



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO BISHOPS FROM MISSION TERRITORIES
PARTECIPATING IN THE SEMINAR PROMOTED BY THE
CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES***

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 8 September 2018*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers, Good morning!

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of your training seminar. With you, I greet the communities that are entrusted to you: priests, men and women religious, catechists and lay faithful. I am grateful to Cardinal Filoni for the words that he addressed to me and I also thank Archbishop Rugambwa and Archbishop Dal Toso.

Who is the bishop? Let us ask ourselves about our identity as pastors in order to have more awareness of it, while knowing that no selfsame standard model exists in all places. The bishop's ministry causes a shudder, so great is the mystery it bears. Thanks to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the bishop is configured to Christ, Shepherd and Priest. He is called, that is, to have the features of the Good Shepherd and to make his very own the heart of the priesthood, namely, *offering his life*. Thus, he does not live for himself, but reaches out to give his life to the sheep, in particular to those who are the weakest and most at risk. For this reason the bishop fosters a true and proper compassion for the multitudes of brothers and sisters who are like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mk 6:34) and for those who, in various ways, are discarded. I ask you to have gestures and words of special comfort for those who experience marginalization and degradation; more than others they need to perceive the predilection of the Lord, whose caring hands you are.

Who is the bishop? I would like to outline three essential traits with you: he is a man of prayer, man of proclamation and man of communion.

Man of prayer. The bishop is the Successor of the Apostles and like the Apostles he is called by Jesus to be with Him (cf. Mk 3:14). There he finds his strength and his confidence. Before the Tabernacle he learns to entrust himself to and to trust in the Lord. In this way the awareness matures in him that at night too, as he sleeps, or during the day, among the toil and sweat in the field he cultivates, the seed matures (cf. Mk 4:26-29). For the bishop, prayer is not devotion but a necessity; it is not one task among many, but an indispensable ministry of *intercession*: each day he must lead people and lay their situations before God. Like Moses, he holds up his hands to heaven in favour of his people (cf. Ex 17:8-13) and is able to persist with the Lord (cf. Ex 33:11-14), to negotiate with the Lord, like Abraham. The *parrhesia* of prayer. A prayer without *parrhesia* is not prayer. This is the Pastor who prays! One who has the courage to debate with God for his flock. Active in prayer, he shares the Passion and the Cross of his Lord. Never satisfied, he constantly seeks to become like Him, striving to become like Jesus, victim and altar for the salvation of his people. And this does not come from knowing many things, but from knowing only one thing each day in prayer: [knowing] “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Because it is easy to wear a cross on one’s breast, but the Lord asks us to bear a much heavier one on our shoulders and in our heart: He asks us to share His Cross. When Peter explained to the faithful the task of the newly created deacons, he added — and this also applies to us, bishops — “Prayer and ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). Prayer comes first. I like to ask every bishop this question: “How many hours a day do you pray?”.

Man of proclamation. Successor of the Apostles, the bishop recognizes as his own the mandate that Jesus gave them: “Go and preach the Gospel” (cf. Mk 16:15). “Go”: the Gospel is not proclaimed sitting down, but on the move. The bishop does not live in the office, like a company manager, but among the people on the streets of the world, like Jesus. He takes his Lord where He is not known, where He is disfigured and persecuted. And by coming out of himself, he finds himself again. He is not satisfied with *comfort*; he does not like a quiet life and spares no energy; he does not feel like a prince; he does all he can for others, abandoning himself to God’s fidelity. If he were to seek worldly assurances and underpinnings, he would not be a true apostle of the Gospel.

And what is the *style* of proclamation? Witnessing with humility to God’s love, just as Jesus did, who humbled himself out of love. Proclaiming the Gospel is subject to the temptations of power, gratification, reputation, worldliness. Worldliness. Beware of worldliness. There is always the risk of being more concerned with form than substance, of becoming more actors than witnesses, of watering down the Word of salvation by proposing a Gospel without Jesus Crucified and Risen. But you are called to be *living memories of the Lord*, so as to remind the Church that proclaiming means giving one’s life, without half measures, even being prepared to accept the total sacrifice of self.

