



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTERS OF THE SOCIETY OF AFRICAN
MISSIONS,
OF THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR OF ST FRANCIS,
OF THE FORMATORS OF THE SERVANTS OF THE PARACLETE**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 6 June 2025*

[[Multimedia](#)]

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Peace be with you!

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet the General Superiors present, especially those recently elected, together with the members of their governing bodies, and all of you who belong to the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis – who is the new General? Was he already elected? Ah, not yet, all right – the Society of African Missions and the Congregation of the Servants of the Paraclete.

Many of you are attending this meeting as part of your General Chapters, which are important moments for your life and for the life of the entire Church. Let us pray first of all to the Lord for your Institutes and for all consecrated persons, that “seeking God, and God alone, before all else, they may join contemplation, by which they cleave to God by mind and heart, to apostolic love, by which they endeavour to be identified with the work of redemption” ([Perfectae Caritatis](#), 5).

You represent three charismatic realities that emerged at different times in the Church’s history and in response to various specific needs. Yet you are united with and complementary to each other, within the harmonious beauty of the mystical body of Christ (cf. [Lumen Gentium](#), 7).

The oldest foundation present is that of the *Third Order Regular of Saint Francis*, which dates back to the saint of Assisi himself, although it was later elevated to an Order by Pope Nicholas V (cf. Bull *Pastoralis Officii*, 20 July 1447). The themes you are addressing in the 113th General Chapter — community life, formation and vocations — in some way concern all God’s great family. However, as the title you have given to your work indicates, it is important that you address them in the light of your “penitential” charism. This reminds us that, in the words of Saint Francis himself, only through a constant journey of conversion can we offer our brothers and sisters “the fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*First Letter to the Faithful*, 19).

The *Society of African Missions* is more recent, founded on 8 December 1856 by Venerable Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac, and is a sign of that missionary spirit which is at the very heart of the Church’s life (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 273). Dear brothers, the history of your Institute bears witness to this. Fidelity to your mission, by which your communities have over time surmounted countless difficulties from within and without, has enabled you to grow and even draw from adversity the inspiration to set out for new apostolic horizons in Africa and other parts of the world. Your Founder’s advice in this regard remains ever timely: in your proclamation, be faithful to the simplicity of the apostolic preaching, and be always ready to embrace the “folly of the Cross” (cf. 1 *Cor* 1:17-25) with sincerity and peace, even in the face of the world’s incomprehension and derision. Be free of all conditioning as men “filled” with Christ, and thus capable of bringing your brothers and sisters to an encounter with him, since you are motivated by a sole aspiration: to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world (cf. *Phil* 1:12-14, 21). What a great sign for the entire Church and the world!

We now come to the most recent Institute: the *Servants of the Paraclete*. You are Servants of that Spirit who dwells within us (cf. *Rom* 8:9) by the gift of Baptism and who heals “*quod est saucium*” — whatever is wounded — as we will sing in a few days’ time in the Pentecost Sequence. Servants of the Spirit of healing: that is what Father Gerald Fitzgerald wanted you to be when in 1942 he began your work of caring for troubled priests, “*Pro Christo sacerdote*,” to use the words of your motto (cf. *Constitutions*, 4.4). Since then, in various parts of the world, you have carried out your ministry of humble, patient, delicate and discreet closeness to the deeply wounded, offering them therapeutic paths combining a simple and intense spiritual life — both personal and communal — with highly qualified professional assistance suited to their needs. Your presence also reminds us of something important: although all of us are called to be ministers of Christ, the physician of souls, for our brothers and sisters (cf. *Lk* 5:31-32), we are ourselves frail and in need of healing. As Saint Augustine said, using the image of a ship, all of us “have in this life some cracks in our frail mortality, through which sin trickles in from the waves of this world” (*Serm.* 278, 13). And the sainted Bishop of Hippo proposes a remedy for evil: “Lest we sink,” he says, “let hold us fast to this exhortation... Let us forgive” (*ibid.*). Yes, let us forgive, so that everywhere, “in our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone [may] find an oasis of mercy” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 12).

Dear friends, thank you for your visit in this hall today, which manifests three luminous dimensions of the Church's beauty: commitment to conversion, enthusiasm for mission and the warmth of mercy. Thank you for all the work you do throughout the world. I bless you and during this novena of Pentecost, I pray that you may be ever more docile instruments of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with God's plans. Thank you!