**HOMILY FOR PERPETUAL VOWS OF MONIKA TJHIN PUNAN, OCTOBER 14 2023, CHURCH OF SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER**

What is Monika about to do this morning? To profess, before God and before the whole Church, that she wants to follow Jesus more closely through the perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the Verbum Dei, in order to proclaim the Gospel to all people with complete freedom and love.

And we are gathered here to pray for her, for **the courage** to go to whichever people God sends her to, **the grace** to persevere in her vocation to till the end of her life, and **the love** to dedicate herself to the charism that has been entrusted to her. Courage, grace and love. These are the three things we will pray for today and the three things I want to touch on in this homily.

COURAGE:

Why courage? Because the consecration we are celebrating today is a *missionary* consecration! It is a decision to be a missionary for one’s whole life! …*ad vitam!* According to the Church, to be a missionary for an entire life-time is a special vocation. (You can read Ad gentes, chapter IV… a beautiful and most accurate description). It’s tough! It requires a spiritually and morally tough training, that Monika had gone through for ten whole years! She may look small and cute, but just give her some time to tell you all her stories! I don’t mean to give her parents a scare! It may not always be that scary externally, but let me tell you that it is a heroic battle that we need to face inside every day.

For example, missionary consecration is nothing less than a sacrifice of a life-time. I don’t want to make it sound dramatic, but you just ask her parents now how easy it has been to live with their child hundreds of miles away on mission! The vow of obedience has carried Monika to wherever God needs her, for a greater purpose, and you can’t soften the heroic imprint it leaves on the Church and on her family, who are all part of her vocation. Missionary obedience comes with a great price, and after years of discernment, this young woman is deciding to stick with it! So let us pray for the courage for her and for her family today, as she says Yes to a missionary consecration.

GRACE:

We said we also pray for grace, and why grace? Simply because our faithfulness to this vocation comes from God. Monika’s capacity to persevere in this vocation until the end of her life depends on her experience of God’s fidelity to her own life. For those of us who have lived this vocation long enough, we know how much we depend on God to remain faithful! And how much, indeed, that God IS AND HAS BEEN FAITHFUL! Today, Monika professes the vow of chastity. But it is Christ who is the first who is professing his eternal fidelity to her! Most would just consider chastity as “not getting married”. You know, actually, this is the most beautiful of the three vows. It is not about renouncing marriage, but to be married to the most faithful One, God Himself. I invite you all, later in the liturgy, when she reads the formula of consecration, to pay attention to the words. More than consecrating herself to a service, Monika is going to consecrate herself to Someone, Persons, to the Father, to Jesus, to the Holy Spirit, with the help of our Blessed Mother… whose love is what empowers her to make this superhuman profession today. I mean, to promise God that you will be steadfast until you are 50, 60, 70… through ups and downs, happy moments and difficult moments, crisis moments… it’s a matter of asking the grace, dear sister. And as you have said the other day, He is a living God who listens, and He will give it!

Lastly, LOVE.

Because the charism is “a dream that will need all the love you can give every day of your life for as long as you live.” This is a crazy community you are getting yourself into, and you know it. This charism is so beautiful, its members so idealistic, but it is still new and so poor in many senses. As Jaime said, it is the field in which you have found the treasure of your vocation, but in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it will cost you your own life. Verbum Dei is something that will cost you so much, everything. You will need so much love for this charism and its mission. Are you up to this challenge of a lifetime?

Today, Monika will profess the vow of poverty in a way to belong to the Verbum Dei Missionary Fraternity. The Gospel poverty is not about having nothing. It is about being generous enough to share everything with those given you by God, relying on God’s gradual working in your life! As they say, poverty has its consequences: on our life, on our efficiency, our expectations, and on our personal realization. Verbum Dei is poor. The spouse you are committing to today is a poor Jesus. It is like marrying a poor man and uniting your destiny to his own poverty. And the only reason one can have to marry a poor person is love, which precisely, is Christ’s riches! But do not be afraid of the poverty of Jesus. His poverty is a mystery of true love and there is no need even to try to understand it. Just try to put love in the midst of the community’s poverty (that you already know by now) and in your own personal poverty too, and you will see that it is the most enriching experience and overwhelming reward of what love deeply means for your life with others and what really matters in your own preaching of the Gospel.

So! **Courage** for a missionary consecration, **grace** to be faithful to the end and **love** to suffer the gift of the charism. As we proceed to the perpetual profession of Monika to a life of generous poverty, of lifelong chastity and of a missionary obedience, let us pray for these three fruits to accompany her always in the missionary calling to follow Jesus, who is real and alive today.