



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE  
**BOLLETTINO**

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**Audience with the participants in the Congress promoted by the national Office for the Pastoral Care of Vocations of the Italian Episcopal Conference (Rome, 3-5 January 2017)**

At 9.30 a.m. today, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Congress promoted by the national Office for the Pastoral Care of Vocations of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI), on the theme “Arise, go and fear not. Vocations and holiness: I am a mission” (Rome, 3-5 January 2017).

The Pope addressed an impromptu address to those present, handing the prepared text to Bishop Nunzio Galantino, secretary general of the CEI.

The following is the impromptu address pronounced by the Holy Father, followed by his previously prepared address:

**Holy Father's pronounced address**

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I have prepared this address [*shows written text*]: it is five pages long. It is too early to fall asleep again! So I will give it to the secretary general and will try to say to you what comes to mind, what it comes to me to say. ... You [*addressing Msgr. Galantino*] will let them know...

When Msgr. Galantino began to speak [*in his greeting to the Holy Father*], and said the motto of the meeting, “Arise!...”, I thought about when this word was said to Peter, in jail; it was said by the Angel: “Get up quickly!” (Acts 12,7). He did not understand anything. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me”. And he did not know if he was dreaming or not. “Follow me”. And the doors opened, and Peter found himself on the street. There he realized that it was reality, that it was not a dream: it was the angel of God and he had freed him. “Get up quickly”, he had said. And he got up, in a hurry, and he went. And where do I go? I certainly go where there is the Christian community. And truly he went to a house of Christians, where everyone prayed for him. Prayer ... He knocks at the door, the maid goes out, she looks at him ... and instead of opening the door she goes back inside. And Peter, afraid because the guard is there, wanders around the city. And she said, “Go, Peter is there!” – “No, it is Peter’s ghost!” And Peter knocked and knocked. That “Get up quickly!” was stalled by fear, by the silly

thing – but, we don't know – of a person. I think she was called ... [*Rhoda*]. It is a complex, the complex of those who out of fear, out of a lack of security, prefer to close doors.

I ask myself how many young people, boys and girls, today feel in their heart that "Get up!", and how many – priests, consecrated persons, sisters – close the doors. And they end up frustrated. They had heard the "Get up" and knocked at the door. ... "Yes, yes, we are praying", "Yes, but not now, we are praying". In parenthesis, someone, when he had heard that I came to you to speak about vocations, said, "Tell them we are praying for vocations, instead of holding lots of congresses!". I don't know if this is true; there is a need for prayer, but prayer with the door open! With the door open. Because merely contenting oneself with a congress, without ensuring that the doors are open, is not useful. And the doors are opened with prayer, good will, risk. Risking with the young. Jesus told us that the first method for having vocations is prayer, and not everyone is convinced by this. "I pray ... yes, I pray the Lord's Prayer every day for vocations". That is, I pay the tax. No, prayer comes from the heart! The prayer that makes the Lord say again that "Get up!": "Get up! Be free! Get up, I want you with me. Follow me. Come to me and see where I live. Get up! But with the doors closed, no-one can enter to the Lord. And we have the keys to the door. Not only Peter, no, no. All of us.

Opening the doors so that they can enter into the churches. I know of some dioceses in the world that have been blessed with vocations. Speaking with the bishops, [I asked], "What have you done?" First of all, a letter from the bishop, every month, to those who wanted to pray for vocations: the elderly, the sick, couples... A letter every month, with a spiritual thought, with support to accompany the prayer. Bishops must accompany prayer, the prayer of the community. A way must be sought .... This is a way that those bishops – three or four that I heard from – have found. But very often bishops are busy, there are many things ... Yes, ye, but we must not forget that the first task of bishops is prayer! The second is proclaiming the Gospel. And this is not what theologians say; it was said by the Apostles, when they had that little revolution in which many Christians complained because widows were not well cared-for, because the Apostles did not have time; so, they "invented" the deacons, to take care of the widows, the orphans, the poor. ... We, in this Church of Rome have a good deacon, we have had Lawrence, who gave his life; he took care of these things. And at the end of the proclamation, when he announced to the Christian community, Peter says: "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word". But someone might say to me, "Father, you are speaking to the daughter in law so that the mother in law hears?" Yes, it is true. The first thing is to pray, this is what Jesus said to us: "Pray for vocations". I could make a bigger pastoral plan, more perfect organisation, but without the leaven of prayer it will be unleavened bread. It will have no strength. Praying is the first thing. And the Christian community, that night in which Peter knocked at the door, was in prayer. The text says, "Earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church". It was in prayer. And when one prays, the Lord listens, always, always! But praying not like parrots. Praying with the heart, with the life, with everything, with the desire that what you are asking will be done. Pray for vocations.

