African! And the Faith demands that! We cannot call ourselves believers if we do not believe that God, too, wishes us to be more human, here, for each other. We cannot be human beings by proxy, thanks to the intervention of the IMF; we cannot be religious thanks to the Roman IMF.

### **We are little.**

And the Lord says to us: "*All that has been hidden from the wise but has been revealed to little ones*". There again is another educational value: to be little, that is, to be called. The Gospel of infancy is not infantile. To be small is a disposition, a cross, a virtue and therefore an enrichment, a source of maturity. We wish, therefore, to be little, in Mary's shadow, in the greater shadow of the Holy Spirit, in order to

receive everything He has to say to us. And we will do what He tells us to do. And we will proclaim what He tells us. That is as true for us teachers as for you students. For us at the Catholic Institute and you at CELAF. We wish this coming year to be the best academic year for you. And the Spirit will be there because we wish to live by His counsel and His loving design for each one of us.

### **But we must cooperate.**

We shall, of course, continue our collaboration and we are determined to collaborate so that this Institute grows and flourishes.

The future of the Institute lies in your hands; in 3 or 4 years, the repercussions of what takes place here in the Institute will be felt. In the coming years, we are going to meet graduates of this Institute. We have been inundated with requests to open new faculties here at the Institute and we are giving it serious consideration: a faculty of social science. We have also been requested to open a new section by Rome. We intend to respond positively to this request, because there are needs and expectations.

But we shall do so together. We are going to support each other so that one and all may contribute to the development of institutions and structures and so fulfill the wishes of our ecclesiastical authorities.

Tomorrow I am leaving for Nigeria where a meeting of interafrican Catholic Institutes will be held: we will discuss common problems and difficulties. Only solidarity will ensure the future and success of our Continent.

### **Surpass our divisions.**

We can no longer afford the luxury of a policy of "balkanisation", of going it alone. Our borders are artificial and sources of conflict. In our dealings, tribal solidarities play a preponderant role. There is no way we can succeed if we go down that road. Ethnic idolatry should have no place in this Institute and in CELAF. If it did play a role, our chances of success would be nil. "There are neither Jews nor Greeks", neither at CELAF nor the Institute; we are all brothers sharing a common humanity. We are all brothers in Christ. There must be solidarity among us.

In so doing we shall respect our continent and contribute to its development. Let our contribution lie in the provision of the cornerstone. Humanity expects that of us. He who wants to walk on one foot will fall. Africa, Asia, America, those we refer to as "the Third World", all are irreplaceable. The Spirit is with us. God loves us. Let us go forward with Him on the road of life. Amen.

*(The title and subtitles have been added to facilitate the reading of the text, which has been taken from a recording).*