



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SUPERIORS GENERAL

Clementine Hall

Friday, 26 November 2010

Dearest Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the bi-annual Assembly of the Union of Superiors General which you are celebrating, in continuity with the meeting last May, on the theme of the consecrated life in Europe.

I greet the President, Fr Pascual Chávez, whom I thank for his words, as well as the Executive Council; a special greeting goes to the Directive Committee of the International Union of Superiors General and to the numerous Superiors General. I extend my thoughts to all your brothers and sisters scattered across the world and especially to those who are suffering for their witness to the Gospel.

I would like to express my deep thanks for all you do in and with the Church on behalf of evangelization and of the human being. I am thinking of the many pastoral activities in the parishes, shrines and centres of worship, of catechesis and of the Christian formation of children, young people and adults, in which you show your passion for Christ and for humanity.

I am thinking of your important work in the field of education, in the universities and schools, of the many social institutions through which you meet the needs of the most deprived brethren with God's own love. I am thinking also of the witness, at times full of risk, of evangelical life in the mission *ad gentes*, in circumstances that are often difficult.

Your last two Assemblies were dedicated to reflecting on the future of the consecrated life in Europe. This has meant rethinking the very meaning of your vocation which entails, first and foremost, seeking God, *Quaerere Deum*: you are seekers of God by vocation. You devote the best

energies of your lives to this research. You move from what is secondary to what is really essential to what is really important: seeking God, keeping your gaze fixed on him. Like the first monks, cultivate an eschatological orientation: behind the provisional seek what remains, what does not pass away (cf. *Address at the Collège des Bernardins*, Paris, 12 September 2008).

Seek God in the confreres or sisters he has given you, with whom you share the same life and mission. Seek him in the men and women of our time, to whom you are sent to offer the gift of the Gospel with your life and your words. Seek him particularly in the poor, the first to whom the Good News is addressed (cf. Lk 4:18). Seek him in the Church, where the Lord makes himself present, especially in the Eucharist and in the other sacraments, and in his word, which is the main road for seeking God. It introduces us into conversation with him and reveals to us his true Face. May you always be enthusiastic seekers and witnesses of God!

The profound renewal of the consecrated life starts from the centrality of the word of God, and more practically, from the Gospel, the supreme rule for all of you, as the Second Vatican Council states in the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (cf. n. 2) and as your Founders understood well: the consecrated life is a plant with a mass of branches whose roots are sunk in the Gospel. The history of your Institutes in which the determination to live Christ's Message and to configure your own life to it, was and remains the fundamental criterion of vocational discernment and of your personal and community discernment. The Gospel lived daily provides the element that gives fascination and beauty to the consecrated life and presents you to the world as a reliable alternative. Contemporary society stands in need of this, and the Church expects this of you: to be a living Gospel.

Another fundamental aspect of the consecrated life that I would like to emphasize is brotherhood: *Confessio Trinitatis* (cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 41) and model of Church communion. Indeed, the witness of your consecration passes through it. Fraternal life is one of the main aspects that young people seek when they approach your life; it is an important prophetic element that you offer in a strongly individualistic society.

I know the efforts you are making in this area, as I also know the difficulties that community life entails. There is a need for serious and constant discernment to listen to what the Spirit says to the communities (cf. Rev 2:7), to distinguish what comes from the Lord from what is contrary to him (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, n. 73).

Without discernment, accompanied by prayer and reflection, the consecrated life runs the risk of adapting to the criteria of this world: individualism, consumerism, materialism; criteria that cause fraternity to fade and the consecrated life itself to lose its fascination and pungency. Be masters of discernment so that your confreres and your sisters may adopt this *habitus* and your communities become an eloquent sign for the world today.

May you who exercise the service of authority and have duties of guidance and of planning the future of your Religious Institutes, remember that an important part of spiritual animation and governance is the common search for the means to foster communion, mutual communication, warmth and truth in reciprocal relations.

A last point that I would like to highlight is the mission. The mission is the Church's way of being and, within her, of the consecrated life. It is part of your identity; it spurs you to take the Gospel to everyone without boundaries. The mission sustained by a strong experience of God, by a robust formation and by fraternal life in community, is a key to understanding and revitalizing the consecrated life. Go, then, and in creative fidelity make your own the challenge of the new evangelization. Renew your presence in today's areopagi to proclaim, as St Paul did in Athens, the "unknown" God (*cf. Discourse at the Collège des Bernardins*).

Dear Superiors General, at present many Institutes are faced with dwindling numbers, particularly in Europe. The difficulties, however, must not make us forget that the origin of the consecrated life is in the Lord: it was desired by him for the edification and holiness of his Church, and therefore the Church herself will never be deprived of it. While I encourage you to walk in faith and hope, I ask of you a renewed commitment to the pastoral care of vocations and to initial and continuing formation.

I entrust you to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to your Holy Founders and Patrons, as I warmly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to your religious Families.

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