



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE 68th GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE**

*Synod Hall
Monday, 18 May 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers, Good afternoon!

I greet you all and I greet those appointed after the last Assembly, as well as the two new Cardinals created after the last Assembly.

When I hear this passage from the Gospel of Mark, I think: Mark has it in for Mary Magdalene! Because up to the very end he reminds us that she had been possessed by seven demons. But then I think: and how many have I hosted? And I keep quiet.

I would first of all like to express my gratitude to you for this meeting, and for the theme you have chosen: “the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*”.

The joy of the Gospel, at this historic moment in which we are often hemmed in by disheartening news, by local and international situations that cause us to feel distress and tribulation — in this scenario of scant comfort — our Christian and episcopal vocation is to go against the current: in other words, to be joyful witnesses to the Risen Christ in order to pass joy and hope on to others. Our vocation is to hear what the Lord asks of us: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (Is 40:1). Indeed, we are asked to comfort, to help, to encourage, without distinction, all of our brothers and sisters oppressed by the burden of their crosses, to accompany them and never tire of working to uplift them with the power that comes only from God.

Jesus, too, says to us: “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men” (Mt 5:13). It is truly distressing to encounter a despondent, demoralized or apathetic

consecrated person: that person is like a dry well where people find no water to quench their thirst.

Therefore today, knowing that you have chosen the Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* as the topic of this meeting, I would like to hear your ideas, your questions, and share with you some of my questions and reflections.

My questions and concerns arise from a global view — not only of Italy, but global — and especially from the countless meetings I have had in these two years with Bishops' Conferences, where I have noted the importance of what might be defined as ecclesial sensitivity: that is, embracing the very sentiments of Christ, of humility, compassion, mercy, concreteness — the charity of Christ is concrete — and most of all wisdom.

Ecclesial sensitivity which also entails not being timid or retreating, but in denouncing and defeating a widespread mentality of public and private corruption which has shamelessly managed to impoverish families, retired people, honest workers, Christian communities, discarding young people, systematically deprived of every hope for their future, and most of all marginalizing the weak and the needy. Ecclesial sensitivity which, as good pastors, helps us go out toward the People of God to defend them from ideological colonization which takes away identity and human dignity.

Ecclesial sensitivity is also shown in pastoral choices and in the drawing up of Documents — our own — in which the abstract theoretical-doctrinal aspect must not prevail, as though our directions were not meant for our People or our country — but only for some scholars and specialists. Instead we must endeavour to translate them into concrete and easily understood recommendations.

Ecclesial and pastoral sensitivity are also expressed by strengthening the essential role of lay people willing to take on their proper responsibilities. In reality, lay people who have an authentic Christian formation should not need a helmsman-Bishop, or pilot-monsignor, or the input of clergy in order to take on their proper responsibilities at all levels, from the political to the social, from the economic to the legislative! They have, rather, the need of a Pastor Bishop!

Lastly, ecclesial sensitivity is revealed concretely in the collegiality and communion between the Bishops and their Priests; in the communion among the Bishops themselves; between the Dioceses that are materially and spiritually wealthy and those in difficulty; between the peripheries and the centre; among the bishops' conferences, and the Bishops with the Successor of Peter.

In certain parts of the world a diffuse weakening of collegiality is noted, shown both in the absence of determination in pastoral planning, and the sharing of programmatic economic and financial commitment.

The regular review of the reception of programmes and the effective implementation of plans are lacking. For example, a conference or event is organized, which by giving prominence to the usual voices, thus narcotizes communities, homogenizing choices, opinions and people, instead of allowing ourselves to be transported toward those horizons where the Holy Spirit is calling us to go.

Another example of the absence of ecclesial sensitivity: why do we let so many religious institutes, monasteries, congregations grow old, almost to the point of no longer being Gospel witnesses faithful to their founding charism? Why do we not arrange to consolidate them before it is too late from so many perspectives? This is a worldwide problem.

I shall stop here, as I only wished to offer a few examples of ecclesial sensitivity, which has been weakened by the continuous confrontation with the enormous worldwide problems and by the crisis which does not even spare the very Christian and ecclesial identity.

May the Lord — during the Jubilee of Mercy which begins on 8 December — grant us “the joy of rediscovering and rendering fruitful God’s mercy, with which we are all called to give comfort to every man and every woman of our time.... Let us henceforth entrust this Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey” (*Homily, 13 March 2015*).

This was only an introduction. Now I leave you time to offer your reflections, your ideas, your questions on *Evangelii Gaudium* and all you would like to ask, and I thank you very much!