



The Holy See

EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

JUBILEE FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Paul VI Audience Hall

Monday, 1st February 2016

[Multimedia]

Extemporaneous address by the Holy Father:

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I prepared a speech for this occasion on topics regarding consecrated life and on the three pillars; there are others, but three [words] are important to consecrated life. The first is prophecy, another is proximity and the third is hope. Prophecy, proximity hope. I have given the text to the Cardinal Prefect, because reading it is a little dull, and I prefer to speak to you from my heart. Okay?

Men and women religious, that is men and women consecrated to the Lord's service, who in the Church pursue this path of arduous poverty, of a chaste love that leads to a spiritual fatherhood and motherhood for all the Church, of obedience.... There is always something lacking in our obedience, because perfect obedience is that of the Son of God, who emptied himself, who became man out of obedience, unto death on the Cross. There are men and women among you who live out an intense form of obedience, an obedience — not military, no, not that; that is discipline, another thing — an obedience of giving of the heart. This is prophecy. "Don't you wish to do something, something else?..." — "Yes, but according to the rules I must do this, this and this. And according to regulations, this, this and this. And if I don't see something clearly, I speak with the superior and, after the dialogue, I obey". This is prophecy, as opposed to the seed of anarchy, which the devil sows. "What do you do?" — "I do whatever I please". The anarchy of will is the daughter of the demon, it is not the daughter of God. The Son of God was not an anarchist, he did not call his [disciples] to mount a force of resistance against his enemies; he said to Pilate: "Were I a king of this world I would have called my soldiers to protect me". Instead, he was

obedient to the Father. He said only: "Father, please, no, not this chalice.... But Thy will be done". When out of obedience you accept something which perhaps often you do not like... [he makes a swallowing gesture]... that obedience must be swallowed, and it is done. Thus, prophecy. Prophecy is telling people that there is a path to happiness and grandeur, a path that fills you with joy, which is precisely the path to Jesus. It is the path to be close to Jesus. Prophecy is a gift, it is a charism and it must be asked of the Holy Spirit: that I may know that word, in the right moment; that I may do that thing in the right moment; that my entire life may be a prophecy. Men and women prophets. This is very important. "Let's do what everyone else does...". No. Prophecy is saying that there is something truer, more beautiful, greater, of greater good to which we are all called.

Then another word is proximity. Men and women consecrated, but not so as to distance themselves from people and have all the comforts, no, [but rather] to draw close and understand the life of Christians and of non-Christians — the suffering, the problems, the many things that are understood only if a consecrated man and woman is close: in proximity. "But Father, I am a cloistered nun, what should I do?". Think about St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, patron saint of the missions, who with her ardent heart was close, and the letters she received from missionaries made her closer to the people. Proximity. Becoming consecrated does not mean climbing one, two, three steps in society. It is true, so often we hear parents say: "You know, Father, my daughter is a nun, my son is a brother!". And they say it with pride. And it's true! There is satisfaction for parents to have consecrated children, this is true. But for consecrated people it is not a life status that makes me look at others like this [with detachment]. Consecrated life should lead me to closeness with people; physical, spiritual proximity, to know the people. "Ah yes Father, in my community the superior gave us permission to go out, to go into the poor neighbourhoods with the people..." — "And in your community, are there elderly sisters?" — "Yes, yes... there is a nurse, on the third floor" — "And how often during the day do you go to visit your sisters, the elderly ones, who could be your mother or your grandmother?" — "But you know, Father, I am very busy with work and I can't go...". Closeness! Who is the first neighbour of a consecrated man or woman? The brother or sister of the community. This is your first neighbour. A kind, good, loving closeness, too. I know that in your communities there is never gossip, never, ever.... A way of distancing oneself [is] to gossip. Listen carefully: no gossip, the terrorism of gossip. Because those who gossip are terrorists. They are terrorists in their own community, because like a bomb they drop a word against this one or that one, and then they go calmly. Those who do this destroy, like a bomb, and they distance themselves. This, the Apostle Santiago said, was perhaps the most difficult virtue, the most difficult human and spiritual virtue to have, that of bridling the tongue. If it comes to you to say something against a brother or sister, to drop a bomb of gossip, bite your tongue! Hard! No terrorism in the community! "But Father, what if there is something, a defect, something to correct?". You say it to the person: you have an attitude that bothers me, or that isn't good. If this isn't appropriate — because sometimes it isn't prudent — you say it to the person who can remedy, who can resolve the problem and to no one else. Understood? There is no use for gossip. "But in the chapter house?". There, yes! In public, what you feel you have to say; because

