



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY THE  
CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF  
APOSTOLIC LIFE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
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*Good morning everyone!*

I thought about delivering a well-prepared, fine speech.... But then I had the idea to speak off-the-cuff, to say the things that are relevant to this moment.

The key to what I am about to say is what the Cardinal [Prefect of the Congregation] has asked: authentic criteria for discerning what is happening. Because truly, today so many things are happening that, in order not to get lost in this world, in the haze of worldliness, in the provocations, in the spirit of conflict, so many things, we need authentic criteria to guide us. To guide our discernment.

Then, there is another thing: that this Holy Spirit is a incorrigible [*he laughs; they laugh*], because he never tires of being creative! Now, with the new forms of consecrated life, he is truly creative, with charisms.... It is interesting: he is the Author of Diversity, but at the same time the Creator of Unity. This is the Holy Spirit. And with this diversity of charisms and many other things, he creates the unity of the Body of Christ, and also the unity of consecrated life. And this, too, is a challenge.

I have wondered: what are the things that the Holy Spirit wishes to have firmly retained in consecrated life? And my thoughts have flown, wandered, spiraled about..., and the day I went to

San Giovanni Rotondo always comes back to mind: I do not know why, but I saw so many consecrated men and women who were working there ... and I have thought about what I said there, about the “three *Ps*” that I spoke of there. And I said to myself: these are the pillars that endure, that are permanent in consecrated life. *Prayer, poverty and patience*. And I decided to speak to you about this: what I think prayer is in consecrated life, and then poverty and patience.

*Prayer* is always a return to the first call. Any prayer, perhaps a prayer in need, but it is always a return to that Person who called me. The prayer of a consecrated man or woman is a return to the Lord who invited me to be near him. A return to the One who looked me in the eye and said to me: “Come. Leave everything and come” — “But I would like to leave only half...” (we will talk about this in relation to poverty) — “No, come. Leave it all. Come”. And the joy at that moment of leaving the lot or the little we have. Each one knows what he or she has left behind: leaving mom, dad, family, career.... It is true that some seek a career “within”, and this is not good. At that moment finding the Lord who has called me to follow him closely. Every prayer is a return to this. And prayer is what enables me to work for *that* Lord, not for my interests or for the institution I work for, no: for the Lord. There is a word that is used often; it has been used too much and has lost a bit of strength, but it indicated this well: *radicalness*. I do not like to use it because it has been overused, but it is this: I leave everything for You. It is the smile of the first steps.... Then problems arise, so many problems that we have all had, but it is always a matter of returning to the encounter with the Lord. And in consecrated life, prayer is the air that allows that call to breathe in us; it renews that call. Without this air we cannot be good consecrated men and women. We might perhaps be good people, Christians, Catholics who work in many of the Church’s activities, but you must continually renew your consecration in prayer, there, in an encounter with the Lord. “But I am busy; I am busy; I have so many things to do...”. This is more important. Go and pray. And then there is that prayer that keeps us in the Lord’s presence during the day. But in any case, prayer. “But I have work that is too critical that takes me the whole day...”. Let us think of a consecrated woman of our time: Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa even went “in search of problems”, because she was like a problem-seeking machine, because she went here, there, there.... But two hours of prayer before the Most Blessed Sacrament: no one could take them away from her. “Ah, the great Mother Teresa!”. Do as she did; do the same. Seek the Lord, the One who called you. Prayer. Not just in the morning.... Each one must find how to do it, where to do it, when to do it. But do it always, pray. One cannot live the consecrated life, one cannot discern what is happening without speaking with the Lord.

I do not wish to say any more on this, but I think you understand. Prayer. And the Church needs men and women who pray, in this painful time for humanity.

The second “*P*” stands for *poverty*. In the Constitutions, Saint Ignatius wrote this to us Jesuits — but this was not his own original concept; I believe he may have taken it from the Desert Fathers, perhaps: “Poverty is the mother; it is the retaining wall of consecrated life”. It is a “mother”. Interesting: he does not say chastity, which is perhaps more closely related to motherhood, to

fatherhood, no. Poverty is a mother. Without poverty there is no fruitfulness in consecrated life. And it is a “wall”; it protects you. It protects you from the spirit of worldliness, certainly. We know that the devil enters through the pockets. We all know this. And the little temptations against poverty are wounds to membership in the body of consecrated life. Poverty according to the Rules, the Constitutions of every congregation: it is not the same, the poverty of one congregation or another. The Rules say: “Our poverty is oriented this way”; “our poverty goes that way”; but the spirit of poverty is always there. And this cannot be negotiated. Without poverty we can never clearly discern what is happening in the world. Without the spirit of poverty. “Leave everything; give it to the poor”, the Lord said to that young man. And we are all that young man. “But no, father, I do not have much wealth...”. Yes, but you have something, some attachment! The Lord asks you for that: that will be “the Isaac” you must sacrifice. Naked in spirit, poor. And with this spirit of poverty the Lord protects us — he protects us! — from so many problems and from so many things that seek to destroy consecrated life.

