

Pope's Address
to participants in the International Congress
for the Episcopal Vicars and Delegates for Consecrated Life

Dear Brothers and Sisters, I greet you warmly and thank you for having come to this first International Congress of Episcopal Vicars and Delegates for Consecrated Life. Through you, I wish to greet all your Bishops and to express my appreciation for the attention they give to consecrated life in its different expressions. I thank Cardinal Braz de Aviz for the words with which he introduced our meeting.

You, dear brothers, are called to help the Bishop in all that concerns consecrated life (cf. *CIC*, 479 §2). Today I would like to share with you three brief reflections.

1. Consecrated life in the particular Church.

Consecrated life is a gift to the Church, it is born in the Church, it grows in the Church <and> is altogether oriented to the Church" (Apostolic Letter *To All the Consecrated* on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, 5). This is a principle that cannot be forgotten either by the Pastors or by the consecrated. In fact, consecrated life "expresses emblematically" and with altogether particular force "the contribution of a charismatic gift to the baptismal priesthood and to the ministerial priesthood" and, "as such, is placed in the charismatic dimension of the Church" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, May 15, 2016, 22c.) It is for the Bishops to receive it "with joy and gratitude" (cf. *Ibid.*, 8), showing to it benevolence, paternity and solicitous love.

Consecrated life is "a spiritual capital that contributes to the good of the whole Body of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 43) and not only of Religious Families" (Apostolic Letter *To All the Consecrated* on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, III, 5). For this reason, I have asked and ask also today the Pastors and you, Vicars and Delegates of Consecrated Life, receive it "warmly and joyfully" (*Ibid.*) as a reality that "is in the very heart of the Church" and "as decisive element of her mission," in as much as it "belongs irrevocably to her life and to her holiness" (*Ibid.*). Therefore, I encourage the Pastors, and you with them, to manifest a special solicitude in promoting in your Churches the various charisms, be they old or new; to be close to the consecrated, with tenderness and love, and to teach the People of God the value of consecrated life.

I remind the consecrated that a just autonomy and exemption cannot be confused with isolation and independence. Today more than ever it is necessary to live a just autonomy and exemption, in the Institutes that provide them, in close relation with insertion, in such a way that the charismatic freedom and the catholicity of consecrated life are also expressed in the context of the particular Church. The latter

would not respond fully to what Jesus desired for His Church, if it were deprived of consecrated life, which is part of her essential structure, in the same way as the laity or the ordained ministry. It is for this reason that, in the light of Vatican Council II, we speak today of the *co-essentialness* of the hierarchical gifts and of the charismatic gifts (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4), which flow from the one Spirit of God and nourish the life of the Church and her missionary action. All these gifts are destined to contribute in different ways, to the building of the Church, and in harmonious and complementary relation between them. Pastors are called to respect, without manipulating, “the multi-dimensionality that constitutes the Church and through which the Church manifests herself.” On their part, the consecrated must remember that they are not “a closed patrimony,” but “an integrated facet in the body of the Church, attracted to the center, that is Christ” (J.M. Bergoglio, Address to the Synod on Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World, XVI, General Congregation, October 13, 1994).

2. *Erection of new Institutes of Consecrated Life.*

Both before and after Vatican II, several Institutes of Consecrated Life arose and continue to arise. The Spirit does not cease to blow where it wills and when it wills (cf. *John* 3:8). It being the responsibility of the diocesan Bishop to discern and recognize the authenticity of charismatic gifts and to erect in the diocese Institutes of Consecrated Life, this cannot be done without a serene and appropriate discernment that, in addition to the criteria pointed out in the Apostolic Letter *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* in n. 18, takes account of the originality of the charism, of its prophetic dimension, of its insertion in the life of the particular Church, of the affective and effective communion with it and with the universal Church, of the commitment for evangelization, also in its social dimension; as well as verifying that the founder has shown proven ecclesial maturity, with a life that does not contradict the action of the Holy Spirit, author of the charisms, and that these charisms harmonize adequately in the ecclesial communion (cf. *Ibid.*, 17). Finally, I remind you of the obligation to always consult previously the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, as I recently established in giving a clarification on canon 579.

At the moment of erecting a new Institute one cannot think only of its usefulness for the particular Church. The Bishops, their Vicars and Delegates, as well as the Congregation itself for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, cannot be simplistic when they exercise this grave responsibility. The Pastors must consider that, in erecting a new Institute, they are certainly exercising a right proper to them but that at the same time they are assuming a responsibility in the name of the universal Church, from the moment that such an Institute is destined to grow and to come out of the confines of the Diocese that saw its birth. And, moreover, it is necessary to consider prudently the duty to provide appropriate

formation to the candidates. Because it is a delicate decision, it is good that the Bishops allow themselves to be helped by all those that have experience of consecrated life, and you can also be among these, dear brothers.

3. *Mutual relations.*

You play an important role in the *mutual relations* between the Pastors and the consecrated. I know that this subject will be studied during the present Congress, but in the Synod of '94 it was requested to look again at the Instruction *Mutuae relationes*: we are somewhat late! At present it is the object of a specific study of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic life and of the Congregation for Bishops, whom I have asked to re-elaborate the document *Mutuae relationes*.

In addition to the updating of the norms that must govern mutual relations between the Bishops and all forms of consecrated life, masculine and feminine, it is about reflecting further on the value of reciprocity, which commits Pastors and the consecrated. Mutual relations do not exist where some command and others submit themselves, out of fear or convenience. Instead, there are mutual relations where dialogue, respectful listening, and reciprocal hospitality, encounter and knowledge, shared quest for the truth, the desire of fraternal collaboration for the good of the Church, which is "house of communion," are cultivated. All this is the responsibility both of the Pastors and of the consecrated. In this connection, we are all called to be 'pontiffs," builders of bridges. Our time requires communion in respect of diversities. We are not afraid of diversity, which comes from the Spirit.

Finally, I would like to ask you to give special attention to the contemplative Sisters. As I affirmed in the recent Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere*, this way of *following Christ*, rooted "in the silence of the cloister," represents in the Church and for the Church the "praying heart, custodian of gratuitousness and of rich apostolic fecundity," which generates "precious fruits of grace and mercy" and of "many-sided holiness" (n. 5). The Church, also the particular Church, is in need of these "lighthouses that indicate the route to reach the port," of these "torches that accompany the path of men and women in the dark night of time," of these "watchmen of the morning that herald the rising of the sun" (*Ibid.*, 6). Accompany them with fraternal affection, treating them always as adult women, respecting their own competencies, without undue interferences. Accompany them by giving them help in all that refers to the essential elements of their life, as they are presented in the mentioned Apostolic Constitution (cf . nn. 12ff), and taking into account the Instruction that the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life will produce (cf. *Ibid.*, 14 §1). Focusing all your attention on one element, as important as it might be, such as the case of cloister or that of autonomy, could lead to a vital imbalance that would have sad consequences for the life of these Sisters.

Dear brothers, love consecrated life and to this end proceed so as to know it in depth. Build mutual relations from the ecclesiology of communion, from the principle of co-essentiality, from the just autonomy that corresponds to the consecrated. Greet your Bishops and all the consecrated of your dioceses on my behalf.

I assure you of my prayer and you, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thanks you and have a good Congress!

[Original text: Italian] [Translation by ZENIT]

10/28/2016