



## The Holy See

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*Dearest sisters and brothers,*

Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori teaches us that to pray for the dead is the greatest work of charity. When we materially help our neighbours, we share ephemeral goods, but when we pray for them, we do so with eternal goods. The Holy Curé of Ars, universal patron of priests, lived in a similar way.

To pray for the dead, then, means to love those who are dead, and it is what we do now for Pope Francis, gathered together as the People of God, together with the pastors and in a particular way this evening, with a major presence of consecrated women and men.

The Holy Father Francis felt very well loved by the People of God, and knew that those belonging to the various expressions of consecrated life also loved him; they prayed for his ministry, for the person of the Pope, for the Church, for the world.

On this third Sunday of Easter, everything invites us to rejoice, to exult. The reason is the Risen Lord and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Saint Athanasius states that the Risen Jesus Christ makes man's life a continuous feast. And this is why the Apostles - and Peter first among them - are not afraid of imprisonment, nor of threats, nor of being persecuted again. And, indeed, they boldly and frankly declare: "we are witnesses of these things, as is the Holy Spirit that God has given to those who obey him".

I wonder – Pope Francis said, in one of his catecheses on this same passage – where the first disciples found the strength for this witness. Not only this, but where did the joy and courage of the proclamation come to them despite the obstacles and violence?

It is clear that only the presence, with them, of the Risen Lord and the action of the Holy Spirit can explain this fact. Their faith was based on such a strong and personal experience of Christ, who died and rose again, that they were afraid of nothing and no-one. "Men and women of this generation have a great need to meet the Lord and his liberating message of salvation", said [Saint John Paul II](#), on the occasion of the [Jubilee of Consecrated Life](#) on 2 February 2000, addressing men and women religious all over the world, adding, "I have been able to appreciate the prophetic

value of your presence for all Christian people... I am also pleased to note the example of generous Gospel dedication offered by your countless brothers and sisters, who often work in difficult situations. In Christ's name they devote themselves unreservedly to serving the poor, the outcast and the lowly".

Brothers and sisters, it is true that all of us, all this assembly, as baptized persons, are called to be witnesses to the Lord Jesus, who died and rose again. But it is equally true that we, consecrated men and women, have received this vocation, this call to discipleship which requires us to bear witness to the primacy of God with our entire life. This mission is particularly important when, as is the case today in many parts of the world, the absence of God is experienced, or his centrality is too easily forgotten. So let us take on and make our own the programme of Saint Benedict the Abbot, summarized by the maxim "put nothing before the love of Christ".

It was the Holy Father Benedict XVI who challenged us in this way: within the People of God, consecrated persons were like sentinels who discern and announce the new life already present in our history.

We are called, by virtue of our Baptism and our religious profession, to bear witness that God alone gives the fullness of human existence and that, as a consequence, our life must be an eloquent sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God for the world today.

We are therefore called to be, in the world, a credible and shining sign of the Gospel and its paradoxes. Without conforming to the mentality of this century, but transforming ourselves and continually renewing our commitment.

In the Gospel we heard that the Risen Lord awaited his disciples by the shore. The account says that when everything seemed to be finished and failed, the Lord made himself present, he went to meet his own, who – filled with joy – were able to exclaim through the mouth of the disciple Jesus loved: "It is the Lord". In this expression we grasp the enthusiasm of Easter faith, full of joy and amazement, which contrasts sharply with the bewilderment, the discouragement, the sense of powerlessness hitherto present in the disciples' souls.

It is only the presence of the Risen Jesus that transforms all things: darkness is defeated by light, pointless work becomes once again fruitful and promising; the sense of weariness and abandonment makes way for new zeal and the certainty that he is with us.

What happened to the first, privileged witnesses of the Lord can and must become a plan of life for us all.

Pope Francis said, during the Year of Consecrated Life, "I am counting on you to 'wake up the world', since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy". And he asked us to be witnesses

of the Lord like Peter and the Apostles, even in the face of the incomprehension of the Sanhedrin of yesteryear or the godless areopagus of today. He asked us to be like the watchman who keeps vigil during the night and knows when the dawn comes. He was asking us to have a heart and a spirit pure and free enough to recognize the women and men of today, our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest, the lowly, the outcast, because in them is the Lord, and so that with our passion for God, for the Kingdom and for humanity, we will be able, like Peter, to respond to the Lord: “Lord, you know everything! You know that I love you”.

May Mary, Mother of the Church, grant to all of us the grace to be missionary disciples today, witnesses of her Son in this, his Church, that – under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – lives in hope, because the Risen Lord is with us until the end of time. Amen.

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