And third, *man of communion*. The bishop cannot have all the attributes, a ‘*togetherness of charisms*’ — some think they have them, poor fellows! — but he is called to have *the charism of*

togetherness, that is, of maintaining unity, of solidifying communion. The Church needs union, not soloists apart from the choir or exponents of personal battles. The Pastor gathers: a bishop *for* his faithful, he is a Christian *with* his faithful. He does not make headlines, does not seek worldly consensus, is not interested in protecting his good name; but he loves weaving communion by being involved in the first person and by acting in a humble manner. He does not suffer if he is not the centre of attention, but lives rooted in the territory, rejecting the temptation to distance himself often from the Diocese — the temptation to be ‘airport bishops’ — and he avoids seeking his own glory.

He does not tire of listening. He does not ground himself on fabricated projects, but allows himself to be challenged by the voice of the Spirit, who loves to speak through the faith of the simple ones. He becomes wholly one with his people and above all with his presbyterate, always willing to receive and encourage his priests. By example, more than by words, he promotes a sincere priestly fraternity, showing priests that they are Shepherds for the flock, not for reasons of prestige or career, which is terrible. Do not be climbers, please, nor ambitious: tend God’s flock “not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:3).

And then, dear brothers, avoid clericalism, “a peculiar way of understanding the Church’s authority, one common in many communities where sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience have occurred”. Clericalism corrodes communion, as it “leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say ‘no’ to abuse” — whether of power, of conscience, any abuse — “is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism” (*Letter to the People of God*, 20 August 2018). Thus do not feel you are lords of the flock — you are not masters of the flock — even if others might act as such or if certain local customs should favour it. May the People of God, *for whom* and *to whom* you are ordained, feel you are fathers, not masters; caring fathers: no one has to manifest an air of submission to you. At this historic time, in various places, certain tendencies of “*leaderism*” seem to have arisen.

Showing you are strong men, who maintain a distance and command over others, might seem convenient and captivating, but it is not evangelical. It causes often irreparable harm to the flock, for whom Christ lovingly gave His life, humbling himself and annihilating himself. Thus may you be men poor in goods and rich in relationships, never harsh and ill tempered, but affable, patient, simple and open.

I would also like to ask you to keep a few institutions at heart, in particular:

Families. Although penalized by a culture that transmits the logic of the provisional and favours individual rights, they remain the first cells of every society and the first Churches, because they are domestic Churches. May you promote courses of marriage preparation and of accompaniment for families: they will be seeds that will bear fruit in time. Defend the life of the unborn just as that

of the elderly; support parents and grandparents in their mission.

Seminaries. They are tomorrow's seedbeds. May you be at home there. Be careful to ensure that they are led by men of God, by capable and mature educators who, with the help of the best human sciences, guarantee the formation of healthy, open, authentic, sincere, humane individuals. Give priority to vocational discernment to help young people recognize God's voice among the many that echo in their ears and their hearts.

Then, *young people*, to whom the upcoming Synod will be dedicated. Let us listen; let us allow ourselves to be challenged by them; let us embrace their wishes, doubts, criticisms and crises. They are the future of the Church; they are the future of society: a better world depends on them. Even when they seem infected by the viruses of consumerism and hedonism, let us never put them in quarantine; let us seek them, hear their heart which begs for life and implores freedom. Let us offer them the Gospel, with courage.

The poor. To love them means to fight all forms of poverty, spiritual and material. Dedicate time and energy to the least without fear of getting your hands dirty. As apostles of charity may you go out to the human and existential peripheries of your Dioceses.

Lastly, dear Brothers, please be wary of the lukewarmness that leads to mediocrity and indolence, that 'midlife crisis'. Be wary of that. Be wary of the tranquility that steers clear of sacrifice; of the pastoral haste that leads to intolerance; the abundance of goods that disfigures the Gospel. Do not forget that the devil enters through the pocket! I wish you instead holy restlessness for the Gospel, the only restlessness that gives peace. I thank you for listening and I bless you, in the joy of having you as the dearest of brothers. And I ask you, please, do not forget to pray and to have prayers said for me.

Thank you.