

Consecrated Life is precious gift to the Church and the world.



(Vatican Radio) Pope Francis met on Saturday afternoon with Communities of Religious at the “School of Love” in Kkottongnae. Approximately 5000 male and female religious were present for the event.

In his address, Pope Francis spoke about the “great variety of charisms and apostolates” represented by the religious. The Holy Father reflected on the words of the Psalm: “My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps 73:26). “We all know that while joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty, ‘it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved’” (Evangelii Gaudium, 6). This conviction of being loved by God is at the centre of a religious vocation. It is only a joyful witness that will allow religious “to attract men and women to Christ.”

This joy, the Pope said, “is rooted in the mystery of the Father’s mercy revealed in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.” Whether involved in contemplative or active vocations, all religious “are challenged to become ‘experts’ in divine mercy.” Moreover, this challenge is fulfilled precisely in religious community. Speaking from his own experience, Pope Francis acknowledged the difficulties of community life, but emphasized that it is in community life that religious are called to grow in “mercy, forbearance, and perfect charity.”

Pope Francis then spoke about each of the evangelical counsels – obedience, chastity, and poverty – as essential aspects of religious life. “Mature and generous obedience,” he said, “requires that you cling in prayer to Christ who, taking the form of a servant, learned obedience through what he suffered (cf. Perfectae Caritatis, 14).”

Purity and chastity are inspired by an experience of God's mercy, and expresses "your single-minded dedication to the love of God who is 'the strength of our hearts'."

Finally, the Pope said, "through the evangelical counsel of poverty you are able to recognize God's mercy not only as a source of strength, but also as a treasure." He warned against the hypocrisy of religious who take vows of poverty but live as though they were rich, causing scandal amongst the faithful.

Pope Francis concluded his address with a call to the religious men and women: "Dear brothers and sisters, with great humility, do all that you can to show that the consecrated life is a precious gift to the Church and to the world.

Below, please find the complete text of the Pope's address at his meeting with Religious Communities in Korea:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I greet you all with affection in the Lord. It is good to be with you today and to share these moments of communion. The great variety of charisms and apostolates which you represent wondrously enriches the life of the Church in Korea and beyond. In this setting of the celebration of Vespers where we have sung the praise of God's infinite goodness and mercy, I thank you, and all of your brothers and sisters, for your efforts to build up God's Kingdom in this beloved country. I thank Father Hwang Seok-mo and Sister Scholastica Lee Kwang-ok, the Presidents of the Korean Conferences of Major Superiors of Men's and Women's Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, for their kind words of welcome.

The words of the Psalm, "My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps 73:26), invite us to think about our own lives. The Psalmist exudes joyful confidence in God. We all know that while joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty, "it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved" (Evangeli Gaudium, 6). The firm conviction of being loved by God is at the center of your vocation: to be for others a tangible sign of the presence of God's Kingdom, a foretaste of the eternal joys of heaven. Only if our witness is joyful will we attract men and women to Christ. And this joy is a gift which is nourished by

a life of prayer, meditation on the word of God, the celebration of the sacraments and life in community. When these are lacking, weaknesses and difficulties will emerge to dampen the joy we knew so well at the beginning of our journey.

For you, as men and women consecrated to God, this joy is rooted in the mystery of the Father's mercy revealed in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Whether the charism of your Institute is directed more to contemplation or to the active life, you are challenged to become "experts" in divine mercy precisely through your life in community. From experience I know that community life is not always easy, but it is a providential training ground for the heart. It is unrealistic not to expect conflicts; misunderstandings will arise and they must be faced. Despite such difficulties, it is in community life that we are called to grow in mercy, forbearance and perfect charity.

The experience of God's mercy, nourished by prayer and community, must shape all that you are, all that you do. Your chastity, poverty and obedience will be a joyful witness to God's love in the measure that you stand firmly on the rock of his mercy. This is certainly the case with religious obedience. Mature and generous obedience requires that you cling in prayer to Christ who, taking the form of a servant, learned obedience through what he suffered (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14). There are no shortcuts: God desires our hearts completely and this means we have to "let go" and "go out" of ourselves more and more.

A lively experience of the Lord's steadfast mercy also sustains the desire to achieve that perfection of charity which is born of purity of heart. Chastity expresses your single-minded dedication to the love of God who is "the strength of our hearts". We all know what a personal and demanding commitment this entails. Temptations in this area call for humble trust in God, vigilance and perseverance.

Through the evangelical counsel of poverty you are able to recognize God's mercy not only as a source of strength, but also as a treasure. Even when we are weary, we can offer him our hearts burdened by sin and weakness; at those times when we feel most helpless, we can reach out to Christ, "who made himself poor in order that we might become rich" (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). This fundamental need of ours to be forgiven and healed is itself a form of poverty which we must never lose sight of, no matter how many advances we make in virtue. It should also find concrete expression in your lifestyle, both as individuals and as communities. I think in particular of the need to avoid all those things which can distract you and cause bewilderment and scandal to others. In the consecrated life, poverty is both a "wall" and a "mother". It is a "wall" because it protects the consecrated life, a "mother" because it helps it to grow and guides it along the right path. The hypocrisy of those consecrated men and women who profess vows of poverty, yet live like the rich, wounds the souls of the faithful and harms the Church. Think, too, of how dangerous a temptation it is to adopt a purely functional, worldly mentality which leads to placing our hope in human means alone and destroys the witness of poverty which our

Lord Jesus Christ lived and taught us.

Dear brothers and sisters, with great humility, do all that you can to show that the consecrated life is a precious gift to the Church and to the world. Do not keep it to yourselves; share it, bringing Christ to every corner of this beloved country. Let your joy continue to find expression in your efforts to attract and nurture vocations, and recognize that all of you have some part in forming the consecrated men and women of tomorrow. Whether you are given more to contemplation or to the apostolic life, be zealous in your love of the Church in Korea and your desire to contribute, through your own specific charism, to its mission of proclaiming the Gospel and building up God's people in unity, holiness and love.

Commending all of you, and in a special way the aged and infirm members of your communities, to the loving care of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially impart my blessing as a pledge of enduring grace and peace in Jesus her Son.

(From archive of Vatican Radio)

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