



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE XXI PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL
UNION OF SUPERIORS GENERAL (UISG)**

Paul VI Audience Hall

Friday, 10 May 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Sisters,

I am very pleased to be able to receive you today on the occasion of your General Assembly and to wish you an Easter Season filled with hope, joy and passion in conveying the Gospel to all corners of the earth. Yes, Easter is all this and it invites us to be witnesses to the Risen One, living a new Evangelizing phase marked by joy. No one can rob us of the passion to evangelize. There is no Easter without mission: “Go and preach the Gospel to all mankind” (cf. Mk 16:15-20). The Lord asks his Church to reveal Christ’s triumph over death; he asks us to reveal his life. Go, sisters, and proclaim the Risen Christ as the source of the joy that nothing and no one can take away from us. Constantly renew your encounter with the Risen Jesus Christ and you will be his witnesses, bringing the gentle and comforting joy of the Gospel to all men and women loved by the Lord, in particular those who feel they are victims of the culture of exclusion.

Consecrated life, as [Saint John Paul II](#) once stated, like any other reality of the Church, is going through “a difficult and trying period” (Apostolic Exhortation [Vita Consecrata](#), n. 13). Before the declining number that consecrated life is experiencing, particularly of women, the temptation is that of discomfort, of resignation, or of “becoming fossilized” in saying “it’s always been done this way”.

In this context I emphatically repeat to you what I have told you on other occasions: do not be afraid of being few in number, but of being insignificant, of no longer being the light that illuminates those who are immersed in the “darkest night” of history. Nor be afraid of “confessing humbly, with immense confidence in the God who is Love, our own weakness” ([Letter to All Consecrated People](#), 21 November 2014). Instead, be afraid: panic if you cease to be the salt that gives flavour

to the life of the men and women of our society. Work tirelessly to be sentries who announce the arrival of dawn (cf. Is 21:11-12); to be leaven wherever you are and with whoever you are, even if this appears to bring you no tangible and immediate benefits (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 210).

There are many people who need you and await you. People in need of your friendly smile to give hope back to them; of your hands to support them on their journey; of your words to sow hope in their hearts; of your love in the style of Jesus (cf. Jn 13:1-15) to heal the deepest wounds caused by loneliness, rejection and exclusion. Never give in to the temptation of self-referentiality, of transforming yourself into “closed armies”. Nor take refuge “in work in order to avoid the operative capacity of the charism” (*The Strength of Vocation*, n. 56). Instead develop the *creativity of charity* and experience *creative fidelity* to your charism. With them you will be able to propose anew the “creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses” (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 37), by opening new paths to bring the encouragement and the light of the Gospel to the diverse cultures in which you live and work in the many spheres of society, as they did in their time. With them you will be able to *reexamine* your charisms, to go to the root, experiencing the present comfortably, without being afraid to journey, “without letting the water stop running [...]”. Consecrated life is like water: if it is stagnant, it will become putrid” (*The Strength of Vocation*, n. 44-45). In this way, without losing memory — ever necessary to live the present with passion — you will avoid both “restorationism” and ideology, of whatever sign it may be, that do so much harm to consecrated life and to the Church herself.

And [do] all that with your presence and your humble and discreet service, always enlivened by freely given prayer and by the prayer of adoration and praise. To pray, praise and adore is not a waste of time. The more united we are with the Lord, the closer we will be to humanity, in particular to suffering humanity. “Our future will be full of hope”, as the motto of this Plenary states, and our projects will be projects for the future, in the measure in which we will pause each day before the Lord in the gratuitousness of prayer, if we do not want the wine to turn into vinegar and the salt to become flavourless. It will be possible to know projects that the Lord has made for us only if we keep our eyes and our heart turned toward the Lord, contemplating his face and listening to his Word (cf. Ps 34[33]). Only in this way will you be able to reawaken the world with your prophecy, a distinctive trait and priority of your being religious and consecrated women (cf. *Letter to All Consecrated People*, ii, 2). The more urgent it is to *be decentralized* in order to go into the existential peripheries, the more urgent it is to *be centred* on Him and to *concentrate* on the existential values of our charisms.

Among the essential values of religious life there is fraternal life in community. I note with much joy the great results obtained in this dimension: more intense communication, fraternal correction, the search for synodality in leading the community, fraternal welcome with respect for diversity..., but at the same time I am concerned about the fact that there are brothers and sisters who lead their life on the margins of the fraternity; sisters and brothers who have been illegitimately absent from

the community for years and for this reason I promulgated a Motu Proprio, *Communis Vita*, with very precise norms in order to avoid these cases.

With regard to fraternal life in community, I am also concerned that there are Institutes in which multiculturalism and internationalism are not seen as a richness but as a threat, and they are experienced as conflict instead of being experienced as new opportunities that reveal the true face of the Church and of religious and consecrated life. I ask those in charge of the Institute to be open to the very newness of the Spirit, who blows where it wills and as it wills (cf. Jn 3:8), and to prepare the generations of other cultures to assume responsibility. Sisters, may you live the internationalism of your Institutes as good news. May you live the changing face of your communities with joy, and not as a necessary evil for preservation. Internationalism and interculturalism do not turn backwards.

I am concerned with the generational conflicts, when young people are not able to bring forward the dreams of the elderly in order to make them bear fruit, and the elderly do not know how to receive the prophecies of the young (cf. Jl 2:28). How I like repeating: young people run a lot, but the elderly know the journey. Both the wisdom of the elderly and the inspiration and strength of the young are necessary in a community.

Dear sisters, through you I thank all the sisters of your Institutes for the great work they do in the various peripheries in which they live. The periphery of education, where educating is always winning, winning for God; the periphery of healthcare, where you are servants and messengers of life, and of a life of worth; and the periphery of pastoral work in all its different manifestations where, by witnessing to the Gospel with your lives, you are revealing the maternal face of the Church. Thank you for what you are and for what you do in the Church. Never stop being women. "It is not necessary to stop being a woman in order to conform" (*The Strength of Vocation*, n. 111).

At the same time, I ask you: cultivate passion for Christ and passion for humanity. Without passion for Christ and for humanity there is no future for religious and consecrated life. Passion will lead you to prophecy, to be the fire that kindles other fires. May you continue to take steps in the mission shared among different charisms and with the laity, inviting them to important works without leaving anyone without due formation and a sense of belonging to the charismatic family. May you work for mutual relationships with pastors, including them in your discernment and integrating them in the selection of participants and ministries.

The journey of consecrated life, both female and male, is a journey of ecclesial discernment. Things do not work outside the Church and parallel to the local Church. May you pay great attention to both the permanent and initial formation and to the formation of formators capable of listening and accompanying, of discerning, going to meet those who knock on our doors. And even amid the trials that we might be going through, may you live your consecration with joy. This is the best vocational propaganda.

May the Virgin accompany you and protect you with her maternal intercession. For my part I wholeheartedly bless you and bless all the sisters whom the Lord has entrusted to you. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

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