



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS TAKING PART IN THE SEMINAR
ORGANIZED BY THE CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 20 September 2014*

Dear Brothers,

I give you my cordial welcome, together with the heads of the Missionary Dicastery, led by Cardinal Fernando Filoni, whom I thank for the words with which he introduced our meeting. I hope that this review seminar may be fruitful for each one of you, both spiritually and pastorally. You answered with faith and generosity the call of the Lord, who has chosen you to be Shepherds of his flock. You have not been frightened by the difficulties and challenges of today's world (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 52-75), which make the Bishops' mission today even more arduous; but you have placed your trust in the Lord, like the first disciples and St Peter, who exclaimed: "at your word I will let down the nets" (Lk 5:5). You too are called, along with all the Pastors of Church, to base your mission on the word of Jesus, to offer hope to the world.

During these two weeks, you have examined the various aspects of life and the episcopal ministry which respond to the fundamental mission of the Church: to proclaim the Gospel. As I underlined in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, today there is an imperious need for missionary conversion (cf. nn. 19-49); a conversion which concerns every baptized person and every parish, but which the Pastors are naturally called to live and witness to first, as leaders of the particular Churches. I therefore encourage you to order your life and your episcopal ministry to this missionary transformation which challenges the People of God today.

At the centre of this missionary conversion of the Church is service to humanity, following the example of her Lord who washed the feet of his disciples. The Church, as an evangelizing community, is called to grow in proximity, to bridge distances, to abase herself to the point of

humiliation, if necessary, and to embrace human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 24). In this perspective, the Second Vatican Council, discussing the duty of the Bishop, as the guide of God's family, underlined that Bishops, in exercising their ministry as fathers and shepherds in the midst of their faithful, must act as "those who serve" always keeping before their eyes the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life for all (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, 16 October 2003, n. 42). Shining examples of this pastoral service are the holy martyrs of Korea: Andrea Kim Taegŏn, a priest, and Paul Chŏng Hasang and Companions, whose liturgical memorial we are celebrating today. Anchored in Christ, the Good Shepherd, they did not hesitate to shed their own blood for the Gospel, of which they were faithful disseminators and to which they were heroic witnesses.

The Church needs Pastors, and therefore servants, Bishops who know how to kneel before others to wash their feet. Pastors close to their people, meek, patient and merciful fathers and brothers, who love poverty both as freedom for the Lord and as simplicity and austerity of life. You are called to keep constant watch over the flock entrusted to you, to keep it united and faithful to the Gospel and to the Church. Strive to give an authentic missionary drive to your diocesan communities so that they may ever increase with new members, thanks to your testimony of life and your episcopal ministry exercised in service to the People of God. Be close to your priests, foster religious life and love the poor.

While I address you, I cannot but think of those Confreres who, for various reasons, are not here with us. To all of them I send a fraternal greeting and blessing. How I would like, for example, that the Chinese bishops ordained in recent years were present with us today! From the bottom of my heart, however, I hope that day is not far off! I wish to assure them not only of my and our solidarity but also that of the world's Episcopate so that, in common faith, even if at times they have the impression of being alone, they may feel the increasing certainty that their suffering will bear fruit — a great harvest! — for the good of their faithful, of their fellow citizens and of all the whole Church.

Dear brothers, we are on the journey of the Synod on the family. While I also trust in your prayers for the next Synod Assembly, I would like to underline with you that families are the basis of evangelizing work, with their mission of education and with their active participation in the life of the parish communities. I encourage you to promote the pastoral care of the family, so that families, accompanied and formed, may make an ever better contribution to the life of the Church and of society. May the Virgin Mary, Star of Evangelization, accompany you with her maternal tenderness. On all of you and on your dioceses, I invoke the blessing of the Lord.

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