Think if you can do something of this type, like those bishops, humble people, did: "Make this commitment, every day pray", and feed this commitment, always. Today a little book, next month a letter, then a little image ... but they must feel connected in prayer, because the prayer of all makes great strength. The Lord Himself says so. Then, the open door. It makes one weep, when you go in the parish, in some parishes... And in parenthesis I would like to say that Italian priests are good! I am speaking in general, but this is testimony I would like to give: never have I seen in other dioceses, in my homeland, in other dioceses, such strong organisation by priests as I see here. Think of voluntary work: in Italy voluntary work is something you do not see elsewhere. It is a great thing! And who did it? Parish priests. Country parish priests, who serve one, two, three villages, some, they know everyone's name, even those of the dogs! Parish priests. Then, the oratory in Italian parishes: it is a strong institution. And who did all this? Parish priests. The parish priests are good. But sometimes – and I speak about all the world – you go into a parish and you find written on the door: "The parish priest receives on Monday, Thursday, and Friday from 3 to 4 p.m.", or "Confessions from this hour to that" These open doors ... How often – and I am talking about my previous diocese – how many times there are secretaries, consecrated women, who receive the people, who scare them away! The door is open but the secretary shows her teeth, and the people flee. There is a need for welcome. To have vocations, welcome is necessary. It is the house in which one welcomes.

And speaking of the young, welcome to the young. This is a third and rather difficult thing. The young tire,

because they always have an idea, they make noise, they do this, they do that... And then they come and say, "But, I would like to speak with you". "Yes, come". And the same questions, the same problems: "I told you". They tire. If we want vocations: open door, prayer, and stay nailed to your seat to listen to the young. "But they are imaginative!" The Lord be blessed! It is up to you to bring them back down to earth. Listen to them: it is the apostolate of the ear. "They want to confess, but they always confess the same things". "And you too, when you were young, have you forgotten? Patience: listen, so they feel they are at home and welcome; they feel wanted. And at times they will do the things the young do: thank God, because they are not old. It is important to "waste time" with the young. Sometimes they can be boring, because – as I said – they always come with the same things; but the time is for them. More than speaking to them, you must listen to them, and work from within. But he or she will be able to say, "Yes, I went to the pastor, to the priest, to the sister, to the president of Catholic Action, and they listened to me as if they had nothing to do". This is something the young understand well.

Then, another thing on the young: we must be attentive to what they are looking for, because the young change with time. In my time, there was the fashion for meetings: "Today we will speak about love", and everyone prepared something on the theme of love, and we spoke... we were satisfied. Then, we left, there, we went to the stadium and saw the match – there was still no television – and we were calm. We did works of charity, visits to hospitals ... all organised. But we were rather "static", in a figurative sense. Today the young have to be on the move, the young have to walk; to work for vocations it is necessary to make the young walk, and this is done by accompanying them. The apostolate of walking. And how do we walk, how? Do we run a marathon? No! Inventing, inventing pastoral action that involves the young, in something that makes them do something: in the holidays let's spend a week in a mission in that country, or giving social aid in another, or let's go to the hospital every week, this that ... or feeding the homeless in big cities ... The young are in need of this, and they feel they are Church when they do this. Even the young who do not confess, perhaps, or who do not take Communion, but they feel they are Church. Then, they will confess, then they will take Communion. But you, set them on their journey. And journeying, the Lord speaks, the Lord calls. And an idea comes: we must do this, I want to do this... and they get involved in the problems of others. The young on the move, not still. The young who stay still, who have everything secure, are young pensioners! And there are many of them nowadays. Young people who have everything guaranteed: they are pensioners in life. They study, they will have a profession, but the heart is already closed. And they are pensioners. So, journey, walk with them, make them walk, make them go. And on the way they will find questions, questions it is difficult to answer. I confess to you, when I have made visits to some countries or even here in Italy, in some cities, I usually meet or have lunch with a group of young people. The questions they pose, in those moments, make me tremble, because you don't know how to answer. Because they are restless, [in a positive sense], and this restlessness is a grace of God, it is a grace of God. You cannot stop restlessness. They will say silly things, at times, but they are restless, and this is what counts. And this restlessness is necessary to make them move.

"Get up!" The open door. Prayer. Closeness to them, listening to them. "But they are boring..." Listen to them, make them walk, make them go, with proposals to "do". They understand the language of the hands better than that of the head or of the heart; they understand doing; they understand well! They think enough, but they understand, if you give them something to do they do it well. They understand well: they have an acute capacity for judgement; they must sort out their minds a little but this comes, it comes with time.

And finally, the last thing that comes to my mind for vocational pastoral care is witness. A boy, a girl, it is true that they hear the call of the Lord, but the call is always concrete, and at least the majority of times, the great part, it is: "I want to become like this person or that one". It is our witness that attracts the young. The witness of good priests, good nuns. Once a nun went to speak in a college – she was a superior, I think a mother general, in another country, not here – who had gathered, this is historical, the educational community of that college of sisters, and this mother general, instead of speaking about the challenge of education, of the young they were educating, of all these things, began to say: "We must pray for the canonisation of our founding mother", and spent more than half an hour speaking about the founding mother, and that they must do this, ask for the miracle. ... But the educating community, the professors [thought]: "But why is she saying this, when we are in need of something else. ... Yes, it is good if she is beatified or canonized, but we need another message". At the end, one of the teachers – she was good, I knew her, said: "Mother, can I say something?" – "Yes" – "Your mother will never be canonised" – "But why?" – "Eh, because she is certainly in purgatory!" – "But don't say these things! Why do you say this?" "For having founded you. Because if you, who are the general, are so, let's

say, foolish, not to say more, then your mother general did not know how to educate you". Is it not so? It is witness: may they see in you what you preach. What led you to become priests, nuns, even laypeople who work hard in the House of the Lord. And not people who seek security, who close the door, who scare away others, who speak about things that are not interesting, who bore the young, who do not have time. "Yes, yes, but I'm in a bit of a hurry". No. We need great witness!

