



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE
LITTLE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF CHARITY (DON ORIONE)**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 26 May 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Sisters,

Thank you for this visit on the occasion of your General Chapter. I greet the Superior General and the Counsellors in particular, and through you, I greet all the Sisters of the Institute, especially the weakest and most infirm. I also greet the Contemplative Sisters of Jesus Crucified and the Sacramentine Sisters with impaired vision.

Founded by Don Orione, your Institute is called upon to carry out works of charity toward your neighbour, in particular, toward the poorest, the abandoned and the marginalized, as is well expressed by the theme you have chosen for this General Chapter: “To give oneself completely to God, to be completely given to the neighbour! psmc [Little Missionary Sisters of Charity]: missionary disciples, joyful witnesses to charity in the suburbs of the world”. On behalf of the Church and many poor people, in particular women and children, and of many people who suffer from physical and psychological illnesses, whom you assist, I thank you for your apostolic work in the various fields of youth ministry in schools, in retirement homes, in the little “*Cottolengo*” institutes, in catecheses and oratories, with the new forms of poverty, and in all the places where Divine Providence has placed you.

You are called and you are by vocation “missionaries”; that is, evangelizers, and at the same time you are at the service of the poor. Sisters, may you be missionaries without borders. To all, but in particular to the poor, in whom you are called to recognize the flesh of Christ, you bring the joy of the Gospel that is Jesus himself. You show everyone the beauty of God’s love which is manifested in the merciful face of Christ. You fill the hearts of those you encounter with this beauty. May

closeness, encounter, dialogue, and accompaniment be your missionary approach. And do not let yourselves be robbed of the joy of evangelization.

Mission and service to the poor inspire you to “go forth”, and help you to overcome the risks of self-reference, of limiting yourself to survival and self-defensive rigidity (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 27, 45). Mission and service lead you to take on the dynamics of exodus and giving, of coming out of yourselves, of walking and sowing; as well as pastoral conversion, so that all structures may be evangelizing and at the service of your charism (cf. *ibid.*, nn. 21, 25, 131). For all these purposes, it is vital to nurture communion with the Lord, knowing that your intimacy with him “is part of a common journey; ‘communion and mission are profoundly interconnected’” (*ibid.*, n. 23); it does not stand still. In prayer, in communion.

Mission in the Church is born from the encounter with Christ (cf. Phil 3:12-16). The One sent by the Father now sends us. He is the one who calls us and sends us. Jesus is the centre of the mission of the Church. As his disciples, you are called to be women who work assiduously to transcend yourselves, oriented toward the encounter with the Master and the culture in which you live.

Missionaries are required to be bold and creative. The convenient criterion of “it has always been done this way” is not valid. It is not valid. Think again about the aims, the structures, the style and the methods of your mission (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 33). We are living at a time when we need to rethink everything in light of what the Spirit asks of us. This demands a special look at the recipients of the mission and at reality itself: the gaze of Jesus, which is the gaze of the Good Shepherd; a gaze which does not judge, but which perceives the presence of the Lord in history; a gaze of closeness, to contemplate, to be moved, and to stay with the other as often as necessary; a profound gaze of faith; a respectful gaze, full of compassion, that heals, frees, and comforts. This special gaze will make you courageous and creative and will help you always to search for new ways to bring the Good News that is Christ to all.

Missionaries are also asked to be free people, living without anything of their own. I never tire of repeating that comfort, sloth and worldliness are forces that prevent missionaries from “going forth”, “departing”, setting out, and ultimately sharing the gift of the Gospel. Missionaries cannot walk with their heart full of things (comfort), with their heart empty (sloth) or in search of things which are extraneous to the glory of God (worldliness). Missionaries are free of all this dead weight and chains; people who live without anything of their own, only for the Lord and for his Gospel; people who live on a constant journey of personal conversion and work unceasingly towards pastoral conversion.

Missionaries are asked to be people inhabited by the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who *reminds* the disciples of all that Jesus said to them (cf. Jn 14:16), who *teaches* them (cf. Jn 16:14-15), who bears witness to Jesus and leads the disciples, in turn, to bear *witness* to him (cf. Jn 15:26-27).

Missionaries are asked to be docile to the Spirit, to further his action, the “wind” that propels towards the most unimagined places to proclaim the Gospel there. In such obedience, one is called to grow continually in this docility, to become capable of perceiving the presence of Jesus in so many people rejected by society. You too, dear sisters, may you be spiritual people in this sense; let yourselves be led, urged forth and guided by the Spirit.

Missionaries are asked to have a spirituality based on Christ, on the Word of God, and on the liturgy. A “holistic” spirituality, involving the whole person in its various dimensions, based on complementarity, integrating and incorporating. This allows you to be daughters of heaven and daughters of the earth, mystical and prophetic, disciples and witnesses at the same time.

Lastly, missionaries are called to be prophets of mercy. The Year of Consecrated Life came to an end as the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy began. This path called upon us to purify our eyes and our hearts from indifference so as to welcome and offer to the world, with humility, as servants, the prophecy of mercy, after the likeness of God the Father. Your charism as servants to the poor asks you to exercise the prophecy of mercy, that is, to be people centred on God and on the crucified ones of this world. Allow yourselves to be moved by the cry for help of so many situations of pain and suffering. As prophets of mercy, proclaim the forgiveness and the embrace of the Father, a source of joy, serenity and peace (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, n. 2).

Along with the other Institutes and Movements founded by Don Orione, you form a family. I encourage you to walk the paths of cooperation with all members of this rich charismatic family. No one in the Church walks “alone”. Nurture amongst yourselves a spirit of encounter, the spirit of family and cooperation.

I shall conclude by offering to you as an example for your mission and for your service to the poor the icon of the Visitation. Like the Virgin Mary, set out in haste — not the hastiness of the world, but that of God — and, full of the joy that dwells in your heart, sing your *Magnificat*. Sing the love of God for every creature. Proclaim to today’s men and women that God is love and can fill the heart of those who seek him and who let themselves be encountered by him.