



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE PONTIFICAL COLLEGE NEPOMUCENUM

*Consistory Hall
Thursday, 10 November 2022*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the Rector for his words of presentation; also for this programme of the Rosary, thank you, as it gives me strength.

I would like to share with you some reflections starting from the witness of your Patron, Saint John Nepomucenum. There is a strong root there, a root that is always living, capable of nourishing the present and the future of your community, as it has done in the past.

It is always striking that he was killed because he wanted to remain faithful to the secret of the Confession. This is touching. He said “*no*” to the king to confirm his “*yes*” to *Christ and the Church*. And this makes one think of what so many priests, so many bishops have had to endure throughout history under various authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. You have experience of this in your own history. For your College this happened during the forty years following the Second World War. And today I pay tribute with you to the memory of so many priests and bishops, consecrated men and women, and also so many lay people, who, with God's grace, had the courage to say 'no' to the regime in order to remain faithful to their vocation and mission. This multitude of hidden martyrs that we do not know. Behind your lives, behind your history, there are martyrs.

This *root of courage and evangelical steadfastness* – that stems from your Patron saint – must never become for you like a plaque to be placed on the wall, like a museum piece, like a little

picture; no, it must remain a living root, because there is a need for its sap today too! Even today, in Europe and all over the world, being Christians, and in particular being ministers of the Church, consecrated men and women, requires that we say “no” to the power of this world to confirm the “yes” to the Gospel. At times these are political powers, sometimes instead they are ideological and cultural, and their conditioning is more subtle; it passes through the means of communication, which can apply pressure, discredit, blackmail, isolate and so on, or worse still, lead you to live in worldliness. Beware of spiritual worldliness, which is the worst thing that can happen to the Church, the worst thing that can happen to a consecrated man or woman. Beware of living in a worldly fashion, according to worldly criteria.

The witness of Saint John Nepomucenum reminds us, today more than ever, of the *primacy of the conscience* above any worldly power; the primacy of the human person, his or her inalienable dignity, which has its centre precisely in the conscience, understood not in a merely psychological sense, but in its fullness, as openness to the transcendent. I hope that the Pontifical College that bears the name of the great Bohemian priest and martyr may always be a *home and school of freedom*, inner freedom, based on the relationship with Christ and with the Holy Spirit. A freedom that manifests itself also in a *sense of humour*, as shown for example by Fr. Spidlik, whom I knew very well, I knew him closely, who for many years exercised his ministry in your College; with that sense of humour he was able to laugh in any situation, even at himself. A great man!

The Rector offered more food for thought, recalling that Saint John Nepomucenum is the protector of bridges, he who was thrown into the Vltava River from the Charles Bridge in Prague, and in this way crowned his witness. An appropriate way to honour his memory, then, is to seek, in real life, to *build bridges* where there are divisions, distance, misunderstandings. Or rather, *to be bridges ourselves*, humble and courageous instruments of encounter and dialogue between different and opposing people and groups. This is a feature that belongs to the identity of Christ’s ministry, as shown by the biographies of so many saintly priests and bishops, who in situations of conflict were builders of peace and reconciliation. But women do this better: making bridges, because a woman knows better than a man how to make bridges. And you [addressing the women present], teach them how to make bridges!

This – as you well know – cannot be done without prayer. Bridges are built starting from the prayer of *intercession*: day after day, knocking insistently on Christ’s door, the foundations are laid to enable two distant and hostile shores to start to communicate again. In this regard, I would like to recall a meditation by Cardinal Martini, entitled “A Cry of Intercession”, delivered in January 1991, at the time of the Gulf War. Today, as the war in Ukraine rages on, that homily is highly topical. In particular, I emphasize a passage on the prayer of intercession, where he says: “Intercession means standing where the conflict takes place, between the two sides in the conflict. [...] It is the gesture of Jesus Christ on the cross”.

And here we touch on the central point: Jesus Christ is the bridge and he is the pontiff. He is our

peace, and he has always torn down, and tears down, the walls of enmity (cf. *Eph 2:14*). And it is to him that we must always direct and draw people, families, communities. It is what we do in the central moment of our day, when we celebrate Mass. We cannot and must not be at the centre; it must be him! Let us flee the temptation of worldly protagonism. Please, the Lord wants us all to be servants, brothers and sisters, not prima donnas or first actors, not protagonists, and at times the protagonists of sad stories and mediocre stories. No. The Lord wants us to be fighters. Let us flee the temptation of this worldly protagonism, which often deceives us by masquerading as noble causes. The motto of John the Baptist applies to every one of us: “He must increase; I must decrease” (*Jn 3:30*).

Dear brothers and sisters, today the Pontifical College *Nepomucenum* hosts, besides priests from the Czech Republic, others from different countries, also from Africa and Asia. It is a sign of the times we see in various Roman colleges, increasingly made up of mixed communities, no longer national but international. And this situation, which is due to the diminishing European presence, can become, if well managed, a source of human and formative richness. In this diversity you can better practice becoming “bridges”, serving the culture of encounter, capable of grasping in the other their peculiar originality, and at the same time, the common humanity.

Thank you for this visit. May the Lord always bless your community and Our Lady who accompanies you. I bless you all from my heart. And thank you for this gift of the Rosary; but, after this, continue to pray for me! Because this work is not easy. Thank you!

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