



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PILGRIMAGE OF THE VOCATIONIST FAMILY

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Monday, 22 May 2023*

[Multimedia]

Brothers and Sisters, Good morning and welcome!

I thank you for your visit and I am pleased to welcome you one year since the canonisation of Saint Justin (Giustino) Maria Russolillo, apostle of vocations and founder of your Vocationist Family.

In addition to gratefully remembering God's gifts and the path completed, for us, celebrating an anniversary such as this also means asking ourselves what light we can receive for the present and which legacy of Saint Justin's witness we are called to embrace for the future. In other words, what message he leaves us in order to renew our following of the Lord. Each of us should ask ourselves this question interiorly, examine ourselves.

Your call is to offer a "service to all vocations" (S. Russolillo, *Lo Spirito e il Carisma di Don Giustino, Centro studi vocazionisti*, 60). This charism flows from the desire of the young Justin, who, while still a seminarian, felt in his heart the strong impulse to care for vocations, in particular those to the ordained priesthood and to consecrated life. And today too, there is much need for this: to care for vocations. And I ask you, please: take care of vocations: sowing, preparing them, making them grow, accompanying them.

And how is this done? Looking to Saint Justin, I would like to point out three paths to you: prayer, proclamation, mission.

First of all, prayer. Each of you answer this question interiorly — not out loud, but within your heart: Do I pray for vocations? Or do I merely say an Our Father or a Hail Mary a little hurriedly? Do I offer intense prayer for vocations? Prayer is the root of all our activities and of every apostolate. Of prime importance are not our works, our structures or our organisations, but prayer. It is paramount. And this is why the first question is: Do I pray for vocations? Because when we enter into the spirit of contemplation and adoration, the Lord transforms us, and we can be a reflection of the love of the Father for those we meet along the way. [We can] be new people, radiant, welcoming, joyful. When we become this way, we offer a service first to vocations, because those we meet, especially young people, are attracted by our way of being and by the life choice we have made. They can glimpse God's light reflected in our faces, his tenderness and his love in our gestures, his joy in the hearts of men and women who have given themselves entirely to him. Vocations, especially those of special consecration, are often born this way, in contact with some priest or religious sister who shows beautiful humanity, peace of heart, invincible joy, a loving and welcoming feature. And it is prayer which makes us become this way. Let us not neglect it! Praying intensely for vocations.

In your apostolate, then, you must not forget the importance of proclamation. Proclaiming the Lord. Saint Justin spoke of the “duty of daily preaching and of perpetual research and formation of vocations” (Rules and Constitutions, I, 75, art. 802), recommending especially the teaching of catechism. It is a guideline that retains its importance and makes your charism timely. In fact, in the present cultural context, while the sense of God's presence is disappearing and faith fades, it can happen that people, especially young people, are unable to understand the meaning and direction of their lives, and perhaps they settle with living day to day, or they make plans without asking themselves what their path is, what dream the Lord has for them. Then one can see the need to return to evangelisation: to proclaim the Word, to communicate the contents of the faith in a simple and passionate way, and to accompany people in discernment. There is a need for this in the Church: for the energy of our apostolate to be directed above all at encounter and listening, so as to accompany in discernment. This is what I recommend to you: to reach everyone with the joy of the Gospel, to help people with spiritual discernment, to spend yourselves in evangelisation!

Lastly, I remind you to always nurture and renew the missionary spirit. The Vocationist, Saint Justin says, is an apostle, a missionary, a witness of the Gospel, and “the whole Vocationist Congregation must be eminently missionary” (Rules and Constitutions, I, 89, art. 971). It is a matter of circulating, in the life of the Church but also in the various sectors of society in which you work, everything that is useful to communicating the joy of the Gospel; to dialoguing with young people; to manifesting closeness to families; to making human activities fruitful, especially those carried out in the field of education. This is a mission for which the service of many lay people who share Saint Justin's charism is necessary and precious. But I add something else: Justin recommended that every Vocationist community become “a monastery for the religious, a home for clergy, a cenacle for vocations, an office for the people, a dispensary of light and consolation, the heart of the parish”. (Opera, I, p. 363). The mission is carried forward also in this way: by

becoming capable of welcoming, listening and closeness.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that you will always be an open space to welcome people and care for vocations; a place of prayer and discernment for those who seek; a place of comfort for those who are wounded; a “workshop of the Spirit” where those who enter can experience being shaped by the divine craftsman who is the Holy Spirit. And do not be discouraged in struggles and difficulties: the Lord is close to you, and Saint Justin intercedes for you! Carry on with courage. I give you my heartfelt blessing, and, please, pray for me.

Thank you!

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