

OPENING OF THE KENTENICH YEAR

Dear Schoenstatt Family,

We are celebrating a new anniversary of the death of our Father and Founder, Fr Kentenich. Next year it will be fifty years since this event. That is why we are opening a "Kentenich Year" today. We are concerned not only with an historical memory, because we gratefully recognize that Schoenstatt owes its existence to its Founder. We are far more concerned with Schoenstatt's identity as such, and hence the question of its existence and future.

In the Missio "Hungertuch" (Lenten hanging) this year an African artist has given expression to a basic human experience in word and picture: "I am, because you are." Basing itself on these words a local house community addressed our Father and Founder and confessed: Father, we are, because you are. Yes, we are Kentenich; we are because you are; we are what you are.

Theologically we are dealing here with sharing in his charism as founder, and in his founding spirit. No less than St John Paul II impressed on us: "You are called to participate in that grace which your Founder has received, and subsequently to offer the same grace to the entire Church. Then, the charism of the Founder proves to be an experience inspired by the Spirit which has been passed on to their own followers, so that they may live, guard, deepen and develop it further in communion with the Church and for the good of the Church." (20 September 1985)

So it is a question of a charism, that is, a grace, a "Spirit-wrought experience", that was given to Fr Kentenich, but not only to him for his personal salvation and sanctification, but to others, for a mission. Besides this, it concerns a calling, hence once again a grace to share in his charism and in this grace.

In Schoenstatt's history we have experienced vitally that our Father and we belong together. The Father current and its many and varied forms of expression - Garden of Mary, "child acts", discipleship current and many other forms of a covenant with our Founder - clearly testify to this. Through our calling we participate in his charism and his mission, that is, we are one with him in life and mission. God thought of us together from all eternity. He united me and each one of you most intimately and inseparably with him and his mission. Insoluble solidarity. Quite simply, and at the same time with theological precision, Fr Kentenich expressed it in these words: *"God's plan has foreseen that you and I, and I and you should belong to each other to an extraordinary depth. From all eternity God has seen us in a profound covenant of love. If God has foreseen it in this way, if he never envisaged me*

without you, and you without me, and if he does not want me to carry out my task without you, in much the same way as he always envisaged the Blessed Mother in connection with our Lord; if from all eternity he has foreseen you as my permanent helpers in carrying out my task, you can understand how grateful I have to be to you that you have entered into these plans.” (20.08.1947). Today our Founder needs us so that he can continue to live and work in order to carry out his mission.

I would like to emphasise one thing: Our attachment to our Father and Founder is not, in the first place, an emotional and affective inclination, but rather an attachment in faith; it is rooted in the belief that through God's grace we have been called to share in Fr Kentenich's charism and founder spirit.

In the first reading we took up a wonderful passage in the Old Testament. The people of Israel had become too numerous. Moses was unable to lead these people on his own. His father-in-law advised him. He spoke to God: It is too much; I cannot carry this burden on my own:

Nu 11,16-17. 24-25: So the Lord said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you. I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on to them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself. ... So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.”

Perhaps in this Kentenich year we are concerned with God taking some of the spirit he had placed in our Father's heart that rested on him, and is placing it upon us. That is why this year we are praying: “Give us some of his fire, give us some of his founder spirit, let his charism come alive in us!”

Or, as the Prophet Elisha asked for and won two shares of the spirit of his Prophet and Master Elijah: 2 Kings, 2,1-14: *Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “**Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.**” He responded, “You have asked a hard thing.”*

However, I chose the other reading, because it highlights another aspect, that is, that sharing in the Founder's charism is not a privilege, and by no means exclusively a matter for a few Kentenich experts and learned doctors. We all share in his charism, each one of us, each group and community. Kentenich is more than all of us and above all of us. Only together can - and should - we exemplify the entire and complete features and the full form of Fr Kentenich.

Each one of us, each group and each course, each community, is a ray of his charism; we are all little mosaic stones that together form a whole. However, it is a great challenge to us to make contact, to share our life and work together, and to live in solidarity and a covenant culture. The mosaic is a difficult, challenging and arduous work on a puzzle, but only in this way do we represent Kentenich, only in this way are we who and what we are.

So the question concerns a charism, a grace for others, a mission. That is why we can and may not keep this gift to ourselves. A charism is a gift and a task. With this in view Pope Francis told the Schoenstatt Fathers something that could offer our entire Family orientation this year, and perhaps also an admonition: *“You are concerned about maintaining the founding charism and the capacity you have of transmitting it to the younger ones. I’m also concerned about being able to maintain and transmit the charism in such a way as to be able to inspire and sustain your lives and your mission.”* Even more important are the following words that speak to us about the dynamism of the charism, which is activated when in touch with reality and at the same time transforms it: *“You’re aware that a charism is not a museum artefact that remains preserved in a glass case to be looked at and nothing more. Faithfulness or keeping it pure does not at all mean that we seal it in a bottle like distilled water so that it cannot be contaminated by the outside air. A charism will not be preserved this way. It must go out and come in contact with reality, with people and their problems and concerns. Thus in this fruitful encounter with reality the charism has a chance to grow and renew itself. Reality is also transformed or changed through the spiritual power that this charism brings with it.”* (3 September 2015).

Our Father and Founder’s charism is our mission, our contribution to the Church and society; it should transform reality and inspire a new culture of the covenant. That is the fruit we have to bring forth, and which we can only bring forth if we “remain in him” - like the branches are united with the vine. “Remain in me. Whoever remains in me will bring forth much fruit. I call you friends. I have chosen you and appointed you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”

Dear Schoenstatt Family, our wish is that Fr Kentenich’s cause of beatification will progress and that he will be canonised one day. Also this is our request in the Kentenich Year. However, I think it should be our most fervent petition that the Family’s striving for holiness, and that of each individual, and the various communities, will grow. Let us think of the condition for 20th January: If you take the Inscriptio seriously, if you are serious in striving for holiness, I will be set free. So our Father could say: Only then will I be canonised. That is what St John Paul II said: “You must canonise him yourselves!”

When Fr Kentenich died, Bishop Tenhumberg applied the words of St Paul to the Schoenstatt Family on behalf of the Founder: “You are my letter!”

“By its fruits you will know the tree”. That ancient law of the Gospel applies today more than ever: By the fruits of the tree you will know the tree, by the holiness of the children and disciples others will recognise the sanctity of their Father and Founder. Through the holy lives of the Family, and the fruitfulness of its apostolic works, the holiness of our Father will be revealed. Other Schoensatters pave the way for Fr Kentenich in Rome; leading the way is Blessed Karl Leisner, perhaps soon also Fr Franz Reinisch, and the decree of Sr M. Emilie’s heroic virtue is already completed, the Positio on Joseph Engling is progressing - perhaps by the time of the centenary of his death in 2018, then Joao Pozzobon and Mario Hiriart should follow, and one day Fr Hernan Alessandri, and God willing, many others. In this way our Founder’s words prove true, that the little chapel will become the cradle of holiness, the cradle of canonisable and canonised saints. That is my wish and my prayer on this day of remembrance for us all. “I have chosen you and appointed you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”

Fr Juan Pablo Catoggio
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