



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE
CANOSSIAN DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY**

Consistory Hall

Friday, 26 August 2022

[Multimedia]

I thank the Superior General for her greeting and for the presentation of this Chapter. And I also thank the outgoing one [Superior], who is returning to her country after eight years. I would like to share with you some reflections inspired by the theme that guides your work.

First and foremost, *women of the Word*. Like Mary. Because women always speak, but one must speak like Mary, which is something else. She is *the* woman of the Word. She is *the* disciple. By looking to her, and also dialoguing with her in prayer, you can learn always anew what it means to be “women of the Word”, which has nothing to do with “[being] women of gossip”! Please do not confuse this. Let there be no gossip among you! The elderly sisters can bear witness to the younger ones of an awe that never ends, a gratitude that grows with age, a welcoming of the Word that becomes ever more complete, more concrete and more incarnate in life. The younger ones, can bear witness to the elderly ones of the enthusiasm of discovery, of the leaps of the heart that, in silence, learns to resonate with the Word, letting oneself be surprised, even called into question, in order to grow in the school of the Master. And what do those who are middle-aged do?

They are more at risk — be careful! — both because it is an age of transition, with some snares — the crises of being 40, 45, you know them — but above all, because it is the phase of greater responsibilities and it is easy to slip into activism, even without realising it. And then one is no longer a woman of the Word, but women of the computer, women of the telephone, women of appointments and so forth. Thus, bring on this motto for everyone! To put oneself anew in the school of Mary, *to focus oneself again on the Word* and be women “who love without measure”.

The Word, not activism, at the core.

This is the second element of the theme: *to love without measure*. There is a saying that goes, “the measure of love is to love without measure”. It is an ability that comes from the Holy Spirit. It does not come from us, from our own effort. It comes from God who always loves without measure and he always waits for us. God’s patience with us always moves me. See how patient our Father is! This quality of being without measure is typical of God’s love. And yet, this love, Saint Paul says, “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). Thus, it is possible to love without measure, making room for the Spirit and his action in our life. And this is holiness. Women of the Spirit, like Mary. Letting the Spirit lead you forward. Hearts that are open to the Spirit.

In fact, the theme of your General Chapter speaks of “reconfiguration to a *life of holiness*” — reconfiguration: the word is beautiful, I like it — and it continues: “in and for *mission*, today”. Holiness and mission are constitutive dimensions of Christian life and are inseparable. We could sum it up like this: “each saint, every holy person is a mission” (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate* 19).

This is demonstrated well by the witness of *Magdalene of Canossa*. She felt called to give herself completely to God, but at the same time, she felt she had to be close to the poor. In her young woman’s heart, there was this dual need, this twofold belonging: to God and to the poor, who in her case were the people on the outskirts of Verona. But notice: it is the Spirit who guides her through concrete situations and she allows herself to be guided. She seeks her path, but always remaining docile. Docility: nothing to do with a whim or with stubbornness: I want to do this.... No, docility to the Spirit. This is the secret! Thus, Christ’s charity moulds her heart, moulds her life, after the example of the Virgin Mary, who said “yes” from the very beginning, completely, and then carried out her pilgrimage in faith, following the Son, and became completely mother beneath the Cross. The life of Magdalene was “configured” to the holiness of Christ, after the example of Mary in the concrete missionary form dictated by the reality in which she lived. And her “yes”, said not in words but in facts, was generative: the Lord sent her some companions with whom to share the path of holiness and of mission. And thus, you arrived at this moment.

I was pleased with the number of novices you have. This reveals fecundity, the fecundity of the congregation. It is a number of fecundity. Unfortunately, here in Europe there are not many people, but it is the demographic winter of Europe. Instead of children, people prefer to have dogs, cats, which is a bit like calculated affection: I plan affection, they give me affection without problems. And if there is pain? Well, there is the veterinarian who intervenes, fullstop. And this is a bad thing. Please help families to have children. It is a human problem and also a patriotic problem.

Dear sisters, you want to “reconfigure yourselves”, *today*, according to this form of life. And the secret is always the same: to allow yourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit to love God and the

poor. But “today”: it is the today of the Church, it is the today of society, or better, of the different societies in which you are present. With those conditions of poverty, *with those faces that ask for closeness, compassion and tenderness*. “Oh what a new thing you are saying, Father!”. No, this is God’s style. God always acts this way, with closeness, compassion and tenderness. He draws us near, forgives and caresses. Always. God’s style is closeness, compassion and tenderness. Do not forget this. This is very important. I thank you for your courage and generosity. I thank you for the joy in your hearts and on your faces. Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit and is a clear sign of the Gospel, especially when it transpires in sharing with our brothers and sisters in conditions of hardship and marginalization. It is joy. And also, in sharing with the sisters in the community. Yes, because it can happen that one may appear filled with enthusiasm for service to the poor and then, while at home, be on their own and not live fraternity.... This is not a good sign because they complain: “This superior ...”, that other one, that problem... In the previous Diocese [Buenos Aires], there was a sister who had this vice of complaining and everyone called her “Sister Complaints”. None of you is “Sister Complaints”, but the temptation to complain, to criticise ... this is bad for the body, it is bad for it. “But Father, it comes to me!”. Go tell the person: “You have this defect”, or otherwise, tell someone who can remedy it. What do you gain from going to your sisters and saying: “But look at this, this and this...”? This is gossip which does much harm and lets the Word of God die. “It is difficult, Father, to solve the problem of gossip, because it comes to you, the comment...” Yes, it is like something sweet, that comes to you... But there is a good solution against gossip and it is very simple. If you are tempted to gossip about others, bite your tongue so that it will swell and you will not be able to speak. Understood? Please no gossip. It kills community life.

I would like to add two things. The first has to do with the community dimension, and I quote from the Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*. “Growth in holiness is a journey in community [...]. Living or working alongside others is surely a path of spiritual growth. [...] Sharing the word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community” (141-142). Let us not think of grand things but rather of daily details. Like the family. That is where we see charity: “A community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father’s plan” (145). Safeguard this in your communities: [care for] one another. And no gossip.

The second emphasis, with which I conclude, is the importance of the prayer of adoration. We have forgotten about the adoration prayer. We know what it is, but we do not practice it much. To adore. To adore. In silence before the Lord, before the Most Blessed Sacrament, to adore. The prayer of adoration. And here again you can refer to the witness of your Foundress who, like other Saints of charity, drew her apostolic impetus especially by remaining in adoration in the presence of the Lord. Do not be afraid of adoration: go there. “But it is boring ...”. Go and adore. Let the Lord do. The movement of the Spirit that defocuses from self to focus on Christ. This is adoration: defocusing from self is what makes service to our neighbours possible, one that is not pietism or

welfarism, but rather openness to the other, closeness, sharing: in one word, charity. Saint Paul would say: the love of Christ enthrals us, and urges us on (cf. 2 Cor 5:14).

Dear sisters, onwards! Take heart! I thank you for this visit and above all for all that you are and do for the Church. I ask the Holy Spirit to give you light and strength to conclude your Chapter well and for the journey of the Institute. I offer my heartfelt blessing to you and to all your sisters throughout the world, And please do not forget to pray for me — to pray for, not against!