



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO SUPERIORS GENERAL OF THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES  
OF APOSTOLIC LIFE**

*Paul VI Hall  
Monday, 22 May 2006*

*Your Eminence,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

It is a great joy for me to meet with you, Superiors General, representatives and those responsible for Consecrated Life. I address my cordial greeting to all.

With fraternal affection I greet in particular Cardinal Franc Rodé, and I thank him for interpreting - together with your other representatives - your sentiments. I greet the Secretary and Collaborators of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, grateful for the service that this Dicastery offers to the Church in the important sector of Consecrated Life.

In this moment, my thought goes with lively gratitude to all of the men and women religious, consecrated persons and members of the Societies of Apostolic Life who spread in the Church and the world the *bonus odor Christi* (cf. II Cor 2: 15).

I ask that you, Major Superiors, transmit a word of special kindness to those who are in difficulty, the elderly and sick, to those who are living moments of crisis and solitude, to those who suffer and feel lost, and also to the young men and women who still today are knocking at the door of your Houses, asking to be able to give themselves to Jesus Christ in the radicalness of the Gospel.

I wish that this moment of meeting and of profound communion with the Pope may be for each of you one of encouragement and comfort in the fulfilment of a duty that is evermore demanding and

at times opposed.

*The service of authority* demands a persevering presence, able to enliven and take initiative, to recall the *raison d'être* of consecrated life, to help the persons entrusted to you to correspond with ever-renewed fidelity to the call of the Spirit.

Your duty is often accompanied by the Cross and sometimes by a solitude that requires a profound sense of responsibility, a generosity that does not falter, and continual self-denial. You are called to sustain and to guide your brothers and sisters in a difficult epoch, one marked by numerous temptations.

Consecrated men and women of today have the duty to be witnesses of the transfiguring presence of God in a world that is evermore disoriented and confused, a world where toning down has substituted sharp and distinctive colours.

The ability to look at our time with the gaze of faith means to be able to look at men and women, the world and history in the light of the Crucified and Risen Christ, the only One able to direct "men and women as they strive to make their way amid the pressures of an immanentist habit of mind and the constrictions of a technocratic logic" (Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, n. 15).

In these last years, consecrated life has been re-examined with a more evangelical, ecclesial and apostolic spirit; but we cannot ignore that some concrete choices have not offered to the world the authentic and vivifying face of Christ.

In fact, the secularized culture has penetrated the mind and heart of not a few consecrated persons, who understand it as a way to enter modernity and a modality of approach to the contemporary world.

As a result, in addition to an undoubted thrust of generosity capable of witness and of total giving, consecrated life today knows the temptation of mediocrity, of middle-class ways and of a consumeristic mentality.

In the Gospel, Jesus warned us that *there are two ways*: one is the narrow way that leads to life, the other is wide that leads to destruction (cf. Mt 7: 13-14). The true alternative is, and will always be, the acceptance of the living God through obedient, faithful service, or the rejection of him.

One priority condition to the following of Christ, therefore, is abnegation, detachment from all that is not him. The Lord wants men and women who are free, not bound, able to give up everything to follow him and to find in him alone their very all.

Courageous choices must be made, both at the personal and communal levels, which give a new

discipline to the life of consecrated persons and bring them to rediscover the all-encompassing dimension of the *sequela Christi*.

*Belonging to the Lord* means to be on fire with his incandescent love, to be transformed into the splendour of his beauty: our littleness is offered to him as a sacrifice of sweet fragrance so that it becomes a witness of the greatness of his presence for our epoch, which has great need to be inebriated by the richness of his grace.

Belonging to the Lord: this is the mission of the men and women who have chosen to follow Christ - chaste, poor and obedient - so that the world may believe and be saved. To belong completely to Christ so as to become a permanent confession of faith, an unequivocal proclamation of truth that frees us from the seduction of the false idols that deceive the world.

To belong to Christ means to keep the flame of love always burning in our heart, continually fed by the richness of faith, not only when this brings with it interior joy but also when it is joined to difficulty, aridity and suffering. Prayer is the nourishment for the interior life, intimate conversation of the consecrated soul with the divine Spouse.

Even richer nourishment is daily participation in the ineffable mystery of the divine Eucharist, where the Risen Christ makes himself continually present in his corporeal reality.

To belong completely to the Lord, consecrated persons embrace a chaste lifestyle. Consecrated virginity cannot be inscribed in the framework of worldly logic; it is the most "nonsensical" of Christian paradoxes and it is not given to all to understand and to live it (cf. Mt 19: 11-12).

To live a chaste life also means to give up the need to belong, to take on a lifestyle that is sober and modest. Men and women religious are called to show this also in the choice of habit, a simple habit that is a sign of poverty lived in union with the One who, rich as he was, became poor to make us rich with his poverty (cf. II Cor 8: 9).

In this way, and only in this way, can one follow Christ crucified and poor without reserve, immersing oneself in his mystery and making his choices of humility, poverty and meekness one's own.

The theme of the last Plenary Meeting of the Congregation for Institutes of Religious Life and Societies of Apostolic Life was *The service of authority*. Dear Superiors General, it is an occasion to deepen reflection on the exercise of authority and obedience so that it will be evermore inspired by the Gospel.

The burden of one who is called to accomplish the delicate task of Superior at all levels will be much easier the more consecrated persons know how to rediscover the value of professed

obedience - which has Abraham, our father in the faith, as its model - and even more so that of Christ. It is necessary to take refuge from voluntarism and spontaneity to embrace the logic of the Cross.

In conclusion, consecrated men and women are called to be credible and luminous signs of the Gospel and its paradoxes in the world without conforming to the mentality of this world, but to continually transform and renew one's own duty, to be able to discern God's will, what is good, acceptable and perfect to him (cf. Rom 12: 2).

This is precisely my wish, dear brothers and sisters; it is a wish upon which I invoke the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, unsurpassable model of every consecrated life.

With these sentiments, I affectionately impart the Apostolic Blessing, willingly extending it to all who belong to your numerous spiritual Families.

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