



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Audience with the participants in the General Chapter of the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master

At 12.15 today, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Chapter of the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Holy Father's Address

I welcome you all and cordially greet the new Superior General, and the new advisors. I hope that this important time of the General Chapter may bear abundant evangelical fruits in the life of your Institute.

Fruits, first of all, of communion. Open to the Holy Spirit, Master of diversity. Master of unity in difference, you walk in communion together that respects plurality, that leads you to tirelessly weave unity in legitimate differences, taking account also of the fact that you are present in different countries and cultures. "How can we enable each member to say freely what he or she thinks, to be accepted with his or her particular gifts, and to become fully co-responsible?" (*Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated Persons*, 21 November 2014, II, 3). Cultivating care and reciprocal acceptance; practising fraternal correction and respect for the weaker sisters; growing in the spirit of living together; banishing from the community all divisions, envy, gossip; saying this with frankness and charity. Yes, and you can live like this. All the other things I mentioned before destroy, destroy the Congregation.

Fruits of communion with the brothers and sisters of the Pauline Family. You have a common father and founder, Don Giacomo Alberione, and also a common mission: bringing to the men and women of our time the Gospel, particularly, in your case, through liturgical service and caring for priests. This is good.

Fruits of communion with other charisms. It is the moment of synergy of all consecrated persons, to welcome the riches of other charisms and to put them in the service of evangelization, remaining faithful to one's own identity. "No one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone" (*ibid*). Therefore, I invite you to cultivate

dialogue and communion with other charisms, and to combat any form of self-centredness. It is ugly when a consecrated man or woman is self-centred, always looking at him or herself in the mirror. It is ugly.

Fruits of communion, finally, with the men and women of our time. Our God is the God of history and our faith is a faith that works in history. In the questions and expectations of the men and women of today, we find important indications for our discipleship of Christ.

The Chapter is the time for listening to the Lord Who speaks to us through *signs of the times*; a time for mutual listening and therefore of openness to what the Lord communicates to us through our brothers; time to serenely and without prejudice compare our projects with those of other people. All this requires openness of mind and heart. In this sense the Chapter is a good time to exercise the spirit of exodus and hospitality: coming out of oneself to welcome with joy the part of the truth that the other communicates to me, and to walk together towards the full truth, the only one that frees us (cf. John 8:32).

Listen to the sisters. I think one of the most important apostolates of today is the apostolate of the ear: listen. *Listening* to the sisters, as well as the men and women of today, and *sharing* with them: these attitudes are necessary for a good Chapter and for a healthy fraternal life in the community, in whose growth everyone feels involved, everyone gives and everyone receives. Never tire of exercising continually the art of listening and sharing. In this time of great challenges, that demand of consecrated people creative fidelity, impassioned research, listening and sharing are more important than ever before, if we want our life to be fully meaningful for ourselves and for the people we meet.

To this end it is necessary to maintain a climate of *discernment*, to recognise what belongs to the Spirit and what is contrary to Him. Before us there opens up a world of possibilities. The culture in which we are immersed presents all of them as valid, all of them as good, but if we do not want to fall victim to the culture of *zapping* and, at times, a culture of death, we must increase our *habitus* of discernment. Never tire of asking, personally and in the community, "Lord, what do you want me to do?", "What do you want us to do?".

The Chapter is also a time to renew obedience to the Spirit that inspires *prophecy*. This is an indispensable value for consecrated life, inasmuch as it is a special form of participation in the prophetic mission of Christ. This involves being bold and humble at the same time, passionate about God and about humanity, to become spokespeople for God against evil and against every sin (cf. *Consecrated Life*, 84).

As consecrated women you live firsthand the *prophecy of joy*. This is in the first place. In the first place there is the prophecy of joy, the joy of the Gospel. It is a prophecy. The world today is in need of this: that joy that arises from the encounter with Christ in a life of personal and community prayer, in daily listening to the Word, in the encounter with brothers and sisters, in a happy fraternal life in the community, including fragility, and in the embrace of the flesh of Christ in the poor. Prophets of a joy that is born of feeling loved and therefore forgiven.

Joy is a beautiful reality in the life of many consecrated persons, but it is also a great challenge for all of us. A sad discipleship is a sad discipleship! And authentic joy, not self-referential or complacent, is the most credible witness of a full life (cf. John 10:10), as in this "radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ" (*Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated Persons*, 21 November 2014, II, 1).

At the same time, this joy that fills your hearts and manifests itself on your faces will lead you to go out to the peripheries, participating in the joy of the Church, that is evangelization. But to do this there must be a true joy, not counterfeit joy. Do not falsify joy. Evangelization, when you are convinced that Jesus is the Good News, is joy and gladness for all. This joy drives away the cancer of resignation, fruit of the lethargy that withers the soul. Please, resigned nuns, no! Joy. But the devil will say, "But there are just a few of us, we do not have vocations ...". And in this way faces become long, down, down, down... and you lose your joy, and we end up with this resignation. No, you cannot live like this: the hope of Jesus Christ is joy.

I encourage you also to be prophets of hope, with eyes turned to the future, where the Spirit pushes you, to continue to do great things with you (cf. *Consecrated Life*, 110). St. Hilary of Poitiers, in his Comments on the

Psalms (118, 15, 7) echoed a question that many posed and continue to pose to Christians today: “Where, O Christians, is your hope?” As consecrated persons we know that we cannot be deaf to this question. Like all disciples of Jesus, we know that hope is for us a responsibility, because we have been called to respond in hope to whomsoever asks its reason (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). The hope that does not disappoint is not based on numbers or works, but on Him, for Whom nothing is impossible (cf. Luke 1:37).

St. Augustine says that “only hope makes us truly Christians” (*The City of God*, 6, 9, 5). And in another work he affirms, “Our life, now, is hope, then it will be eternity” (*Comment on the Psalms* 103, 4, 17). Only hope enables us to walk the road of life, only hope makes us capable of the future. Jesus Christ and His hope (cf. 1 Timothy 1:1): we have placed our trust in Him (cfr. 2 Timothy 1:12), and with the strength of the Holy Spirit we can be prophets of hope.

With this trust and this strength I repeat to you: do not join the prophets of misfortune, who do great damage to the Church and to consecrated life; do not give in to the temptation of torpor – like the Apostles in Gethsemane – and desperation. Strengthen your vocation as “morning sentinels” (cf. Isaiah 21:11-12) to be able to announce to others the coming of the dawn. *Awaken the world, illuminate the future!* Always with a smile, with joy, with hope.

Thank you, for what you are, for what you do and for how you do it, also here in Vatican City. Thank you very much! May Mary our Mother protect you with her gaze, and the Lord bless you, show you His Face, and grant you peace and mercy.

Please, pray for me.
