



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE ITALIAN CONFERENCE OF SECULAR INSTITUTES**

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 10 May 2014*

The Pontiff spoke extemporaneously:

I wrote an address for you, but something happened today. It's my fault because I granted two audiences not quite at the same time, but almost. Thus, I would rather consign this text to you, because reading it now would be tedious, and I will just say two or three small things that might help you.

From the time in which Pius XII thought of it, *Provida Mater Ecclesia* was a revolutionary gesture in the Church of that day. Secular institutes are themselves an act of courage that the Church made at that moment; such as to give structure, to institutionalize XX secular institutes. And from that time up to now, the good you do for the Church is very great, it is done with courage; for one needs great courage to live in the world. Many of you are alone, many come and go in your apartment; some of you live in small communities. Everyday you live the life of a person in the world, and, at the same time, retain contemplation. This contemplative dimension with the Lord and in relation to the world, to contemplate reality, to contemplate the beauty of the word as well as the great sins of society, its deviations, all these things, and always in spiritual tension.... This is why your vocation is so fascinating, because it is a vocation which is spot on, where the salvation not only of people but of the institutions are at stake. And a great many lay institutions are necessary in the world. That is why I think that *Provida Mater Ecclesia* was a truly revolutionary step for the Church!

I hope that you will always retain this attitude of going beyond, not only beyond, but beyond and in between. There, where everything is at stake: politics, the economy, education, family... precisely

there! Perhaps you are tempted maybe to think: “But what can I do?”. When you are tempted like this, remember that the Lord spoke to us about the grain of wheat! Your life is like a grain of wheat... precisely; it is like leaven... precisely. Doing everything possible so that the Kingdom may come, grow and be great, and also so that it may shelter many people, like the mustard tree. Think about this. Small life, small gesture; normal life with a leaven, a grain that produces growth. And this may reward you. The outcome of the Kingdom of God cannot be foreseen. Only the Lord allows us to divine something... We shall see the results in heaven.

Therefore it is important that you foster great hope! It is a grace which you must always ask the Lord for. Hope never disappoints. It never disappoints! A hope that moves forward. I would advise you to read often Chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews, that chapter of hope. And to learn that many of our forefathers took this path and did not see the results, but they anticipated them beforehand. Hope.... This is what I wish for you. Many thanks for all you do in the Church; many thanks for your prayers and work. Thanks for the hope. And do not forget: be revolutionary!

Prepared address of the Holy Father:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you on the occasion of your Assembly and I greet you saying that I understand and value your vocation! It is one of the most recent forms of consecrated life the Church has recognized and approved, and perhaps that is why it is not yet fully understood. Do not be discouraged: you are part of that poor Church which goes out and which I dream of!

As a vocation, you are lay and priestly like others and among others, you lead an ordinary life, free from outward signs, without the support of community life, without the visibility of an organized apostolate or specific works. Your only wealth is the all encompassing experience of God's love and thus you are able to understand and share the toils of life in its many expressions, infusing them with the light and power of the Gospel.

May you be a sign of that Church in dialogue of which Paul VI speaks in his Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*: “Since the world cannot be saved from the outside”, he stated, “we must first of all identify ourselves with those to whom we would bring the Christian message like the Word of God who Himself became a man. Next we must forego all privilege and the use of unintelligible language, and adopt the way of life of ordinary people in all that is human and honourable. Indeed, we must adopt the way of life of the most humble people, if we wish to be listened to and understood. Then, before speaking, we must take great care to listen not only to what men say, but more especially to what they have it in their hearts to say. Only then will we understand them and respect them, and even, as far as possible, agree with them. Furthermore, if we want to be men's pastors, fathers and teachers, we must also behave as their brothers. Dialogue thrives on friendship, and most especially on service” (nn. 90-96).

The theme of your Assembly, “At the heart of human events: the challenges of a complex society”, indicates the scope of your mission and of your prophetic scope. You are in the world but not of the world, carrying within you the essence of the Christian message: the love of the Father who saves. You are at the heart of the world with the heart of God.

Your vocation makes you *interested* in every man and in his deeper issues which are often left unexpressed or masked. By the strength of the love of God which you have encountered and come to know, you are capable of sympathy and tenderness. Thus, you can be close enough to *touch* the other, his wounds and his expectations, his questions and his needs, with the tenderness that is an expression of care that erases all distances. As the Samaritan who *passes by, sees and takes compassion*. This is the action to which you are committed by your vocation: pass by every man and make yourself a neighbour to every person you meet. Because your permanence in the world is not simply sociological, it is a theological reality that calls you *to be* aware, attentive, that can perceive, see and touch the flesh of his brother.

If this does not happen, if you are distracted, or worse still, if you do not know today’s world but you know and experience only the world which suits you best or that you feel more drawn to, then conversion is urgently needed! Yours is an *outward reaching* vocation by nature, not only because it brings you into contact with others, but also and especially it demands that you live where every man lives.

Italy is the country with the largest number of secular institutes and members. You are a leaven that can produce good bread for many, the Bread for which there is so much hunger: listening to people’s needs, aspirations, disappointments, hopes. Like those who have preceded you in your vocation, you can restore hope to young people, help the elderly, open roads to the future, spread love in every place and in every situation. If this does not happen, if your ordinary life lacks witness and prophecy, then, I repeat to you, there is an urgent need for conversion!

Never lose the momentum of *walking the streets of the world*, aware that walking, even with an uncertain step or limping along, is always better than standing still, withdrawn in your own questions or sense of security. The missionary passion, the joy of the encounter with Christ that urges you to share with others the beauty of faith, reduces the risk of becoming stuck in individualism. The line of thought that proposes man as self-reliant, guided only by his own choices and desires, often vested in the seemingly beautiful garment of freedom and respect, threatens to undermine the foundations of consecrated life, especially of lay people. There is an urgent need to reevaluate your sense of *belonging to your vocational community* which, precisely because it is founded on community life, finds its strengths in its charisma. For this reason, if each of you are a precious opportunity for others to meet with God, it is about rediscovering the responsibility of being prophetic as a community, to seek together, with humility and patience, a word of sense that can be a gift for the country and for the Church, and to bear witness to it with simplicity. You are like *antennas* ready to receive the smallest innovations prompted by the Holy

Spirit, and you can help the ecclesial community to take on this gaze of goodness and find new and bold ways to reach all peoples.

Poor among the poor, but with a burning heart. Never still, always on the move. Together and *sent out*, even when you are alone, because your consecration makes of you a living spark of the Church. Always on the road borne along by the virtue that is of pilgrims: joy!

Thank you, dear friends, for what you are. May the Lord bless you and Mary keep you. And pray for me!