there is temptation not to say things in the chapter house, and then outside: “Did you see the prioress? Did you see the abbess? Did you see the mother superior?...”. Why didn’t you say it there in the chapter house?... Is this clear? These are virtues of proximity. The Saints, the consecrated Saints had this. St Thérèse of the Child Jesus never, ever complained about work, about the bother it was to bring that sister to the dining room every evening: from the choir to the dining room. Never! Because that poor nun was very old, almost paralyzed, she had difficulty walking, she was in pain — I understand her too! — she was even a bit neurotic.... Never, ever did she go to another sister to say: “How she bothers me!”. What did she do? She helped her sit down, brought her a napkin, broke the bread and did so with a smile. This is called proximity. Closeness! If you drop the bomb of gossip in your community, this is not closeness: this is waging war! This is distancing yourself, this is creating distance, creating anarchy in the community. In this Year of Mercy, if each one of you could manage to never be a gossiping terrorist, it would be a success for the Church, a success of great holiness! Take courage! Proximity

And now hope. I admit that it pains me a great deal when I see the drop in vocations, when I receive bishops and ask them: “How many seminarians do you have?” — “Four, five...”. When, in your religious communities — men’s and women’s — you have a novice or two... and the community ages, it ages.... When there are monasteries, great monasteries, and Cardinal Amigo Vallejo [turning to him] can tell us how many there are in Spain, that are carried on by four or five elderly nuns, until the end.... This leads me to the temptation to lose hope: “Lord, what is happening? Why is the womb of consecrated life becoming so barren?”. Several congregations are experimenting with “artificial insemination”. What are they doing? They accept.... “Yes, come, come, come...”. And then there are internal problems.... No. One must accept with seriousness! One must carefully discern whether this is a true vocation and help it to grow. I believe that in order to fight the temptation to lose hope, which gives us this barrenness, we have to pray more. And pray tirelessly. It does me a lot of good to read the passage of Scripture in which Hannah, Samuel’s mother, prayed and asked for a son. She prayed and moved her lips, and prayed.... And the elderly priest, who was a little blind and who didn’t see well, thought she was a drunken woman. But that woman’s heart [she said to God]: “I want a son!”. I ask you: does your heart, facing this drop in vocations, pray with this intensity? “Our congregation needs sons, our congregation needs daughters...”. The Lord, who has been so generous, will not fail in his promise. But we have to ask him for it. We have to knock at the door of his heart. Because there is a danger — this is terrible, but I have to say it — when a religious congregation sees that it has no children and grandchildren and begins to be smaller and smaller, it grows attached to money. And you know that money is the devil’s dung. When they cannot receive the grace of having vocations and children, they think that money will save its life; and they think of old age: that this not be lacking, that that is not lacking.... Thus, there is no hope! Hope is only in the Lord! Money will never give it to you. On the contrary: it will bring you down! Understood?

I wanted to tell you this, instead of reading the pages that the Cardinal Prefect will give you later....

I thank you so much for what you do, consecrated people, each with your own charism. And I want to point out the consecrated women, the sisters. What would the Church be without nuns? I have said this before: when you go to hospitals, colleges, parishes, neighbourhoods, missions, men and women who have given their lives.... In my last journey to Africa — I believe I recounted this in an audience — I met an 83-year-old Italian nun. She told me: “I’ve been here since I was — I don’t remember if she told me 23 or 26. I am a hospital nurse”. Let’s think: from age 26 to 83! “And I wrote to my family in Italy that I would never return”. When you go to a cemetery and see that there are so many religious missionaries and so many nuns dead at age 40 because they caught diseases, the fevers of those countries, their lives burnt out.... You say: these are saints. These are seeds! We must tell the Lord to come down to some of these cemeteries and see what our ancestors have done and give us more vocations, because we need them!

I thank you very much for this visit. I thank the Cardinal Prefect, the Monsignor Secretary, the Undersecretaries, for what they have done in this Year of Consecrated Life. But please, do not forget prophecy, obedience, proximity, the most important neighbour, the closest neighbours are the brothers and sisters of the community, and then hope. May the Lord bring forth more sons and daughters in your congregations. And pray for me. Thank you!

Written address consigned by the Holy Father:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am glad to meet with you at the end of this Year dedicated to consecrated life.

