



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS OF THE CAMILLIAN CHARISMATIC FAMILY

Clementine Hall

Monday, 18 March 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Sisters and dear Brothers,

It is with joy that I welcome all of you, representatives of the various expressions of the *Camillian Family*! I greet you with affection and I thank Fr Pessini for his words. And I ask the Lord to preserve his sense of humour: you will never have a gastric ulcer! You are constantly engaged in giving lovingly and generously to the sick, carrying out a valuable mission, in the Church and in society, at the side of the suffering. When illness disturbs and at times overturns our lives, we then feel the strong need to have a compassionate and also competent brother or sister beside us, who consoles us, supports us and helps us to recover the precious benefit of health, or who accompanies us to the threshold of our final meeting with the Lord!

The entire Church as a whole has received from her Master and Lord the mandate to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick (cf. Lk 9:2), in imitation of him, the Good Shepherd, the Good Samaritan, who passed through this earth “benefiting and healing all those who were prisoners of evil” (*Common Preface* viii). But God bestowed upon Saint Camillus de Lellis in particular, and upon all those who follow his example, the gift of reviving and witnessing to Christ’s merciful love for the sick. The Church has recognized it as an authentic charism of the Spirit. You live it in an exemplary way, expressing it in life along the twofold path of directly assisting the sick, especially the poorest, in their bodily and spiritual needs, and of teaching others the best way to serve them, for the benefit of the Church and of humanity.

All charisms “are gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us ... Gifts given not to be hidden but to be shared with others. They are not given for the benefit of the one who receives them, but for the use of the People of God. If a charism ... serves instead as self-affirmation, then it is doubtful that we are dealing with an authentic charism or one faithfully lived out. The charisms are special graces,

given to some for the good of many others” ([Catechesis, 6 November 2013](#)). They always have a transitive nature: they are orientated towards others. Over the years, you have made efforts to embody your charism faithfully, expressing it in a multitude of apostolic works and in pastoral service to the benefit of suffering humanity throughout the world.

In line with this mission, which some members of your religious families have lived heroically by becoming models of holiness, you are called to continue your service in a prophetic way. It is a matter of looking to the future, open to new forms of apostolate which the Spirit inspires in you and which the signs of the times and the needs of the world and of the Church require. The great gift you have received is still current and necessary also for this age of ours, because it is founded on love that will never end (cf. 1 Cor 13:8). As a living part of the Church, sent to spread the Gospel so that people “may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10), you have the wonderful opportunity to do so precisely through the gestures of caring for life and for integral *salus*, so necessary in our time too.

From the charism initially inspired in Saint Camillus, various ecclesial bodies have gradually been constituted, which today form a single constellation, that is, a “charismatic family” composed of men and women religious, secular consecrated persons and lay faithful. None of these realities is the sole depository or single holder of the charism, but each one receives it as a gift and interprets it and updates it according to its specific vocation, in the various historical and geographical contexts. The original charism remains at the centre, as a perennial source of light and inspiration, which is understood and embodied dynamically in the various forms. Each one of them is offered to the others in a reciprocal exchange of gifts that enriches everyone, for the common benefit and in view of the implementation of the same mission. What is it? To witness in every time and place to Christ’s merciful love for the sick.

Saint Camillus de Lellis, whom you all recognize as “Father”, lived in an age in which the possibility of active consecrated life for women had not yet matured, but only that of the contemplative and monastic type. He therefore constituted an Order of men only. However, he had clearly understood that care of the infirm also had to be practised with attitudes that are typical of the female soul, such that he asked his religious to serve the sick “with that affection that a loving mother usually has for her only sick child” (cf. *Rules of the Company of the Servants of the Sick*, 1584, xxvii). The two women’s Congregations established in the 19th century and the secular Institutes born in the last century have given completeness to the expression of the charism of mercy toward the sick, enriching it with the distinctly feminine qualities of love and care. In this, the Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick and Mother of the consecrated, accompanies you and guides you. From her we learn how to be close to those who are suffering, with the tenderness and devotion of a mother. I would like to pause a moment on this word “tenderness”. It is a word that today risks being removed from the dictionary! We must reclaim it and put it into practice once more. Christianity without tenderness does not work. Tenderness is a truly Christian attitude; it is also the “marrow” of our encounter with people who are suffering.

Dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you to always cultivate communion among yourselves, in that *synodal style* that I have proposed to the entire Church, listening to one another, and all women and men listening to the Holy Spirit, so as to value the contribution that each individual offers to the one Family, thus to express more fully the multiple potentialities that the charism encompasses. Be ever aware that “it is in communion, even when this proves painful, that a charism is seen to be authentic and mysteriously fruitful” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 130). In fidelity to the initial inspiration of the Founder and the Foundresses, and in listening to the many forms of suffering and poverty of humanity today, you will know how to make the gift you received shine with an ever new light; and many young men and women throughout the world will be able to feel attracted by it and to join you, so as to continue bearing witness to God’s tenderness.

Dear brothers and sisters, I ask the Holy Spirit to support this new phase of your journey as the *Camillian Charismatic Family*. I wholeheartedly bless all of you, your communities and the people you serve. And please, continue to pray for me too. Thank you.