



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE 36th GENERAL CONGREGATION OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

*General Curia of the Society of Jesus
Monday, 24 October 2016*

[Multimedia]

My dear Brothers and Friends in the Lord,

While I was praying about what to say to you today, a fond memory came to me of the last words Blessed Paul VI said to us at the end of our 32nd General Congregation: “This is the way, this is the way, brothers and sons. Forward, *in Nomine Domini!* Let us walk together free, obedient, united in the love of Christ, for the greater glory of God”.¹

Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI also encouraged us “*to walk in a manner worthy of the vocation to which we are called*”² (cf. Eph 4:1), and, “in the ecclesial and social context that marks the beginning of this millennium, ... *to continue on the path of this mission in full fidelity to your original charism. As my Predecessors have said to you on various occasions, the Church needs you, relies on you and continues to turn to you with trust, particularly to reach those physical and spiritual places which others do not reach or have difficulty in reaching*”.³

To walk together — free and obedient — moving toward the margins of society where no one else reaches, “under the gaze of Jesus and looking to the horizon which is the ever greater glory of God, who ceaselessly surprises us”.⁴ As Saint Ignatius reminds us, a Jesuit is called “to think and to live in any part of the world where there is a greater need of service to God and assistance for souls” [*Con.*, 304]. The fact is that “the Society must feel at home anyplace in the world”, as Nadal used to say.⁵ Saint Ignatius wrote to Francis Borgia about the criticism against the Jesuits that they were too “angelic” (Oviedo and Onfroy), for some people were saying that the Society was insufficiently trained and needed more instruction in the spirit: the spirit that guides them, Ignatius wrote, “ignores the state of things in the Society because these things are always *in fieri*, except

for what is absolutely necessary”.⁶ I rather like Ignatius’ way of seeing everything — except for what is absolutely essential — as constantly developing (*in fieri*), because it frees the Society from all kinds of paralysis and vain ambition.

What is necessary and essential is the *Formula of the Institute*, which we should keep constantly before our eyes after gazing at the Lord: “the nature of this Institute which is his pathway to God”. This is the way it was for the first members of the Society, just as they foresaw it would be “for those who will follow us along the path”. In this way, whether it be poverty or obedience or the dispensation from certain obligations such as praying in choir: all these things are neither needs nor privileges, but rather aids given to the Society so that its members may be available “to travel along the way of Christ Our Lord” (*Con.*, 582), so that, thanks to their vow of obedience to the Pope, they may receive “more certain direction from the Holy Spirit” (*Formula of the Institute*, 3). The *Formula* contains Ignatius’ insight, and its essence is what accounts for the Constitution’s insistence on always keeping in mind the priority of “places, times, and persons”, and the fact that all the rules are intended to help us in concrete situations.

For Ignatius the journey is not an aimless wandering; rather, it translates into something qualitative: it is a “gain” or progress, a moving forward, a doing something for others. This is how it is expressed in the two *Formulas of the Institute* approved by Popes Paul III (1540) and Julius III (1550), centering on the Society’s solicitude for the faith — its defence and propagation — and on the lives and instruction of the people. Here Ignatius and his first companions use the word “*aprovechamiento*” or “benefit” (*ad profectum*,⁷ cf. Phil 1:12, 25) to describe the practical criterion of discernment in Ignatian spirituality.

Aprovechamiento is not individualistic but communal. “The purpose of this Society is not directed merely at the salvation and perfection of the souls of its members by divine grace, but rather by the same grace to work assiduously for the salvation and perfection of the souls of our neighbours” (*Ex.*, 1, 2). And if Ignatius’ heart was inclined in one direction or the other, it was toward helping his neighbours; so much to the point that he would get angry whenever he was told that someone wanted to spend time with the Society “in order to save his soul. Ignatius did not want people who were good for their own sake if they did not want to place themselves at the service of their neighbours” (Aicardo I, point 10, p. 41).

