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Audience with participants in the International Convention promoted by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life

At 10.30 this morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the international Convention entitled: "*Consecratio et consecratio per evangelica consilia. Reflections, open questions, possible pathways*", promoted by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, and taking place in Rome at the Pontifical University *Antonianum* from 3 to 6 May.

The following is the Pope's off-the-cuff address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Good morning to you all!

I had thought of making a speech, well-written, good… But then it came to me to speak off-the-cuff, to say things suited to this moment.

The key to what I will say is what the Cardinal [Prefect of the Congregation] asked for: authentic criteria to guide us. Because truly, today many things happen and, so as not to lose ourselves in this world, in the fog of worldliness, of provocations, of the spirit of war, many things, we need authentic criteria that guide us. That guide us in discernment.

Then, there is something else: this Holy Spirit is a disaster [laughter], because He never tires of being creative! Now, with the new forms of consecrated life, He is truly creative, with the charisms… It is interesting: He is the Author of diversity, but at the same time the Creator of unity. This is the Holy Spirit. And with this diversity of charisms and many things, He makes the unity of the Body of Christ, and also the unity of consecrated life. And this too is a challenge.

I have wondered: what are the things that the Spirit keeps strong in consecrated life? And my thought flew, wandered … and the day I went to San Giovanni Rotondo kept coming to mind: I don't know why, but I saw there many consecrated men and women who work … and I thought of what I said there, of the "three Ps" that I said there. And I said to myself, these are pillars that remain, that are permanent in consecrated life: *prayer*, *poverty* and *patience*. And I have decided to speak to you about this: what I think prayer is in consecrated life, and then poverty and patience.

Prayer is always returning to the first calling. Any prayer, perhaps a prayer in need, but always a return to that Person who called to me. The prayer of a consecrated man or woman is a return to the Lord who invited me to be close to Him. Returning to Him, to He Who looked me in the eyes and said to me: "Come. Leave everything and come" – "But I would like to leave half" (we will speak of this in relation to poverty) – "No, come. Leave everything". And the joy in that moment of leaving the much or the little that we had. Each person knows what he or she has left: leaving one's mother, father, family, a career… It is true that some seek a career "inside", and this is not good. In that moment, I find the Lord Who has called me to follow Him closely. Every prayer is a return to this. And prayer is what makes me work for *that* Lord, not for my interests or the institution in which I work, no, for the Lord. There is a word that is used a lot, it is used too much and has lost some of its force, but which indicates this well: *radicality*. I do not like using it because it has been used too much, but it is this: I leave everything for You. It is the smile of the first steps… Then problems arrived, many problems that we all have all had, but it is always about returning to that encounter with the Lord. And prayer, in consecrated life, is the air that calling makes us breathe, renewing that calling. Without this air we would not be able to be good consecrated persons. We would perhaps be good people, Christians, Catholics engaged in many works of the Church, but consecration has to be renewed continually, in prayer, in an encounter with the Lord. "But I am busy, I have many things to do…". This is more important. Go and pray. And then there is that prayer that keeps us in the presence of the Lord during the day. But anyway, prayer. "But I have too risky a job, that takes up all my day". Let us think of a consecrated woman of our times: Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa even went "in search of problems", because she was a machine for searching for problems, because she went here and there… But the two hours of prayer in front of the Most Holy Sacrament, no-one could take away from her. "Ah, the great Mother Teresa!". But do as she did, do the same. Look for your Lord, He Who has called to you. Not only in the morning… Everyone must look for how to do this, when to do this. But always do it, pray. One cannot live consecrated life, one cannot discern what is happening without speaking with the Lord.

I would not like to speak any more on this, but you have understood well, I think. Prayer. And the Church needs men and women who pray, in this moment of great pain for humanity.

The second "P" is *poverty*. In the Constitutions, Saint Ignatius, of the Jesuits, had written this – but it was not something original of his, I think he had taken it from the Fathers of the Desert, perhaps – "Poverty is the mother, the perimeter wall of consecrated life". It is the "mother" – interesting. He does not say chastity, which is perhaps more connected to maternity, to paternity, no: poverty is mother. Without poverty there is no fruitfulness in consecrated life. It is the "wall", it defends. It defends you from the spirit of worldliness, certainly. We know that the devil enters via the pockets. We all know it. And the little temptations against poverty are wounds to our membership of the body of consecrated life. Poverty according to the rules, the constitutions of every congregation: they are not the same, the poverty of one congregation and another. The rules say: "Our poverty goes here", "Ours goes there", but always there is the spirit of poverty. And this cannot be negotiated. Without poverty we will never be able to discern well what is happening in the world. Without the spirit of poverty. "Leave everything, go to the poor", said the Lord to that young man. And all of us are that young man. "But I, no, father, I do not have much wealth". Yes, but you have something, some attachment. The Lord asks you for that: it will be the Isaac you have to sacrifice. Naked in the soul, poor. And with this spirit of poverty the Lord defends us – He defends us! – from the many problems and the many things that try to destroy consecrated life.

There are three steps for passing from religious consecration to religious worldliness. Yes, even religious: there is a religious worldliness, many religious and consecrated persons are worldly. Three steps. First: money, that is, the lack of poverty. Second: vanity, which goes from the extreme of being a "peacock" to little things of vanity. And third: arrogance, pride. And from there, all the vices. But the first step is attachment to wealth, attachment to money. If we keep watch over this, the others will not come. And I say wealth, not only money. To wealth. To be able to discern what is happening, it takes this spirit of poverty. Here is some homework: how is my poverty?