There are three steps to pass from religious consecration to religious worldliness. Yes, even religious; there is religious worldliness; many consecrated men and women are worldly. Three steps. First: money, that is, the lack of poverty. Second: vanity, which goes from the extreme of being a “peacock” to the small matters of vanity. And third: arrogance, pride. And from there, all the vices. But the first step is the attachment to wealth, the attachment to money. Attention to this prevents the others from coming. And I mean wealth, not just money. To wealth. It takes this spirit of poverty to be able to discern what is happening. A homework assignment is: how is my poverty? Look in the drawers, in the drawers of your soul; look into your personality; look into your Congregation.... See how poverty is going. It is the first small step: if we are careful about that one, the others do not come. It is the wall that protects us from the others; it is the mother that makes us more religious and helps us to dedicate all our richness to the Lord. It is the wall that protects us from that worldly development that causes so much damage to every consecration. Poverty.

And third, *patience*. “But father, what has patience got to do with this?”. Patience is important. We usually do not speak about it, but it is very important. Looking at Jesus, patience is what Jesus had in order to get to the end of his life. When Jesus, after the Supper, goes to the Garden of Olives, we can say that at that moment, in a special way, Jesus “entered patience”. “Entering patience” is an attitude that every consecration, which goes from the small matters of community life or of the life of consecration, which each one has, in this variety that the Holy Spirit creates.... From the small matters, the forbearance, the small gestures of smiling when I want to swear..., up to the sacrifice of self, of life. Patience. That “bearing on your shoulders” (*hypomone*) of Saint Paul: Saint Paul spoke of “bearing on your shoulders”, as a Christian virtue. Patience. Without patience, that is, without the capacity to suffer, without “entering patience”, a consecrated life cannot be sustained; it will be halfway. Without patience, for example, the internal conflicts of a congregation are understandable; they are understandable. Because they have not had the patience to abide one another, and the stronger side, not always the better side, wins; nor is the side that lost better, because it is impatient. Without patience, careerism at the General Chapters

is understandable, this organizing “rope teams” beforehand ... to offer two examples. You do not know how many problems, internal conflicts, quarrels are submitted to Msgr Carballo [Secretary of the Congregation]! But he is from Galicia; he is able to abide this! Patience. Abiding one another.

But not just patience in community life: patience before the trials of the world. Bearing the problems, the trials of the world on your shoulders. “Enter patience”, as Jesus entered patience in order to fulfil the redemption. This is a key point, not only for avoiding these internal quarrels that are a scandal, but in order to be consecrated, in order to discern. Patience.

And patience too in facing the common problems of consecrated life: let us consider the scarcity of vocations. “We do not know what to do, because we have no vocations.... We have closed three houses...”. This is a daily complaint; you have heard it, heard by the ears and felt in the heart. Vocations do not come. And when this patience is not there.... What I am saying now has happened, is happening: I know of at least two cases, in a country that is too secularized, which concerned two congregations and two respective Provinces. The Province began that journey which is also a worldly journey, of the “*ars bene moriendi*”, the notion of dying well. What does this mean in that Province, in those two Provinces of two different congregations? Closing the Noviate to applicants, while here we are growing old and dying. And the congregation in that place is finished. And these are not fairy tales: I am speaking of two male Provinces that have taken this decision; Provinces of two religious congregations. Without patience we end up with the “*ars bene moriendi*”. Patience is gone and vocations are not coming? Let us sell and hold onto the money for whatever may happen in the future. This is a signal, a signal that one is close to death: when a Congregation begins to cling to money. It lacks patience and falls prey to the second “*P*”, in the absence of a sense of poverty.

I can ask myself: is what happened in those two Provinces, which opted for the “*ars bene moriendi*”, happening in my heart? Have I lost my patience and I go on merely surviving? Without patience one cannot be magnanimous; one cannot follow the Lord: we grow tired. We follow him to a certain point and at the first or second trial, say goodbye. I choose the “*ars bene moriendi*”; my consecrated life has reached this point; here I close my heart and survive. It is in a state of grace, yes, certainly. “Father, will I not go to hell?”. No, perhaps you will not. But what about your life? Did you give up the possibility to be a father or mother of a family, to have the joy of children, grandchildren, all this, to end up like this? This “*ars bene moriendi*” is the spiritual euthanasia of a consecrated heart that cannot go on, does not have the courage to follow the Lord; and does not call for help....

As my point of departure I chose to speak about the scarcity of vocations: this grieves the soul. “I have no descendants” was the lament of our father Abraham: “Lord, my riches will be inherited by a stranger”. The Lord said to him: “Be patient. You shall have an heir” — “But at age 90?”, and his wife behind the window was as — I beg your pardon — as women do: she was spying from the window — but this is a quality of women, this is ok, it is not bad —; she smiled, because she was

thinking: “But I am 90 years old. And my husband, nearly 100, we shall have a child?”. “Patience”, the Lord said. Hope. Go onward, onward, onward.

Be mindful of these three “*Ps*”: *prayer, poverty and patience*. Be mindful. I think the Lord will be pleased by choices — I will use the word that I do not like — choices that are *radical* in this sense. Be they personal, be they of the community. But you can bet on this.

I thank you for the patience you have had in listening to this sermon [*they laugh, applaud*]. I thank you. And I wish you fruitfulness. One never knows the ways through which fruitfulness passes, but if you pray, if you are poor, if you are patient, you are sure to be fruitful. How? the Lord will show you “on the other side”; but it is the recipe for bearing fruit. You will be fathers; you will be mothers: fruitfulness. That is what I hope for your religious life, that you may bear fruit.

Thank you! Continue to study, to work, to offer good proposals, but may they always be with the gaze that Jesus wants. And when you think of the first “*P*”, think of me and pray for me. Thank you!

Now let us pray to Our Lady:

“Hail Mary...”.

[*Blessing*]

Have a good day!