Aprovechamiento pervades everything. Ignatius’ *Formula* expresses an inherent tension: “not only ... but ...”; this mentality of holding tensions together — one’s own salvation and perfection with the salvation and perfection of others — beginning with the higher order of grace, is a distinctive characteristic of the Society. The harmonizing of this and all tensions (contemplation and action, faith and justice, charisma and institutions, community and mission ...) is not contained in abstract formulas but rather obtained over the course of time through that which Fabro calls “our way of proceeding”.⁸ By walking and “moving forward” in following the Lord, the Society is harmonizing the tensions of the different groups of people who make it up and the missions it embraces and

undertakes.

Aprovechamiento is not elitist. In the *Formula*, Ignatius goes on to describe the means of a more universal *aprovechamiento* specific to priesthood. But first let us note that works of mercy are taken for granted in the *Formula*. It says: “without these being an obstacle” to mercy! The works of mercy — the cure of the sick in the hospital, alms and their distribution, the teaching of the young, bearing hardships patiently — these were the vital milieus in which Ignatius and his first companions moved and existed. These were their daily bread. They took great pains to prevent anything from getting in the way of these!

In the end, this kind of *aprovechamiento* is “what is best for us”. It is a *magis*, that *plus* that leads Ignatius to undertake initiatives, to follow them through, and to evaluate their real impact on peoples’ lives in matters of faith, justice, mercy, and charity. The *magis* is the fire, the fervour of action that rouses us from slumber. Our saints have always been an incarnation of this. It was said of Saint Albert Hurtado that he was “a sharp dart stuck in the sleeping flesh of the Church”. This counters the temptation that Paul VI labeled *spiritus vertiginis* and what De Lubac called “worldly spirituality”. A temptation that is not primarily moral but spiritual as it distracts us from what is essential: namely, to be *aprovechamiento*, to leave an imprint or a mark in history, especially in the lives of the smallest.

“The Society is zealous”, Nadal affirmed.⁹ In order to reignite the mission’s fervour for “benefiting” people in their concrete lives and through teaching, I would like to ground my reflections in three points which, from the moment the Society established itself in the missions it undertook, have especially enhanced our way of proceeding. These three points are joy, the Cross, and the Church — our Mother — and they have the purpose of taking a step forward, taking away the impediments that the enemy of human nature places in front of us when, in the service of God, we rise from good to better.

1. Ask persistently for consolation

We can always improve in praying persistently for consolation. The Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Amoris Laetitia*, along with the Encyclical *Laudato Si’*, were meant to highlight the importance of joy. In the *Exercises*, Ignatius asks his companions to contemplate “the task of consolation” as something specific to the Resurrected Christ (*Spiritual Exercises*, 224). It is the specific task of the Society to console the Christian faithful and to help them in their discernment so that the enemy of human nature does not distract us from joy: the joy of evangelizing, the joy of the family, the joy of the Church, the joy of creation.... Let us never be robbed of that joy, neither through discouragement when faced with the great measure of evil in the world and misunderstandings among those who intend to do good, nor let it be replaced with vain joys that are easily bought and sold in any shop.

This “service of joy and spiritual consolation” is rooted in prayer. It consists in encouraging

ourselves and others “to ask persistently for God’s consolation”. Ignatius expresses this in a negative formulation in the sixth rule of the first week when he affirms: “It is very helpful intensely to change ourselves against the same desolation” by persisting in prayer (*Spiritual Exercises*, 319). It is helpful because in desolation we realize how weak we are without grace and consolation (cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 324). To practice and teach this prayer of asking and begging for consolation is our main service of joy. If one does not consider himself worthy (something that happens often in practice), he should at least persist in asking for this consolation out of a love for the message, since joy is constitutive of the Gospel, and he should ask it also out of a love for others, his family, and the world. One cannot deliver good news with a sullen face. Joy is not a decorative “addition” but a clear indicator of grace: it indicates that love is active, operative, present. Therefore searching for it should not be confused with searching for some “special effect” easily produced today for the mere purpose of consumption, but rather it should be sought in its essential trait of “permanence”: Ignatius opens his eyes and awakes to this discernment of spirits by discovering the difference between the joys that endure and the joys that pass away (*Autobiography*, 8). Time becomes the element that offers him the key to recognizing the action of the Spirit.

