



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 240914a

Saturday 14.09.2024

Audience with participants in the pilgrimage organized by the Congregation of Clerics Regular (Theatines)

This morning, in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the pilgrimage organized by the Congregation of Clerics Regular (Theatines), on the fifth centenary of its founding.

The following is the Holy Father's greeting to those present at the audience:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet the Prepositor General, and all of you. I am pleased to meet you on the fifth centenary of the solemn vow of Saint Cajetan of Thiene and his first companions, made here, in this Basilica, on 14 September 1524. History tells us that the Theatines had some differences with the Jesuits, but I don't believe it! Let us go forward.

It was the beginning of your religious institute, established to practice and promote "communal life and service to God through brothers", and to contribute to the reform of the Church via the reform of oneself, based on the first apostolic community (cf. *Mk* 3:13-15). I thank you, and I would like to encourage you to continue to walk in this threefold direction, in *renewal*, *communion* and *service*. And I like to do so by taking as my starting point the place where we are and the circumstances in which your Founders made their vow.

First: *renewal*. The first Theatines did not make their solemn vows in a perfect building, complete, as we see it today, but practically in a large building site. Such was the appearance of the Vatican Basilica in 1524. For some time, in fact, work had begun on the gradual demolition of the old Constantinian building, no longer suited to the needs of God's people, in order to build a new one. Work was proceeding slowly, funds were scarce, and even the plans were not entirely clear. Yet they set to work, because the community was growing and the previous structures were no longer sufficient. Brothers, this is an image that helps us reflect on the need, in order to

remain faithful to our mission, to embark on courageous paths of renewal. It is interesting: fidelity must be renewed. There cannot be fidelity that is not renewed, remaining founded on the old, yes, but at the same time ready to demolish what is no longer needed in order to build something new (cf. *Lk* 5:36-39) docile to the Spirit and trusting in Providence. This is *renewal*.

The second thing: *communion*. As we know, many people have worked at Saint Peter's: famous artists, skillful craftsmen and a multitude of workers and labourers, men and women, engaged in the humblest of tasks, united in the same effort to bring the new building into being. And this too is an important sign: indeed, a welcoming home is not built alone, but together, in a community, valuing the contribution of all (cf. *1 Cor* 12:7-11).

Renewal, communion and, third point, the "fabric", that is, *service*. The most beautiful plans would have led to nothing if people had not rolled up their sleeves and set to work. Good intentions remain barren if one does not genuinely place oneself at the service of others, with humility, good will and a spirit of sacrifice. Saint Cajetan showed us this, with the many charitable works he promoted, some of which still live today; but Jesus was the first to teach us this, by coming not to be served, but to serve and to give His life (cf. *Mk* 10:45). And it is very significant that your institute was established precisely on the festivity of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Dear brothers and sisters, how beautiful this Basilica is! Then, however, let us look at each other and remember that the building where we find ourselves is merely a symbol: we are the reality, personally and as a community. Five hundred years ago your founders did not consecrate their life to a building site filled with bricks and marble, but to living stones (cf. *1 Pt* 2:4-5); they consecrated their life to the Church with a capital "C"; the Church, Bride of Christ, people of God and mystical body of the Lord (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 6-9). It is for her good that each of them spent themselves to the very end, bringing to life a work that, after centuries of fidelity, is today entrusted to you. Be bold and go forward!

I therefore invite the entire Theatine Family to embrace joyfully, in today's Jubilee, intentions of *renewal*, *communion*, and *service*, following the example of Saint Cajetan. Thank you, thank you very much for the work you do. I bless you and I pray for you! And please, do not forget to pray for me.