Look in the drawers, in the drawers of your souls, look in the personality, look in the Congregation… Look at how your poverty is going. It is the first step: if we protect this, the others will not come. It is the wall that defends us from the others, it is the mother that makes us more religious and makes us place all our wealth in the Lord. It is the wall that defends us from that worldly development that greatly damages every consecration. Poverty.

And third, *patience*. “But father, what does patience have to do with this?”. Patience is important. We do not speak about it habitually, but it is very important. When we look at Jesus, patience is what Jesus had to arrive at the end of His life. When Jesus, after the Supper, goes to the olive orchard, we can say that in that moment, in a special way, Jesus “enters in patience”. “To enter in patience”: it is the attitude of every consecration, that goes from the little things of community life or the life of consecration, that each person has, in this variety that the Holy Spirit makes… From the little things, the little tolerances, the little gestures of a smile when I would want to curse… up to the sacrifice of the self, of life. Patience. That “bearing on the shoulders” (*hypomoné*) of Saint Paul: Saint Paul speaks about carrying on the shoulders as a Christian virtue. Patience. Without patience, that it, without the capacity to bear suffering, without “entering in patience”, a consecrated life cannot be sustained, it will be a half measure. Without patience, for example, the internal wars of a congregation can be understood, they can be understood. Because they did not have the patience to bear each other, and the stronger part wins, which is not always the better part: and also that which is won is not the best, because it is impatient. Without patience, we can understand those careerisms in the general chapters, that trying to build the little groups first, to offer two examples. You have no idea how many problems, of internal wars and quarrels arrive to Msgr. Carballo! Secretary of the Congregation]. But he is from Galicia, he is capable of bearing this! Patience, bearing each other.

But not only patience in community life: patience before the suffering of the world. Bearing on your shoulders the problems, the suffering of the world. “To enter in patience”, as Jesus entered in patience to achieve redemption. This is a key point, not only to avoid those internal quarrels that are a scandal, but to be consecrated, to be able to discern. Patience.

And also patience before the common problems of consecrated life: let us think of the scarcity of vocations. “We do not know what to do, because we have no vocations… We have closed three houses”. This, what I say now, happened, happens: I know at least two cases, in a country that is too secularized, that relate to two congregations and two respective provinces. The province set out on this path that is also a worldly path, that of the “*ars bene moriendi*”, the attitude to die well. And what does this mean, in that province, in those two provinces of two different congregations? Closing admission to the novitiate, and those of us who are here age until we die. And the congregation in that place is finished. And these are not fairytales: I am speaking of two male provinces that have made this choice; provinces of two religious congregations. There is a lack of patience, and we end up with the *ars bene moriendi*. There is a lack of patience, and no vocations come? We sell, and we become attached to money to whatever may happen in the future. This is a sign, a sign that we are nearing death: when a congregation starts to become attached to money. It does not have patience, and falls to the second “P”, in the lack of poverty.

I may ask myself: what happened in those two provinces, that took the option of the *ars bene moriendi*, is it happening in my heart? Has my patience run out, and do I go ahead merely surviving? Without patience one cannot be magnanimous, one cannot follow the Lord: we get tired. We follow Him to a certain point, but at the first or second trial, we say goodbye. I choose the *ars bene moriendi*; my consecrated life has arrived at this point, then I close my heart and survive. It is in a state of grace, yes, certainly. “Father, I will not go to hell, will I?” No, maybe you will not go. But your life? You left the possibility of being a father and mother of a family, of having the joy of children, of grandchildren, all this, to end this way? This *ars bene moriendi* is the spiritual euthanasia of a consecrated heart that can not take it anymore, that does not have the courage to follow the Lord. And does not call...

I took the scarcity of vocations as a starting point to talk about this: this embitters the soul. “I have no offspring” was the lament of our father Abraham: “Lord, my riches will be inherited by an outsider”. The Lord told him: “Be patient. You will have a son” – “But at 90?” And the wife behind the window who – sorry, like women, she spied at the window, but this is a characteristic of women, it is fine, it is not bad – she smiled, because she thought: “Me, at 90? And my husband, almost 100, we will have a son?”. “Patience”, said the Lord. Hope. Onwards,

onwards, onwards.

Pay attention to these three “Ps”: *prayer*, *poverty* and *patience*. Be careful. And I think that the Lord will like – I will permit myself to use the word I do not like – *radical* choices in this sense. They may be personal, they may be communal. But you can bet on this.

I thank you for your patience in listening to this sermon [laughter, applause]. Thank you. And I wish you fruitfulness. You never know what path fruitfulness passes through, but if you pray, if you are poor, if you are patient, be sure that you will be fruitful. How? The Lord will show you “on the other side”; but it is the recipe to be fruitful. You will be a father, you will be a mother: fruitfulness. That is what I wish for religious life, to be fruitful.

Thank you! Continue to study, work, make good intentions, but always with that outlook that Jesus wants. And when you think of the first “P”, think of me and pray for me. Thank you!

Now let us pray to Our Lady: “Hail Mary...”

[Blessing]

Have a good day!