



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE
HOSPITALLER ORDER OF SAINT JOHN OF GOD (FATEBENEFRATELLI)**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 1st February 2019*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers,

I welcome you with joy as you are celebrating the 69th General Chapter of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God. I wish to thank you for what you are and what you do in the various expressions of your charism. I thank the Superior General for the words with which he introduced our meeting. And I would like to invite you to focus on three themes: *discernment*, *closeness-hospitality* and *shared mission*.

Discernment. This is a fundamental attitude in the life of the Church and in the consecrated life. Making grateful memory of the past – as the Word of God invites us to do in today's Liturgy – to live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope, the three objectives indicated for the Year of Consecrated Life, would be impossible without adequate discernment. Looking at the past, discernment leads to the purification of our history and our charism, to separate the wheat from the straw, to fix our attention on what is important. Looking at the past, we also arrive at the encounter with the first love. Looking at the present, discernment pushes us to live the present moment with the passion that must characterize the consecrated life, away from routine and mediocrity, and transforms the *passion* for Christ into *compassion*, which is in step with the pains and needs of humanity. Looking to the future, discernment will allow you to continue making fruitful your charism of hospitality and care, facing the new challenges presented to you. Discernment is rooted in a historical dimension.

I hope that this Chapter will remain in the heart and memory of your Congregation as an

experience of dialogue and discernment, listening to the Spirit and the brothers and collaborators, without giving in to the temptation of self-centredness, which would lead you to become wrapped up in yourselves. Please do not make a closed army, a closed reserve, of the Hospitaller Order. Dialogue, discuss and plan together, starting from your roots, the present and the future of your life and mission, always listening to the voice of many sick people and of the people who need you, as did Saint John of God: a man impassioned by God and compassionate towards the sick and the poor.

Second attitude: *Closeness-hospitality*. Passion and compassion are energies of the Spirit that will give meaning to your hospital mission, which will animate your spirituality and give quality to your fraternal life in community. In a consecrated person, and in every baptized person, there can be no genuine compassion for others if there is no passion of love for Jesus. Passion for Christ leads us to the prophecy of compassion. May the cause of the human resonate in you as a cause of God. And thus, feeling that you are a family, you can always be at the service of the wounded and sick world.

In the midst of so many signs of death, think of the Gospel figure of the Samaritan (*Lk* 10: 15-37). He does not seem to have many means, he does not belong to any centre of power that supports him, he has only his saddlebag, but he has an attentive gaze and there, in the depths of his being, his heart vibrates to the rhythm of the other. The urgency of reaching out to those in need leads him to set his plans aside and stop his journey. Concern for the threatened life of the other brings out the best of his humanity, and leads him to pour oil and wine on the wounds of that half-dead man, with tenderness.

In this gesture of pure altruism and great humanity there hides the secret of your identity as hospitallers. In letting you get involved in the other, and in the Samaritan's gesture of pouring oil and wine on the wounds of the one who had fallen into the hands of the bandits, you will discover the mark of your own identity. A mark that will lead you to keep alive through time the merciful presence of Jesus Who identifies Himself with the poor, the sick and the needy, and Who dedicates Himself to their service. In this way you are able to fulfil your mission of announcing and realizing the Kingdom among the poor and the sick. With your testimony and your apostolic works, guarantee assistance to the sick and the needy, with a preference for the poorest (cf. *General Constitutions*, article 5), and promote the pastoral care of health.

The Samaritan *took care* of the wounded man. The expression "taking care" has a human and spiritual dimension. Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch His flesh in the flesh of those who suffer in body or spirit. Touch, so as to let ourselves be touched. It would do us so much good! And thus your life will become an icon of the essence of God's mercy, which was finally configured as Christ, compassionate and merciful, Who passed into the world doing good to all (cf. *Acts* 10:38) and healing every sort of diseases and infirmities (see *Mt* 4: 23).

In this context I ask you for peaceful discernment on your structures. Your structures must be “inns” – like that of the parable of the Samaritan – at the service of life, spaces where the sick and the poor in particular feel welcomed. And it will do you good to ask yourself often how you can preserve the memory of these structures that were born as an expression of your charism, so that they always remain at the service of the tenderness and attention we owe to the victims of social rejection. I ask you to create “Samaritan” networks for the weakest, with special attention to the poor, and that your homes always be open and welcoming communities, so as to globalize compassionate solidarity.

Third word: *Shared mission*. This is a real urgency, and not only because we are going through moments of scarcity of vocations, but because our charisms are gifts for the whole Church and for the world. Aside from number and the age, the Spirit always inspires a renewed fruitfulness that passes through adequate discernment and increases joint formation, so that religious and laity may have a missionary heart that rejoices in the joy of experiencing Christ’s salvation and shares it as consolation and compassion, while running the risk of getting dirty in the mud on the way (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 45).

I encourage you to pay attention to your formation, without neglecting to train the laity in the charism, in the spirituality and in the mission of Christian hospitality, so that they too may have a good sense of belonging and that in their works the testimony of the spirituality that nourished the life of Saint John of God may never be lacking.

Dear brothers, bring the compassion and mercy of Jesus to the sick and the most needy. Come out of yourself, your limits, your problems and difficulties, to join others in a caravan of solidarity. May your young people prophesy and your elders never cease to dream (cf. *Joel* 3: 1). I accompany you with my blessing; and please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

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