In the *Exercises*, progress in the spiritual life is made through consolation: it is a moving from good to better (cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 315) as well as “every increase of hope, faith, and charity” (*Spiritual Exercises*, 316). This service of joy was what led Ignatius’ first companions to establish rather than disband the Society to which they offered themselves and shared spontaneously, and whose distinctive characteristic was the joy it gave them of praying together, being sent as missionaries together, and reuniting in imitation of the life that the Lord and His Apostles led. This joy of an explicit proclamation of the Gospel — by means of the preaching of the faith and the practice of justice and mercy — is what drives the Society out to the margins of society. The Jesuit is a servant of the joy of the Gospel, be it when he is working “in the workshop” of giving retreats — even if to one person, helping him or her to encounter that “interior place whence comes the strength of the Spirit that guides, frees, and renews”¹⁰ — or when he is working in a structured way by organizing works of formation, mercy, and reflection, all of which are an institutional outgrowth of that point of “inflection” in which we allow our will to be overcome and the Holy Spirit comes into action. M. De Certeau said it well: the *Exercises* are “the apostolic method *par excellence*” insofar as they make possible “a return to the heart, to the principle of docility to the Spirit, who awakens and encourages whoever undertakes the exercises to personal fidelity to God”.¹¹

2. Allow ourselves to be moved by the Lord on the Cross

We can always improve somewhat in allowing ourselves to be moved by our crucified Lord, both in person and as present in the sufferings of so many of our brothers and sisters — indeed, the majority of the human race! Just as Fr Arrupe said, wherever there is pain, the Society is there.

The Jubilee of Mercy is a privileged time to reflect on the “services” of mercy. I use the plural

because mercy is not an abstraction but a lifestyle consisting in concrete gestures rather than mere words: reaching out and touching others and institutionalizing the works of mercy. For those of us who perform the Exercises, this grace by means of which Jesus commands us to become like the Father (cf. Lk 6:36) begins with a conversation of mercy that is an extension of our conversation with the crucified Lord because of our sins. The entire second Exercise is a conversation full of sentiments of shame, confusion, sorrow, and tears of gratitude by seeing precisely who I am — by making myself small — and who God is — by magnifying him — he who “preserved my life until now” (*Spiritual Exercises*, 61); and by seeing who Jesus is, hanging on the cross for me. The way in which Ignatius lives and formulates his experience of mercy is of great personal and apostolic benefit and requires an acute and elevated sense of discernment. Our spiritual father said to Saint Francis Borgia: “As for me, I persuade myself both before and after that I am nothing but an obstacle; and from this I derive great spiritual contentment and joy in our Lord insofar as I cannot take credit for anything that appears good”.¹² Ignatius therefore lives completely on God’s mercy even in the littlest things. He felt that the greater the obstacle in life, the greater the goodness with which the Lord treated him: “the Lord’s mercy was so great and the tenderness and sweetness of His grace so abundant within him, that the more he wished to be castigated in this way, the greater was God’s goodness toward him and the more generously He showered him with the treasures of His infinite generosity. Laonde said he believed there was no other man in the world in whom these two things came together more strikingly: failing God so much on the one hand, and receiving so many graces from Him on the other”.¹³

Ignatius, in formulating his experience of mercy in these comparative terms — the more he felt he was doing wrong in the Lord’s eyes, the more the Lord showered him with His grace — liberated the dynamic strength of mercy that we so often dilute with abstract formulae and legalistic conditions. The Lord, who looks upon us with mercy and chooses us, sends us forth with the same powerful mercy to the poor, the sinners, the abandoned, the crucified and anyone who suffers from injustice and violence in today’s world. Only when we experience this healing force in our own lives and in our own wounds — as individuals and as a body (i.e., the community) — will we be able to lose our fear of allowing ourselves to be moved by the immense suffering of our brothers and sisters so as to go out and walk patiently with our people, learning from them the best way to help and serve them (cf. *General Constitutions*, 32d, 4, n. 50).

