



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME**

Clementine Hall

Monday, 13 November 2023

[Multimedia]

Dear Sisters, good morning!

I welcome all of you on the occasion of your 25th General Chapter, which is taking place here in Rome. As you gather to give thanks to Almighty God for his blessings, past and present, and to discern the future path of your Congregation, it is my hope that you will continue to draw inspiration from the legacy of your Foundress, Blessed Teresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, whose anniversary of beatification occurs on 17 November, the closing date of your General Chapter. And how is her cause of canonization going?

Blessed Teresa's life was a testament to the transformative power of faith, the courage to forge new paths, and dedication to educating young people. Her vision was integral: passing on academic knowledge together with nurturing the spirit and the formation of compassionate, responsible, and Christ-centred individuals, that is, the formation of the heart in order to have compassion. In her footsteps, you have continued on the three paths of *education*, *service*, and *spirituality*. As we read in your Constitutions, Blessed Theresa "grounded the congregation in the Eucharist, anchored it in poverty, and dedicated it to Mary" (Nos. 17-18). I like this: *anchored in poverty*. Without genuine poverty, there is no religious life. Poverty is what safeguards the consecrated life. It is not only a virtue, no, it is the safeguard. Always remember this. This firm foundation has allowed the School Sisters of Notre Dame to go out to the whole world and bear witness to the Gospel, making Christ visible by your presence, faith, hope and charity (cf. Constitutions, No. 4).

The theme you have chosen for your General Chapter, “Living into a Prophetic Witness of Universal Communion,” is of great importance in the context of our times. The Scriptures provide us with numerous references to the prophetic vocation of individuals and communities who fostered communion among diverse members of God’s holy and faithful people. Here, I am thinking, for example, of the prophet Jeremiah, whose mission was to become one with the people of Israel in their suffering in order to help them recognize and respond together to God’s covenantal love. I think, too, of Saint Paul, who reminded the early Christians of Rome that “we, though many, are one body in Christ” (*Rom* 12:5). Indeed, your charism of “bringing all to the oneness for which Christ was sent”, is itself founded upon Jesus’ desire for unity among all who believe in him (cf. *Jn* 17:11).

As women professing the evangelical counsels, you have long been pioneers in embracing the prophetic dimension of consecrated life which “is a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in his regard for the human race” (*Vita Consacrata*, 22). Your dedication in this regard is a sign not only of the gift you have made of yourselves to the Lord, but also of your availability to serve, in him, all our brothers and sisters.

As you now reflect on new paths for your Congregation and at the same time remain rooted in the firm foundation provided by your Foundress, I encourage you to continue to be courageous witnesses of evangelical solidarity at a time when many are experiencing fragmentation and disunity. This responsibility assumes ever greater importance in light of the synodal journey that the whole Church is undertaking. Your Chapter is an opportunity to listen more intently to the Holy Spirit and to each other in order to enhance the bonds that unite you as Sisters and as members of Christ’s body.

I want to highlight this: *listening*. We always like to speak. Everyone, not only women, but everyone. Yet in this way it is difficult to learn how to listen. The Lord also speaks to us through others. Listening to others, then, and not thinking, while the other person is speaking, “What will I say in reply?” No. Listening: so that what the other person is saying enters my heart, and if I feel I should answer, then I answer. Listening is truly a virtue that we need to let grow in our communities, in the consecrated life. Listening to the Lord, but also listening to our brothers and sisters. This is very important.

Dear Sisters, I thank you for your visit and I pray that the Holy Spirit will grant you his gifts in abundance, so that the deliberations and decisions of the Chapter may bear much fruit in the life of your community. And there will be fruits if you know how to listen. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, protect you, help you and be your sure guide on the path. I bless you and all your Sisters throughout the world. How many are there? How many Sisters? [Answer: 1900]. 1900? I greet them all! 1900 kisses. I extend to you and all your Sisters my heartfelt blessing, and I ask you, please, to pray for me because I need it.
