



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE COMMUNITY
OF THE PONTIFICAL ECCLESIASTICAL ACADEMY**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 6 June 2013*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate
Dear Priests,
Dear Sisters,
Friends,*

I address to you all my most cordial welcome! I cordially greet your President, Archbishop Beniamino Stella, and I thank him for the kind words he has addressed to me on your behalf, recalling my pleasant visits to your house in the past. I also remember the warm insistence with which, more than two years ago, Archbishop Stella convinced me to send to the [Academy](#) a priest of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires! Archbishop Stella knows how to knock at doors! I also address a grateful thought to his co-workers, to the Sisters and to the personnel who offer their generous service in your community.

Dear friends, you are training for a particularly demanding ministry in which you will serve directly the Successor of Peter, his charism of unity and communion, and his solicitude for all the Churches. Working in the Papal Representations is moreover a labour which — like every kind of priestly ministry, demands great inner freedom, great inner freedom. Live these years of your training with hard work, generosity and a great heart so that this freedom may really be shaped within you.

But what does having inner freedom mean?

First of all it means being free from personal projects, being free from personal projects. Free from some of the tangible ways in which, perhaps, you may once have conceived of living your priesthood; from the possibility of planning your future; from the prospect of staying for any length of time in a place of “your own” pastoral action. It means, in a certain way, making yourself free also with regard to the culture and mindset from which you come. This is not in order to forget it or even less to deny it, but rather to open yourselves in the charity of understanding different cultures and meeting people who belong to worlds far distant from your own.

Above all it means being alert to ensure you keep free of the ambitions or personal aims that can cause the Church great harm. You must be careful not to make either your own fulfilment or the recognition you might receive both inside and outside the ecclesial community a constant priority. Rather, your priority should be the loftier good of the Gospel cause and the accomplishment of the mission that will be entrusted to you. And I think this being free from ambitions or personal goals is important, it is important. Careerism is a form of leprosy, a leprosy. No careerism, please.

For this reason you must be prepared to integrate all your own views of the Church — however legitimate they may be — and every personal idea or opinion into the horizon of Peter’s gaze. You must integrate them into his specific mission at the service of the communion and unity of Christ’s flock, of his pastoral charity that embraces the whole world and wishes to be present, partly through the action of the papal representations, especially in those all too often forsaken places where the needs of the Church and of humanity are greater.

In a word, the ministry for which you are preparing yourselves — because you are preparing yourselves for a ministry! Not a profession, a ministry — this ministry asks you to leave yourself, to be detached from yourself. It is possible to achieve this only through an intense spiritual journey and a serious unification of life round the mystery of God’s love and the inscrutable plan of his call.

In the light of faith we can experience freedom from our own plans and from our will: not as a cause of frustration or emptying but, rather, as openness to God’s superabundant gift that makes our priesthood fertile. Living the ministry at the service of the Successor of Peter and of the Churches to which you will be sent might seem demanding, but it will enable you, so to speak, to be and to breathe in the heart of the Church and of her catholicity. Moreover this is a special gift since, as [Pope Benedict XVI](#) himself reminded your community, “wherever there is openness to the objectivity of catholicity, there is also the principle of authentic personalization” ([Address to the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy](#), 10 June 2011).

Take great care of your spiritual life which is the source of inner freedom. Without prayer inner freedom does not exist. You will be able to treasure the means of conformation to Christ that is proper to priestly spirituality by cultivating the life of prayer and by making your daily work the training-ground for your sanctification. I am pleased to recall here the figure of [Blessed John XXIII](#), the anniversary of whose death we celebrated a few days ago. His service as papal representative

was one of the areas — and by no means the least significant — in which his holiness was formed. In rereading his writings, his constant painstaking care of his soul in the midst of the most varied occupations in the ecclesial and political areas is striking. This gave rise to his interior freedom, the exterior joy he communicated and the effectiveness of his pastoral and diplomatic action.

So it was that he noted in his *Journal of a Soul* during the Spiritual Exercises of 1948: “the older I become, the more experience I gain, the better I recognize that the most reliable way to my personal sanctification and the best outcome of my service to the Holy See remains the vigilant effort to reduce everything, principles, addresses, positions, business, to the greatest possible simplicity and calmness; with attention always to prune from my vine all that is only useless foliage... and to go straight to what is truth, justice, charity, especially charity. Every other system of behaving is solely posturing and the search for personal affirmation which is soon betrayed and becomes cumbersome and ridiculous” (Edizioni di San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo 2000, p. 497). He wanted to prune his vine, to be rid of the foliage, to prune it.

A few years later, after concluding his long service as a papal representative and being appointed Patriarch of Venice, he wrote: “I now find myself in the midst of the ministry for souls. Actually I have always held that for clerics the so-called ‘diplomacy!’ must always be imbued with a pastoral spirit; otherwise it counts for nothing, and makes a holy mission ridiculous (*ibid.*, pp. 513-514).

This is important. Listen well: when in a Nunciature there is a secretary or a nuncio who does not take the path of holiness and lets himself be involved in the many forms and manners of spiritual worldliness, he makes himself ridiculous and everyone laughs at him. Please do not make yourselves a laughing stock, be holy or return to your diocese to be a parish priest; but do not be ridiculous in diplomatic life, where there are so many perils in the spiritual life of a priest.

I would like also to say a word to the Sisters — thank you! — who carry out their daily service in a religious and Franciscan spirit. They are the good Mothers who accompany you with their prayers, with their simple and essential words and especially with the example of their faithfulness, devotion and love. With them I would like to thank the lay staff who work in the house. Theirs is a hidden but important presence that enables you to live your time in the Academy with tranquillity and hard work.

Dear priests, I hope you will undertake your service to the Holy See in the same spirit as that of Blessed John XXIII. I ask you to pray for me and I entrust you to the care of the Virgin Mary and of St Anthony Abbot, your patron. May you be accompanied by the assurance of my remembrance and my blessing, which I warmly extend to all your loved ones. Many thanks.

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