3. Do good with a good spirit by ‘feeling with the Church’

We can also take a step forward in doing good with a good spirit: “feeling with the Church”, as Saint Ignatius says. It is also a distinctive service of the Society to facilitate the discernment of *how* we do things. Fabro formulated it by asking the grace that “all the good that can be realized, thought, and organized, has to be done with a good spirit, not a bad spirit”.¹⁴ This grace of discerning is not limited to thinking, doing, and organizing well, but rather of doing these things with a good spirit: this is what roots us in the Church in which the Spirit works and distributes his various gifts for the common good. Fabro used to say that in many cases those who wanted to reform the Church were well intentioned, but God did not wish to correct the Church using their

methods.

It is distinctive of the Society to do things by “feeling with the Church”. To do this joyfully and without disturbing the peace, considering the sins we perceive within ourselves and the structures we have created, entails carrying the cross and experiencing poverty and humiliation, the locus in which Ignatius encourages us to choose between patiently enduring them and desiring them.¹⁵ Whenever the contradiction was more pronounced, Ignatius gave the example of reflecting before speaking or acting in order to work in a good spirit. The rules of “feeling with the Church” are not to be read as precise instructions on controversial points (some of them arise spontaneously), but rather as examples where Ignatius extended the invitation to “act against” the anti-ecclesial spirit of his time, inclining always and decisively on the side of our Mother, the Church; not to justify a controversial point, but rather to open up space in which the Spirit could work in his own time.

The service of good-spiritedness and discernment makes us men of the Church — ecclesial men, not clerical men — men “for others”, having nothing that isolates us but placing everything we have in common and at the service of others.

We walk neither by ourselves nor for our own comfort; we walk with “a heart that does not rest, that does not close in on itself but beats to the rhythm of a journey undertaken together with all the people faithful to God”.¹⁶ Let us walk by making ourselves all things to all people by seeking out someone to help.

This shedding of ourselves makes it possible for the Society to always have the face, the way of speaking, and the way of being of all peoples, all cultures, by inserting ourselves into all of them, into the specific heart of each people, to build up the Church with each of them, by inculturating the Gospel and evangelizing every culture.

Let us ask Our Lady of the Way, speaking as a son with his mother or as a servant with his Mistress, to intercede for us in the presence of the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor 1:3), that he may place us once again together in the presence of his Son, Jesus, who takes up the cross of the world and asks us to take it up with him. Let us entrust him with our “way of proceeding”, that it may be ecclesial, inculturated, poor, ministerial, and free of worldly ambition. Let us ask our Mother to guide and accompany each Jesuit to that portion of the faithful People of God to which he is sent, *on the ways of consolation, compassion, and discernment*.

1) *Address to the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, 3 December 1974.

2) *Homily, Mass at the opening of the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, 2 September 1983.

- 3) *Address to the participants of the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, 21 February 2008.
- 4) Cf. Francis, *Homily, Liturgical Memorial of the Most Holy Name of Jesus*, Church of the Gesù, 3 January 2014.
- 5) MNadal V, 364-365.
- 6) *Letter 51, to Francis Borgia*, July 1549, 17 n. 9. Cf. M. A. Fiorito and A. Swinnen, *La Fórmula del Instituto de la Compañía de Jesús* (introducción y versión castellana), *Stromata*, July-December 1977 — n. 3/4, 259-260.
- 7) “Ad profectum animarum in vita et doctrina Christiana” in *Monumenta Ignatiana, Constitutiones T. I* (MHSI), Rome, 1934, 26 and 376; cf. *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* annotated by General Congregation 34 and the *Complementary Norms*, Rome, ADP, 1995, 32-33.
- 8) Cf. MF. 50, 69, 111, 114, etc.
- 9) Cf. MNad V, 310.
- 10) Pierre Favre, *Mémorial*, Paris, Desclée, 1959; cf. Introduction by M. De Certau, 74.
- 11) *Ibid.*, 76.
- 12) Ignatius of Loyola, *Letter 26 to Francis Borgia*, c. 1545.
- 13) P. Ribadeneira, *The Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, Rome, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1863, 336.
- 14) Pierre Favre, *Mémorial* cit. n. 51.
- 15) Cf. *Directorio Autógrafo* 23.
- 16) Francis, *Homily, Liturgical Memorial of the Most Holy Name of Jesus*, Church of the Gesù, 3 January 2014.