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## **The four pillars of life in the seminary: the Pope's impromptu address to the community of the Pius XI regional seminary**

The following are extensive extracts from the Holy Father's extemporaneous address to seminarians from the Pius XI Pontifical Regional Seminary of Puglia, located in the city of Molfetta, Italy.

"For me, Molfetta is a word with great resonance. ... And it recalls to me a woman, a nun, a great women, who worked a lot in the seminaries, also in Argentina, near our house of formation: Sister Bernadetta. .. When I, as Master of Novices and also as provincial superior, had problems with someone, I sent them to speak with her. And she, with a couple of 'spiritual slaps', sorted that out. This wisdom of the women of God, of mothers. It is a grace to grow in the priestly vocation with these women close by, these mothers, who know how to say things that the Lord wants to be said. ...

I wanted to say this to pay homage to this woman and to many like her, who consecrate their life to the Lord, and are close to the apostolate of priests, who are close to the formation of priests in the seminaries; they have that wisdom, that wisdom of mothers; they know how to say what the Lord wants to be said. And for me it is a duty to mention Sister Bernadetta today. And I thank this land for having given us a woman like that.

Yours is a seminary, and a seminary forms priests. Priests who, at times, have problems, make mistakes. ... When there are scandals about priests, we are accustomed to hearing them. The press pays well for this news. ... Because the rule of scandal has a high value on the media markets. How can a priest be formed without there being a failure in his life, a collapse? So that his life is fruitful? ... Not only that he is a good priest who follows all the rules. No, no. Who gives life to others. Who is the father of a community. A priest who is not a father is of no use. ... The paternity of pastoral vocation: giving life, making life grow; not neglecting the life of a community. And doing this with courage, strength and tenderness.

And you – 180 of you? – have embarked upon this path to become fathers of the community. ... Look to your fathers in faith ... and ask the Lord for the grace of ecclesial memory. The history of salvation did not start with me, you might say. My Church has a tradition, a long tradition of good priests. Take this tradition and carry it forward. And it will not finish with you. Try to leave this legacy with those who will take your place. ... And here we reach another work that I would like to say to you, seminarians: closeness. One cannot be a priest, detached

from the people. Closeness to the people. And it is the Lord Who gave us the best example of closeness. With his *synkatabasis* He made Himself close to us, close, close, to the point of taking on our flesh. Closeness! A priest who is detached from his people is not capable of bearing Christ's message. He is not capable of giving the caresses of Jesus to the people; he is not capable ... putting a foot in the door to stop it being closed. ... Closeness means patience; it means burning out, because, let's be honest, the holy people of God can tire us. ... That healthy tiredness of work, of giving one's life to others, continually in service to others. When you begin, 'I have a parish, but I would like to make a school there. But why do you want a school? For money? Are you afraid of poverty? If you are afraid of poverty, then your vocation is in danger. Because poverty will be what makes your donation to the Lord grow, and will build a wall to protect you, because the poverty of consecrated life, the life of priests, is mother and wall; ... it gives life and protects. A priest close to the people, close to the problems of the people.

When you find a priest who distances himself from the people ... yes, he comes, he celebrates Mass and then goes away because he has other interests other than the people entrusted to him – this harms the Church. ... There is no other path: it is the path of Incarnation. There are many gnostic offerings today, and one may be a good priest, but not Catholic, gnostic but not Catholic. No, no, Catholic, incarnate, near, who knows how to caress and suffer with the flesh of Jesus in the sick, in children, in the people, in problems, in the many problems our people have.

To be close like Jesus ... it is necessary to know Jesus. But I would ask: how much time do you stay seated before the Tabernacle each day? ... At least spend a moment by the Tabernacle. 'Ah yes, it's true! But I fall asleep... Blessed be the Lord! What could be more beautiful than falling asleep before the Lord. It happens to me. This is not a sin, it is not a sin. Even St. Therese of the Child Jesus taught us to do this. ... Do not leave the Lord of the Tabernacle alone. ... 'Ah, but when I entered the seminary, I did not think this would be my path ... I thought I would be a priest ... I thought I would do many good things'. And this is important, but it is more important to encounter Jesus, and starting from Jesus, to do all the rest. Because the Church is not an NGO, and pastoral care is not a pastoral plan. This help is a tool, but pastoral ministry is dialogue, the continual discussion – sacramental, catechetical, of teaching – with the people. And who leads pastoral ministry? The pastoral council of the diocese? No. That too is a tool. The Holy Spirit guides it. ... We all say Glory to the Lord, we all say 'I believe in the Holy Spirit', but in your life, how does the Holy Spirit enter? Do you know how to identify the inspirations of the Spirit in your heart? 'But Father, this is for mystics'. No, it is for all of us!

In the seminary, there are four pillars: spiritual life, prayer; community life with your companions, the life of study; because we must study – no-one tolerates a priest who does not understand things, who has no method for understanding things and who does not have a solid base of knowledge of the things of God; and fourth, apostolic life. At the weekend you go to the parish and you have this experience. These four pillars, may they always be present. ... And returning to the Holy Spirit, I would like to underline a virtue, very important and necessary for the priest: apostolic zeal. To have this, you must be open to the Holy Spirit; He will give you apostolic zeal. You must ask for it! Discreet zeal, but apostolic.

I began speaking with a nun, and wish to finish with a priest. ... An icon without a person, but which I saw as a boy very often: the telephone, because there was no answering machine, there were no cellphones, just the telephone on the priest's bedside table. These good priests, who get up at any hour of the night to go to a sick person, to give the sacraments – 'but I must rest, the Lord saves all, leave the telephone off the hook ...' This [willingness] is apostolic zeal, this is what it means to spend your life in the service of others. And at the end, what remains to you? The joy of service to the Lord! Think about the nun, and think about the telephone on the bedside table; think about the people, think about the Tabernacle; think of the four pillars. Many things to think about ... And think also of the bishops, your fathers: if you have something against him, sooner or later, the first who must know this is him, and not others in gossip".

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