



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTERS OF THE
CANOSSIAN SONS OF CHARITY AND
THE BROTHERS OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION OF SAINT GABRIEL**

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 29 April 2024*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I joyfully greet you all, “Canossian” Sons and Daughters of Charity and Brothers of Saint Gabriel, and in particular the Superiors General. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of your Chapters, which are fundamental synodal events for every religious Congregation.

Above all, they are entrusted with the safeguarding of the heritage of intentions and projects with which the Spirit inspired your Founders, and of all the good that has arisen from them (cf. CIC 578; 631). They are therefore moments of grace — a Chapter is a moment of grace — to be lived first of all in docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, gratefully remembering the past, paying attention to the present — in mutual listening and the reading of the signs of the times (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 4) — and looking to the future with an open and trustful heart, for personal and community verification and renewal. Past, present and future enter into a Chapter, to remember, evaluate and progress in the development of the Congregation.

Dear Canossian friends, it is very good to see you here, men committed to following Christ more closely (cf. *Perfectae caritatis*, 1; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 916) in the footsteps of a woman, Magdalene of Canossa, whose 250th birth anniversary we are celebrating. This courageous Saint, in a world no less difficult than ours, set out to “make Jesus known and loved, who is not loved because He is not known”. And you, who want to continue her missionary work,

have chosen this phrase as the theme of your work: “*He who does not burn does not set fire*”. It makes me sad when I see religious brothers and sisters who look more like firefighters rather than men and women with ardour to set alight. Please, do not be firefighters! We already have many of them. You thus commit yourselves to *burning to ignite*, reviving and fueling the “gift of God that you have”, so as to bear “testimony to the Lord” (cf. 2 *Tim* 1:6). And you do so in a family that, over more than two centuries of history, has been enriched by many gifts: present in seven countries and made up of members of 10 different nationalities, supported by the communion and collaboration with the Canossian sisters and with an increasingly active and involved lay reality. This is important, having laypeople involved in the spirituality of an institute and who collaborate in its apostolic work. Certainly, it is a legacy that also brings challenges, but Saint Magdalene has shown you how to overcome difficulties: with eyes turned to the Crucified [Jesus] and with arms open to the least, the small, the poor and the sick, to heal, educate and serve our brothers and sisters with joy and simplicity. When the journey gets difficult, then, do as she did: look at the Crucified Jesus and look at the eyes and wounds of the poor, and you will see that gradually the answers will make way in your hearts with ever greater clarity.

As we have also been taught by Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort and Father Gabriel Deshayes, to whose work we owe the foundation of the Brothers of Saint Gabriel, you too, dear brothers, are busy these days discerning God’s will for your journey, as we approach an important anniversary: 350 years since the birth of Saint Louis-Marie. Your family, born from a small group of lay collaborators of the great preacher, today numbers more than 1,000 religious, engaged in pastoral care, human and social promotion and education — especially in favour of blind and deaf people — in 34 different countries. To keep your presence alive, which is a prophetic presence, you have chosen to reflect on the theme “*Listening and acting with courage*”. “Courage”: that apostolic parrhesia, the courage that we read about, for example, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. That courage. It is the Spirit who gives us that courage, and we must ask for it.

There are two attitudes — listening and courage — that require humility and faith, and which reflect well the spirit and action of Saint Louis-Marie and Father Deshayes, who have also left you a precious triptych as a compass to guide your decisions: “*God alone*”, the “*Cross*” — engraved in the heart — and “*Mary*”. Providence has given to you too, then, the richness of a variegated internationality: it will be very good for your growth and your apostolate if you know how to experience it by welcoming and constructively sharing diversity among yourselves and with everyone. This is an important message, especially in our world, often divided by selfishness and particularism: differences are gifts to be shared, diversities are precious gifts! Be prophets of this with your lives. And the One who makes harmony among diversity is the Holy Spirit, who is the master of harmony. Uniformity in a religious institute, in a diocese, in a lay group, kills! Diversity in harmony makes one grow. Do not forget this. Diversity in harmony.

Dear friends, a Chapter is a “family event, but also a Church event and a salvific event” (cf. Blessed E.F. Pironio, *Address to the General Chapter of the Salesians*, 14 January 1984). I thank

you for what you are doing, and for the work that you carry out every day in many different places and conditions. I bless you and I entrust you to Mary; and I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me. Thank you!

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