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**Homily of Robert P. Maloney, C.M., for the Opening Mass of the
40th General Assembly Readings: Hosea 2:16-18, 21-22; Matthew
9:18-26 Rome, 5.VII.2004**

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Vincentiana, July-October 2004

Some Homelies

Homily
of Robert P. Maloney, C.M.,
for the Opening Mass
of the 40th General Assembly

Readings: Hosea 2:16-18, 21-22; Matthew 9:18-26

Rome, 5.VII.2004

My brothers we begin this Assembly by celebrating the Eucharist because we believe that it is not just a meeting, but also a time when God is present in our midst. I encourage you today to believe deeply in God's presence here. God loves you personally — each member of this Assembly — and beyond that, he loves the Congregation of the Mission because he loves the friends of the poor. Allow God to pour out his Spirit on you in these days, assuring you of his presence and love.

Our Constitutions tell us (C 135) that the first task of a General Assembly is to promote the spirituality and the apostolic vitality of the Congregation. And today's readings speak to us rather strikingly about both spirituality and mission. Let me say just a few words about each.

1. Spirituality. How good it would be to say to young people who were pondering their future vocation: "The Congregation of the Mission is a deeply spiritual group of men. For them, Jesus, the Evangelizer of the Poor, is absolutely central. And so in his footsteps they commit themselves to be deeply simple, humble, gentle, self-denying, and burning with zeal."

Actually, as you might imagine, in my years as Superior General I have known many men like that in the Congregation. Their lives shine out like stars in the night, encouraging us. I am grateful for having known them. In today's first reading the Prophet Hosea tells us that the Lord wants the entire Company to be that way. In one of the Old Testament's tenderest passages, speaking of the Israelite community, Hosea uses an explicitly sexual image: "I will allure her. I will lead her into the desert and will speak to her heart." I urge you to hear God speaking those

words to each of us during the Assembly. We begin four long, tiring weeks of work together. Even though we will be living in the heart of Rome, these weeks will not be unlike the desert experience to which Hosea alludes. The days will probably be dry and hot. Some of the talks may also be dry, and some may also be hot. But the Assembly aims at promoting our spirituality and that of the entire Congregation, and so I encourage you to let these days be spiritual days in which you pray often and in which you allow the Lord to say to you: "I am with you. I love you deeply. I espouse you. Through you I want to tell the whole world, especially the poor, that my love for them is unrelenting, absolutely faithful. Nothing can overcome it."

2. The second reading is about mission. Notice that this reading is in Matthew's ninth chapter. It comes just before the great missionary discourse that Jesus gives at the beginning of the tenth chapter. Here Jesus is showing his followers, in action, what his mission involves. It involves encouragement, preaching the Good News, healing wounds, bringing hope and life to others. And so Jesus says to this woman who has suffered from hemorrhages for 12 years: "Courage, my daughter! Your faith has restored you to health." And in a stupefying miracle, he raises from the dead the daughter of the leader of the synagogue who had said to him in faith: "Just lay your hand upon her and she will come back to life."

Notice the missionary Jesus. He preaches a gospel of hope. He encourages. He stands in solidarity with the weakest in society. He is daunted neither by sickness nor by death. In fact, he tells us that his love breaks chains, it opens the doors of prisons, it sets captives free. It changes the hearts of sinners. Because of Jesus' love, those who weep, laugh; those who mourn, rejoice; those who hunger and thirst for justice have their fill.

This Assembly calls us to absorb even more deeply the missionary zeal of Jesus, to be men of hope and preachers of hope, to be living signs of the Good News because we believe in the Good News profoundly ourselves.

So, my brothers, we begin. The Lord is here with us and he calls us to deepen our spirituality and our mission in the Congregation. That is our objective in these days. We pray that the Spirit of the Lord will come upon us in this Eucharist, and that as we eat the Lord's flesh and drink his blood, his own spirituality and his own missionary zeal might fill our hearts.