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Homily of G. Gregory Gay, C.M., for the Closing of the 40th General Assembly Readings: Jeremiah 18:1-6; John 11:19-27 Rome, 29.VII.2004

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Vincentiana, July-October 2004

Homily of G. Gregory Gay, C.M., for the Closing of the 40th General Assembly

Readings: Jeremiah 18:1-6; John 11:19-27

Rome, 29.VII.2004

Dear Brothers,

We are gathered here today for the closing of the 40th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission.

The Word of God offers us Martha's testimony. Frequently we confine ourselves to thinking of her as hyperactive, preoccupied with many things, somewhat shallow in contemplating the Lord and superficial in her faith. But, according to the Gospel which we have just heard, her experience is quite different.

Let me highlight some points from the Gospel that show why we celebrate the feast of St. Martha, and how her memory might animate us as we arrive at the end of the General Assembly.

Martha **went out to meet** the Lord in the moment of her sorrow and that of her family over the death of Lazarus, her brother. She is not passive, nor even shy. But rather, assertive in the living out of her faith;

She speaks with simplicity to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (11:21). She doesn't beat around the bush.... She expresses **clearly and directly** her feelings in face of the situation she is experiencing;

Martha **has confidence** in Jesus, her long-time friend, the family friend: "... even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you" (11:22);

She **has faith and proclaims it**: "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day" (11:24);

Martha **is open to deepening this faith** in Jesus who says to her: "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). She shows her openness by saying: "Yes, Lord, I believe" (11:27).

St. Martha teaches us today that faith implies a personal relationship with Jesus. It is not something static. Rather faith is a

dynamic process, in which growth, firmness and fidelity are its consequences.

Helped by the reading from the Prophet Jeremiah, let us mention briefly another fact: the impact on our Vincentian identity of the changes in the world in recent years has been strong. We have all been affected in many ways, for example by the departure of young confreres in various places where the CM is located. In fact, we are like "clay": fragil, vulnerable, unstable, not solid. And sometimes we also lack faith.

Jeremiah's text reminds us that this "clay" which we are is in the hands of God. He is the Potter who, with his love and his grace, is "shaping us" slowly. It is a process in which we are also, at times, like earthen vessels which crack but that are once again restored, thanks to the Lord's mercy, patience and compassion.

Let us all take Martha's example to heart. Let us be assertive, not passive, in living out our faith. Let us be simple, speaking clearly and sincerely in the face of the dark forces of death. Let us confide in the Lord. Let us have an active and courageous faith in the God of life, who conquers death. Let us open ourselves to the new ways through which the Lord surprises and teaches us. That demands that we deepen our faith and our Vincentian identity. His resurrection gives us the strength to continue working tirelessly in the defense of life and human dignity.

Our faith, in relation to our life, is a dynamic process in which the Spirit of Jesus is present, continually recreating us. For all this, my brothers, let Martha's faith inspire our faith.

The renewing presence of Jesus' Spirit calls me personally to hope in the Congregation, in particular in the coming six years. I invite all of you to look to our future with hope.

Let me conclude with a phrase from the poem, "Why I Have Hope," by Cardinal Suenens:

*To hope is not to dream,
but to turn dreams into reality.
Happy are those who dream dreams
and are ready to pay the price
to make them come true.*

My brothers, convert your dreams into reality. Let us convert our dreams into reality! Let us have the courage to do it "but let it be with the strength of our arms, let it be with the sweat of our brows" (SV XI, 40), and we will be happy. So be it!