I don't know, this is what broke out in my heart from that "Get up!" that I heard from Msgr. Galantino, from the motto of your meeting. And I have spoken about what I felt. And I thank you for what you do, I thank you for this congress, I thank you for the prayers... and go ahead! For the world not to finish with us, we must go ahead...

Now, before the blessing, let us pray to Our Lady: "Hail Mary..."

### Holy Father's prepared address

Dear brothers and sisters!

At the end of your congress on the pastoral care of vocations, organised by the Office of the Italian Episcopal Conference, I am glad to be able to welcome you and meet you. I thank Msgr. Galantino for his kind words, and I congratulate you for the effort with which you continue this annual appointment, in which you share the joy of fraternity and the beauty of the different vocations.

Before us there opens up the horizon and the path towards the 2018 Synod Assembly, on the theme "*Youth, faith and vocational discernment*". The total and generous "yes" of a life given is similar to a wellspring, long hidden in the depths of the earth, which waits to emerge and flow forth, in a stream of purity and freshness. The youth of today are in need of a spring of fresh water to slake their thirst, so as to continue on their searching journey. "Young people want to live life to the fullest. Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by His love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint".

Your service, with its style of proclamation and vocational accompaniment, is also located on this horizon. Such commitment requires passion and a sense of gratuitousness. The passion of personal involvement, in knowing how to care for the lives that are presented to you as treasures containing a precious treasure to be preserved. And the gratuitousness of a service and ministry in the Church that requires great respect for those whom you accompany on their journey. It is the commitment to searching for their happiness, and this goes well beyond your preferences or expectations. I make my own the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "Be sowers of trust and hope. The sense of being lost that the youth of today often experience is indeed profound. Human words are frequently without a future or prospects, and also lack meaning and wisdom. ... Yet, this could be God's hour" (*Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to participants in the European Congress on the Pastoral Care of Vocations*, 4 July 2009).

To be credible and to be in tune with the young, it is necessary to favour the path of listening, of knowing how to "waste time" in hearing their questions and their desires. Your witness will be far more persuasive if, with joy and truth, you will be able to narrate the beauty, stupor and wonder of being in love with God, men and women who live with gratitude their decision in life to help others and to leave an unprecedented and original mark on history. This requires us not only not to be disoriented by external pressures, but also to trust in the mercy and tenderness of the Lord, reviving the fidelity of our choices and the freshness of our "first love" (cf. Ap. 2,5)

The priority of the vocational proclamation is not the efficiency of what we do, but rather the special attention to vigilance and discernment. It is having an outlook capable of perceiving the positive in the human and spiritual events that we encounter; a heart full of wonder and gratitude before the gifts people bear in themselves, casting light on potential rather than limits, the present and the future in continuity with the past.

There is a need nowadays for a vocational pastoral care with broad horizons and the breath of communion; capable of interpreting with courage reality as it is with its hardships and resistance, recognising the signs of the

generosity and beauty of the human heart. There is the urgency of restoring to Christian communities a new “vocational culture”. “The ability to dream and think big is also part of this vocational culture, that wonder that allows the appreciation of beauty and the choosing of it for its intrinsic worth, so that it might make life beautiful and true” (Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, *New Vocations for a new Europe*, 8 December 1997, 13b).

Dear brothers and sisters, never tire of repeating to yourselves, “I am a mission”, and not simply “I have a mission”. “We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 273). Being in permanent mission requires courage, audacity, imagination and the desire to go beyond. Indeed, “Arise, go, fear not” is the theme of your Congress. This helps you to remember many stories of vocations, in which the Lord invites those who are called to come out of themselves to be a gift for others; to these He entrusts a mission and reassures them: “Fear not, for I am with you” (Isaiah 41, 10). This, His blessing, offers constant and heartfelt encouragement so as to be able to go beyond the fears that close us in on ourselves and paralyse every desire for good. It is good to know that the Lord takes on board our frailties, restoring us to our feet to rediscover day after day the infinite patience to begin again.

Let us feel driven by the Holy Spirit to identify with courage new paths for the proclamation of the Gospel of vocation; to be men and women who, like sentinels (cf. Sal 130,6), know how to capture the streaks of light of a new dawn, in a renewed experience of faith and passion for the Church and for the Kingdom of God. The Spirit inspires us to be capable of a loving patience, that does not fear the inevitable delays and resistances of the human heart.

I assure you of my prayers, and please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

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