

HOMILY OF THE PRIOR GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECTS, MIGUEL MIRÓ, AT THE SOLEMN OPENING OF THE YEAR OF CELEBRATION OF THE IV CENTENARY OF THE PROVINCE OF SAINT NICHOLAS OF TOLENTINE OF THE ORDER OF AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECTS.

Parish Church of Santa Rita, Madrid, Spain, September 10, 2020, 1:00 p.m.

As we celebrate today the feast of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine and the beginning of the IV Centenary of Province that bears his name, let us thank the Lord. Let us sing with joy: See how good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity! (Psalm 132). The Spirit descends like Precious ointment, like dew from Hermon, there the Lord sends blessing and life to always . With this psalm Saint Augustine expressed his dream, this is how he wanted life to be fraternal of their monasteries. This psalm calls out the cry of the Spirit, the prophetic cry (cf. 132.2). Let us remember today the mercy of the Lord and let praise, gratitude and hope rise from our hearts.

In a very particular way, let us turn our gaze today to Saint Nicholas, to the Order of the Augustinian Recollects and the Province of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine. Let's look not only for narration of the events of the past, let us admire from faith the divine intervention in human vicissitudes.

1. Saint Nicholas of Tolentine

The Word of God that we have heard is reflected in the life of Saint Nicholas. We can say that he is the poor man who trusts in the Lord and expects everything from his mercy. (Eclo 2, 1-9); It is the generous man who distributes alms to the poor (2 Cor 9.6 to 11). Saint Nicholas is the disciple and missionary who joyfully announces the Kingdom of God (Lk 10, 1-11).

His biographers say that he entered the Augustinian convent of Sant'Angelo in Pontano, in northeastern Italy, a few years after Pope Alexander IV united in 1256 various groups of convents and hermits under the Rule of Saint Augustine. With this Great Union began the Order of St. Augustine. Nicholas lived for thirty years in the convent of Tolentine, there he died in 1305.

The words of the Rule of Saint Augustine resounded in the heart of Nicholas: The first thing for what you have gathered in community is to live unanimously in the house and have a single soul and a single heart directed towards God (Rule 1.2). The key to the life of Saint Nicholas was in love. He learned very well that charity does not seek its own, but rather puts common things before their own (Rule 5, 2).

They say that he really enjoyed watching the friars enjoy themselves, he was affable and very human in dealing with the brothers and was very happy with the poor. May Saint Nicholas be in this time of pandemic, a star of hope for all and teach us to help people in need.

2. After the glare of a Star

Today we begin the celebration of the IV Centenary of the Province of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine. It is a reason for joy for the entire Order and for the entire Augustinian Recollect

Family. Saint Nicholas is a constant reference to holiness for the religious of the Province. In the history of the Province he has encouraged the most risky missionary undertakings, he has been consolation in persecution and strength in difficulties, he has been also stimulus for the study and the search for Truth.

After the glow of the star of Saint Nicholas, the Province has sailed out to sea in the storm and calm. The life of the Province becomes history, also our simple daily life is part of this history, our history.

Let us remember with gratitude how the Lord has blessed the Order in the history of the Province of Saint Nicholas. Let's remember the missionaries from the Philippines and America and let's think about the missionaries of today. Let us remember the saints: the martyrs of Japan, Saint Ezequiel Moreno and so many brothers who gave their lives for love. The charism that the Spirit infuses us is grace, life, communion and mission in our concrete reality. Let's go back to the heart to give ourselves account of what the Lord wants to do with us today and through each one of us.

But, today, we also ask forgiveness for our sins, for the occasions when communion and missionary spirit in the Province have waned. We apologize for times when we have shut ourselves in and have not heard the voice of the Lord In the needs of the Church and in the cry of the poor.

The Province has sailed with more wind in its favor when it has risked more in the evangelizing mission and how much more has contributed to the communion of the whole Order. Let us Remember:

–In 1588 the Recollection began and in 1606 the first group of Recollects arrived in the Philippines.

–What we have begun to celebrate today is that on November 19, 1621, the then Congregation of Augustinian Recollects held its first General Chapter in Madrid and organized in four geographic provinces. Three were in Spain: Castilla, Aragon, and Andalucía . The fourth was in the Philippines, under the invocation of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine. Later, in 1629, the Colombian Recollects joined together to form a new Province.

–For two hundred years, all the religious of the Province of Saint Nicholas were volunteers who came from the other three Spanish provinces. Only in 1824 did the Province opened his own school in Spain, that of Alfaro (La Rioja), which five years later, in In 1829, he was transferred to Monteagudo (Navarra).

–With the confiscations of Spain (1835) and Colombia (1861), the communities are suppressed. Only Monteagudo was left in Spain because of her role in training and sending missionaries to the Philippines. With this house the life of the Congregation. As for Colombia, in 1888 Saint Ezequiel Moreno, member of the Province of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine, led the expedition to restore the Colombian Province of Our Lady of Candelaria. In 1907 the Province that today is called Saint Thomas of Villanueva.

–A difficult period was the Philippine Revolution (1896-1898), but the desolation and pain became a new opportunity thanks to some bold religious from the Province who did not remain in lamentations but, with faith and boldness, went to America searching for new mission fields.

–Saint Pius X in 1912 with the brief Religious Families elevates the Congregation to a religious Order. In the document, the Pope praises the missionary spirit of the Provinces of the Order and affirms: the Province of Saint Nicholas subsisted as a sacred fire that revived the *Recollect family*.

–Later, in 1948 the Province of Saint Joseph was formed; and in the General Chapter of 1997 was born with joy, after a process of preparation, the Province of Saint Ezekiel Moreno. Finally in 2017, after the last General Chapter, the Provinces of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine and Saint Augustine joined.

3. Communion becomes mission

It has not been an easy journey, but the works of God are like that. Throughout history we have seen that when there is communion and missionary spirit, the Lord blesses us. In these times of revitalization it helps all of us to keep it in mind.

A revitalization process has started. Let's think about the Life and Mission Projects of the Order, of the Province and of each one of our communities. A project requires prayer and sacrifice to renounce our individualism and protagonism, and thus work together. Communion leads us to discern with freedom what the Lord tells asks of us, what the Church expects of us and what our peoples need.

We are Augustinian Recollects. The four Provinces that make up the Order are one body, a charismatic network of life and gospel.

Communion becomes mission. Saint John Paul II used to say: communion generates communion and it essentially configures itself as a missionary communion (VC 46). Communion in the Order and Communion in the Province enrich us with the diversity of cultures and ministries. Communion unites us in the love of Christ. And the union strengthens and consolidates us in the evangelizing mission. We cannot get stuck in the past and act like someone who is hopeless.

Today the Province is in China, England, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, the United States and Spain; and their vocations and the younger religious are no longer from Spain. We need to be in communion to be always on mission. Let's look at the Province of Saint Nicholas in the unity of the Order, in the Augustinian Recollect Family, in the Augustinian Family and in the communion of the Church.

I want to thank the prayer of the contemplative sisters, the sick and the elderly. All of them make the mission of the Province fruitful. We count on the laity, with our Secular Fraternities and with the Augustinian Recollect Youth.

May Saint Nicholas help us to live in communion during this year and to always be in mission to go where the Church needs us and sing with joy: See what sweetly it is a delight to live united as brothers!