One day, Jesus, in his infinite mercy, turned to each of us and asked us, personally: “Come, follow me”! (Mk 10:21).

If we are here it is because we responded “yes” to him. At times it is treated as a bond filled with enthusiasm and joy, at times more difficult, perhaps uncertain. However, we have followed him with generosity, allowing ourselves to be led on paths we would have never even imagined. We have shared intimate moments with him: “Come away by yourselves [...] and rest a while” (Mk 6:31); moments of service and mission: “You give them something to eat” (Lk 9:13); even his cross: “If any man would come after me, let him [...] take up his cross” (Lk 9:23). He has introduced us into his very relationship with the Father, he has given us his spirit, he has expanded our hearts by the measure of his own, teaching us to love the poor and the sinners. We have followed him together, learning from him service, acceptance, forgiveness, fraternal love. Our consecrated life has meaning because dwelling with him and carrying him along the streets of the world, conforms us to him, makes us be the Church, a gift for humanity.

The Year that we are concluding has helped to make the beauty and holiness of consecrated life shine more in the Church, strengthening in consecrated people gratitude for the call and the joy of

responding. All consecrated men and women have had the opportunity to have a clearer perception of their own identity, and thus project themselves in to the future with renewed apostolic zeal in order to write new pages of good, in the wake of the Founders' charism. We are grateful to the Lord for what he has given us in order to live in this Year so rich of initiatives. I thank the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, which prepared and brought about the great events here in Rome and in the world.

The Year has ended, but our commitment to be faithful to the call received and to grow in love, in giving, and in creativity continues. For this reason I offer you three words.

The first is *prophecy*. It is a characteristic of yours. What prophecy does the Church and the world expect from you? You are called, first of all, to proclaim, with your life even before than with words, the reality of God: to speak God. If at times he is rejected or marginalized or ignored, we must ask ourselves whether perhaps we have not been transparent enough to his Face, showing our own instead. The Face of God is that of a Father "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps 103[102]:8). In order to make him known it is important to have a personal relationship with him; and for this it takes the capacity to adore him, to cultivate friendship with him day after day, through a heart to heart conversation in prayer, especially in silent adoration.

The second word I consign to you is *proximity*. God, through Jesus, made himself close to every man and every woman. He shared the joy of the spouses at Cana in Galilee and the anguish of the widow of Nain; he entered the house of Jairus, touched by death, and in the house of Bethany perfumed with nard; he took sickness and suffering upon himself, until giving his life as a ransom for all. Following Christ means going there where he has gone; taking upon oneself, as a Good Samaritan, the wounded whom we meet on the street; going in search of the lost sheep. Being, like Jesus, close to the people, sharing with them their joys and their sorrows; showing, with our love, the paternal face of God and the maternal caress of the Church. May no one ever feel distant, detached, closed and therefore barren. Each of you is called to serve our brothers and sisters, following your own charism: some by praying, some through catechesis, some through teaching, some by caring for the sick or the poor, some by announcing the Gospel, some by performing various works of mercy. The important thing is not living for oneself, as Jesus did not live for himself, but for the Father and for us.

Thus we come to the third word: *hope*. In bearing witness to God and his merciful love, with the grace of Christ you can instill hope in this humanity of ours marked by various reasons for anguish and fear and at times tempted to be discouraged. You can make felt the renewing power of the Beatitudes, of honesty, of compassion; the value of goodness, of the simple, essential, meaningful life. You can also nourish hope in the Church. I think, for example, of ecumenical dialogue. The meeting a year ago among consecrated people of various Christian confessions was a beautiful innovation, which deserves to be carried on. The charismatic and prophetic witness of the life of consecrated people, in its various forms, can help to recognize all of us more united and foster full

communion.

Dear brothers and sisters, in your daily apostolate, do not let yourselves be conditioned by age or by number. What counts most is the capacity to repeat the initial “yes” to the call of Jesus who continues to make himself heard, in an ever new way, in every season of life. His call and our response keep our hope alive. *Prophecy, proximity, hope*. By living this way, you will have joy in your heart, the distinctive sign of the followers of Jesus and more so of consecrated people. Your life will be more attractive to so many men and women, by the glory of God and through the beauty of the Bride of Christ, the Church.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank the Lord for what you are and do in the Church and in the world. I bless you and I entrust you to Our Mother. Please, do not forget to pray for me.