

Sermon on 2.2.2009 in the Adoration Church (Planning Conference 2014)

Fr. Heinrich Walter, President of the General Presidium

Dear Leaders of the Schoenstatt Movement,

They brought the Child in order to dedicate him to the Lord

“They brought the Child to Jerusalem in order to present him to the Lord” (Lk 2,22). We are making a similar pilgrimage today when we bring the life that has grown in our thirty-one countries to the temple. We bring everything with the same attitude of gratitude as Mary and Joseph. We bring what God has given us through the daughter shrines and home shrines. We bring the fruits of our groups, Branches and communities. We bring the best of our lives and work in our families and professions. We bring the projects in which we have invested all our strength, and we bring the many friends whom we are representing here today. We bring everything here to our father and founder. His charism has inspired and motivated us. He finds his joy in us. As a result we become his Family, the Family of the Father. We bring everything “to present it to the Lord” (Lk 2,22). Everything belongs to God. The important thing in all we do is the living God. We belong to this God with all the life that has grown. Our deep faith in the God of life, who is at work in our midst, is our strength. At decisive turning points our father saw only God and his will. So we can join in singing his hymn of thanksgiving, which he composed 67 years ago in the Koblenz prison:

“The fetters have fallen!

May a hymn of thanksgiving

rise jubilantly upwards

from Schoenstatt’s holy halls.” (Heavenwards)

Our father believed that the Schoenstatt Movement is a “child of promise” which we now present in the temple with faith and conviction. May God give us Simeon’s eyes so that we can see the salvation that lives and works in the Family. It must be a bright light that shines out for all. We want to strengthen what is good by showing it to one another, and by rejoicing in one another. The more we become involved with God, the more we ourselves will become a temple, a holy place, a Cenacle. In the last hundred years Schoenstatt has become a vast, living shrine in this world. That is the basis on which we live, speak and pray with one another in this week, and carry out our responsibility. Mary has called us to gather here. She will give us a large heart in which to preserve everything. She will help us to do what the Lord tells us.

My eyes have seen the salvation: Recognizing God’s guidance

We are witnesses of what God has worked in the hundred years of our Family's history. We want to pray for the believing eyes of a Simeon, so that we may recognize God's guidance. Many small streams have filled the river of our history. It started here and flows back here time and again with new life. That is the mystery of what happens as we advance with one another and in one another in the covenant of love. Some of what has happened was difficult and we could not understand it. Our hearts bled in the painful hours of the war, the concentration camp, the time of exile, and also the controversies with one another. Our father looked with Mary's eyes on God's guidance. He looked for the open doors and trusted blindly. He had great courage and dared a great deal. In the same way God wants to lead us into the future still today. Enter into history, our father often said. A thorough assessment of the last decades can help us discover a sure way into the future. How has the legacy of his foundation developed? What has become fruitful? What 'miracles' have been worked among us? What is still a seed hidden deep in the Family that has still to germinate? Which part of the vision could not yet take on shape and form? We could work out a great Magnificat from answering these questions and sing it together with Mary in the shrine of the Triune God.

We will also recognize that we were weak instruments, that we have made mistakes, that we have also sinned, that besides all the light, much darkness has fallen. In the hymn of thanksgiving our father also described this. He speaks of Satan's tricks, of what was too earthly in our thinking and too human in our giving. This can give rise to repentance, perhaps also to confession with the request for forgiveness. It can bring about conversion and a purification of our memory. In this way we will be following the footsteps of our Holy Father in the year 2000. Our hearts are longing for fresh new life and strength for the second century of our Movement. May the fetters of psychological, mental, and moral subjection still fall, so that we can sing with our father as a renewed Family:

"So today we stand united,

forged by God's love

.....

So that new people may develop,

who are free and strong on earth,

bearing themselves like Christ

in joy and difficulties.

.....

See, here are your followers,

the little ones and the pure;

in your mercy unite them

and let them appear again to the world.” (Heavenwards)

A light to enlighten the pagans: living prophetic lives for these times

Simeon saw that this Child would not only bring glory to Israel, but also that his light would enlighten the pagans. As we look at Jesus’ universal mission, we in Schoenstatt also look to all people and all nations, including the pagans. I would like to mention two perspectives.

+ The evangelisation of the peoples. The start was made in Africa and South America in the 1930s, and in the 1960s we began to work in India and the Philippines. This daring gave rise to much life. Schoenstatt is flourishing in a number of these countries. Many have come here to the place of origin as representatives of their people. At a time of globalisation, of rapid travel and international networking, we have become timid. Very young Movements have often spread far more widely than we have. However, the missionary spirit has awakened in our youth. Perhaps at this jubilee the Blessed Mother will give us the grace of a new start in the countries of Africa and Asia. In the future the die of world events will increasingly be cast in the countries of Asia.

+ Schoenstatt was ahead of its times. Our father dealt with the developments of his time in a prophetic manner. He looked for answers that were tailored to life. That is how our Movement came into existence. His understanding of the Church or community, the formation of the personality or pedagogic starting points, were all experienced as new. The ‘new shore’ was an image for setting out to the goal. Then we had to fight for our survival in the war and time of exile. Today we find it difficult to follow behind the developments of our times. The prophetic spirit of yesterday appears stale, because it is not experienced as an answer to current challenges. Our father said that we are the image of our times. We want to recognize the features of our times. We feel the winds of our times blowing in our face; we don’t avoid them but allow a prophetic answer to arise.

Our conference is taking place against the background of powerful events. There is a global crisis of trust in the financial and economic markets. This chaos drives some to despair and suicide; others in responsible positions hide and wash their hands in innocence. Barak Obama speaks of “the winds of change”. The citizens of the USA have given a sign of hope. The world is beginning to trust that this coloured man with his style of working towards consensus will find global ways into the future. If we follow the road leading to 2014, we also have to deal with the storms of the times in which we find ourselves. The first Schoenstatters proved themselves in the great challenge of the First World War.

We want to clarify our core competence for this time and grow to new strengths. How can we describe our hope? What trustworthy contribution can we give to the world and Christendom when we sing in the Hymn of Thanksgiving:

“Through us you can build

the city on heaven’s meadows,

so that all can look up
to it with great trust.”

Sisters and Brothers, we have entered our shrine, we ourselves are Mary's holy space, the living shrine in which a great dialogue is taking place this week. In the Cenacle the Holy Spirit gives the gifts of grace. He does not look at our age or rank. Here all claims of power fall silent so that the Holy Spirit can reign. This is how our founder envisaged us - as a Family that is founded on mutual respect and trust. We want to show one another the life that God has given us. We want to allow the candles of our faith to shine out, and pass on this light to one another. Our eyes want to see the salvation God has worked in others. Then God will be very close to us. Together with Mary we will have our ear to God's heart. We will feel the power of our origins. Together we will gain in security, and feel the pulse of our times with our father's hand. We will find the courage to provide an answer to our times. Selfless love will flame up in us and we can then give our Schoenstatt to our present-day Church and the whole world for its wellbeing.

Our father is behind us with his blessing: Only go forward, trust one another, you are my Family, I can only do it through you, have courage and do not hesitate, it is highest time.

Fr Heinrich Walter