



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY OF THE CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF
CONSECRATED LIFE
AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 27 November 2014*

[Multimedia]

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

It is with great joy today that I meet with you and with those who serve in the Dicastery for Consecrated Life. In particular, I welcome the Cardinals and Bishops who have recently become Members, and I thank the Cardinal Prefect for the greeting he addressed to me on everyone's behalf; and I thank the Secretary and the two Undersecretaries for this "logo", which I saw yesterday in *L'Osservatore Romano* but did not quite understand what it was; now I understand!

I find the title you selected for this session, "New wine in new wineskins", beautiful and meaningful. In the light of this Gospel phrase you have reflected on consecrated life in the present-day Church, 50 years after the Constitution *[Lumen Gentium](#)* and the Decree *[Perfectae Caritatis](#)*. Following the Second Vatican Council, the wind of the Spirit has continued to blow with force, on the one hand pushing the Institutes to implement the spiritual, charismatic and institutional renewal that the said Council asked for, and on the other raising in the heart of men and women new ways to respond to Jesus' invitation to leave all in order to dedicate one's life to follow Him and to proclaim the Gospel.

In the portion of the Lord's vineyard represented by those who have chosen to more closely imitate Christ through the profession of the evangelical counsels, new grapes have ripened and new wine has been pressed. In these days you have set out to discern the quality and maturity of the "new wine" which has been produced in the long season of renewal, while evaluating whether the wineskins that hold it, represented by the institutional forms present today in consecrated life,

are suitable to hold this “new wine” and help it to fully age. As I have had the opportunity to point out at other times, we must not be afraid to discard the “old wineskins”: that is, not to renew those habits and those structures which, in the life of the Church and thus also in consecrated life, we recognize as no longer corresponding to what God asks of us today in order to help his Kingdom move forward in the world: the structures that give us false protection and that condition the vitality of charity; the habits that distance us from the flock to which we are sent and prevent us from hearing the cry of those who await the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, you do not hide the areas of weakness which are possible to observe today in consecrated life: for example, certain sectors’ resistance to change, a weaker force of attraction, the not-insignificant number of dropouts, — and this worries me! It has to do with the selection of candidates and the formation of candidates; then there is the mystery of every person, but first we must evaluate these two things properly — the weakness of certain formative paths, the desire for institutional and ministerial duties at the expense of spiritual life, the difficult integration of cultural and generational diversity, maintaining a balance when exercising authority and in the use of goods — I am also concerned about poverty! I am promoting my family, but St Ignatius said that poverty is the mother and also the wall of consecrated life. Poverty is mother because it gives life, and the wall protects from worldliness. Let us think about these weaknesses. You want to listen to the signals of the Spirit who opens new horizons and urges you on new paths, always setting forth with the supreme rule of the Gospel and inspired by the bold creativity of your Founders and Foundresses.

In the challenging task that has brought you together, in order to assess the new wine and test the quality of the wineskins that must hold it, you are led by a few guidelines: the evangelical originality of choices, charismatic faithfulness, the primacy of service, attention to the smallest and most fragile, and respect for the dignity of each person.

I encourage you to continue working with generosity and initiative in the Lord’s vineyard, to foster the growth and ripening of the thriving bunches, from which abundant wine can be extracted and can reinvigorate the life of the Church and gladden the heart of so many brothers and sisters in need of your thoughtful and motherly care. In addition, the substitution of old wineskins with new ones, as you have well indicated, does not happen automatically, but requires commitment and ability, in order to offer suitable space to welcome and make fruitful the new gifts with which the Spirit continues to embellish his bride, the Church. Do not forget to thank the Master of the vineyard who has called you to this exalted task. May you continue on the journey of renewal that you have begun and, to a great extent, accomplished in these 50 years, examining every novelty in the light of the Word of God and listening to the needs of the Church and of the contemporary world, and using all the means and wisdom that the Church has made available to advance on the journey of your personal and community holiness. And among these means, the most important is prayer, even spontaneous prayer, prayer of praise and adoration. We consecrated men and women are consecrated to serve the Lord and to serve others with the Word of the Lord, are

we not? Say to new members, please, say that praying is not a waste of time, adoring God is not a waste of time. If we consecrated people do not pause every day before God, freely in prayer, the wine will be vinegar!

The Plenary of your Congregation has assembled on the very eve of the Year of Consecrated Life! Let us pray together that the Lord help us this Year to put “new wine in new wineskins”! And therefore I especially want to thank the Congregation, the Prefect, the Secretary, for the effort they have made in organizing this Year. I sincerely thank them because during the meeting they came with plans... and I thought: I do not know if they will be able to do it.... And truly, at the other meeting, the plan had form, it had a body. Thank you so very much for the effort! I thank you for the work that you have been doing in these days, and for your service as members and collaborators of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. May the Virgin Mary accompany you and ensure that you receive a new, revived ardour and the holy courage to seek new paths. May the Holy Spirit help you and enlighten you. Thank you.