

**OMELIA DEL PADRE GENERALE  
IN OCCASIONE DELLA PROFESSIONE SOLENNE DI  
STEPHEN ODUH**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Dear Stephen

*“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”.*

The brief conversation we heard in the Gospel passage, between a man identified elsewhere as a rich young man and Jesus, begins with this question.

We do not have many details about this anonymous figure; yet from a few characteristics we succeed in perceiving his sincere desire to attain eternal life by leading an honest and virtuous earthly existence. In fact he knows the commandments and has observed them faithfully from his youth. Yet, all this – which is of course important – is not enough. Jesus says he lacks one thing, but is something essential. Then seeing him well disposed, the divine Teacher looks at him lovingly and suggest to him a leap in quality; he calls the young man to heroism in holiness, he asks him to abandon everything, to follow him: “go, sell what you have, and give to the poor...and come, follow me”.

“Come, follow me”. This is the Christian vocation which is born from the Lord’s proposal of love and can only be fulfilled in our loving response. Jesus invites his disciples to give their lives completely, without calculation or personal interest, with unreserved trust in God.

Our brother Stephen have accepted this demanding invitation an set out with humble docility in the following of the Crucified and Risen Christ, as said St. John Leonardi our Founder.

His wish of perfection in the logic of faith – sometimes humanly incomprehensible – consist in no longer put him self at the center but in choosing to go against the tide, living in line with the Gospel.

The great example of our founder St. John Leonardi may help us to understand better this logic of the Gospel. “*he, have said the Pope Benedict XVI, in the unforgettable catechesis dedicated to our founder on 7 October of the last year, never lost his interest in medicine, because he felt that the professional mediation of the pharmacist, would permit him to fulfill his vocation to the full, one in which he could pass on the men and women, by means of holy life, “the medicine of God”, which is the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ, the “measure of all things”* Inspired by the conviction that all humans beings need this medicine more than anything else, St, John Leonardi sought to make the personal encounter with Jesus Christ his fundamental *raison d’etre.*” And the pope, concluding this wonderful catechesis said:”*Conquered by Christ, like the Apostle Paul, St John Leonardi pointed out to his followers and continues to point out all of us the Christocentric ideal for which “it is necessary to strip oneself of every personal interest and look only to the service of God”, keeping “before the eyes of the mind only the honour, service and glory of Jesus Christ Crucified”.*

May the example and intercession of this fascinating man of God be a reference and encouragement particularly for our brother Stephen and for all Christians to live their own vocation with passionate enthusiasm.

For this to take place we must have entered into the deep and hidden places of our inner self and there face our secret desires and fears, our hopes and longing and confront them in the light of the purifying words of Jesus.

This is the homage that you are about to offer to God today, Brother Stephen, by pronouncing your solemn vows for life. These vows represent a commitment to consecrated life as it is practiced in our community. More profoundly, your solemn promise is a consecration of your person to God so that the whole of your life is a witness to Him. By virtue of the promises you make today you choose to belong to Him body and soul more than to yourself by a free choice and by a public act that we call religious profession. Accordingly, the worth of your life will be measured by your fidelity to your commitment, and by the fervor with which you pursue this way of life to the end of your days. With this gesture and profession, our brother Stephen allows himself to be *bound by the Order* of Mother of God to a life of obedience. The word obedience comes from the Latin *ab audire*, i.e. “to listen to.” The religious promises to hold “attentive listening” as the first and fundamental “stance of life”. He promises to listen to God in a manner similar to and flowing from the “listening heart” of

Mary. This listening will happen throughout his life in the Order – and it is in *this* context that he takes on the vows of chastity and poverty. In choosing to live life this way, Stephen is simultaneously choosing to subordinate his own will to that of God – not blindly, but reflectively, contemplatively, by listening. In return for this surrender, Stephen finds himself *grasped by God*.

Whether you are there at the Solemn Profession in person or in spirit, do join us in prayer for our brother as he binds himself in this way to God for the rest of his life. May he truly find himself grasped by the Lord in mercy and compassion.

As you are aware, it is a great gift of God's grace that enables you to make such a solemn promise; it carries with it the responsibility that will engage you day by day until death to carry out from the heart what you undertake with this commitment. Remember that you are not left to your own resources in this undertaking; the Lord will not leave you alone. He is faithful and has promised to be with you to the end, even to abide with you, together with his Father. His Mother Mary, who is honored so greatly in our Order will accompany you.

He also gives you a community of brothers to assist and sustain you as you live out your engagement. Finally, in the Eucharist, which is the context in which you make these vows, he gives you himself as a pledge that you are to be united with him in an intimate bond of love. This union of charity will never be broken if you remain faithful, but will endure not only throughout your life here but will continue for all eternity, in the heavenly kingdom. May these signs of God's love be your strength and be always a source of confidence and of joy.

With this prayer and these hopes, I ask if it is your firm purpose to pronounce these solemn vows for life.