



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SUPERIORS GENERAL**

Synod Hall

Saturday, 26 November 2022

[\[Multimedia\]](#)

I am pleased to welcome you all, members of the Union of Superiors General, and the Archbishop, Secretary of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. I thank Fr Arturo Sosa for his kind words.

In your Assembly, based on the Encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, you addressed the theme, *Called to be artisans of peace*. It is an urgent appeal that concerns everyone, particularly consecrated people: to be artisans of peace, of that peace the Lord has given us and which makes us feel like we are all brothers and sisters: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (*Jn 14:27*).

What is the peace that Jesus gives us, and what sets it apart from that which the world gives? In these times, hearing the word “peace” makes us think especially about a situation of no war or of an end to war, a state of tranquillity and well-being. This — we know — does not fully correspond to the meaning of the Hebrew word *shalom*, which has a richer meaning in the biblical context.

The peace of Jesus is first of all *his gift*, the fruit of charity. It is never a human conquest; and starting from this gift, it is the *harmonic ensemble of one’s relationships*, with God, with oneself, with others and with creation. Peace is also the experience of mercy, of God’s forgiveness and benevolence, which in turn gives us the ability to show mercy, forgiveness, rejecting every form of violence and oppression. This is why God’s peace as a gift is inseparable from being builders and witnesses of peace. As *Fratelli Tutti* says, “peacemakers, men and women prepared to work boldly and creatively to initiate processes of healing and renewed encounter” (no. 225).

As Saint Paul reminds us, Jesus broke down the dividing wall of hostility among people, reconciling them to God (cf. *Eph 2: 14-16*). Such reconciliation defines the ways of being “peacemakers” (*Mt 5:9*) because, as we said, it is not simply an absence of war or a balance of power between enemies (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 78). Rather, it is based on recognition of the dignity of the human person, and requires an order to which justice, mercy and truth inseparably contribute (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 227).

“Making peace” is therefore artisanal labour, to be carried out with passion, patience, experience, tenacity, because it is a process that endures through time (cf. *ibid.*, 226). Peace is not an industrial product but handcrafted. It is not made mechanically. It requires man’s knowledgeable intervention. It is not mass-produced using only technological development. Rather, it requires human development. This is why peace processes must not be delegated to diplomats or armies: peace is the responsibility of each and every person.

“Blessed are the peacemakers” (*Mt 5:9*). Blessed are we, consecrated men and women, if we strive to sow peace with our daily actions, with attitudes and gestures of service, fraternity, dialogue, mercy; and if, in prayer, we unceasingly ask Jesus Christ, “our peace”, (*Eph 2:14*) for the gift of peace. Thus, consecrated life can become a prophecy of this gift, if consecrated men and women learn to be its artisans, starting from their own community, building bridges and not walls within their community and outside of it. There is peace in the community when each person contributes by charitably doing his or her duty. The world needs us, consecrated men and women, also as artisans of peace!

This reflection on peace, brothers and sisters, brings me to consider another aspect that is characteristic of consecrated life: *synodality*, this process into which we are called to enter as members of the holy People of God. As consecrated people, then, we are called in a particular way to participate in it, since consecrated life is synodal by nature. It also contains many structures that can foster synodality: I am thinking about the chapters — general, provincial or regional and local — the fraternal and canonical visits, the assemblies, the commissions and other structures that are specific to each institute.

I thank those who have offered and are offering their contribution to this journey, at various levels and in different areas of participation. Thank you for making your voice as consecrated people heard. But, as we well know, having synodal structures is not enough. We need to “revisit them”, asking ourselves first of all: how are these structures prepared and utilised?

In this context, one must view and perhaps also re-examine the way of exercising the service of authority. Indeed, it is necessary to be alert to the danger that it could degenerate into authoritarian, sometimes despotic forms, with abuses of conscience or spiritual abuses that are also fertile ground for sexual abuses, because people and their rights are no longer respected. And furthermore, there is the risk that authority will be exercised as a privilege, for those who hold

it or for those who support it, thus also as a form of complicity between the parties, so that everyone does what they want, thus paradoxically fostering a kind of anarchy, which does so much damage to the community.

I hope that the service of authority will always be exercised in a synodal style, respecting its own right and the mediations it provides, to prevent authoritarianism, privileges and a “leave it at that” attitude; fostering an atmosphere of listening, of respect for the other, of dialogue, participation and sharing. With their witness, consecrated people can contribute greatly to the Church in this process of synodality we are living. As long as you are the first to live it: to walk together, to listen to each other, to value the variety of gifts, to be a welcoming community.

From this perspective, suitability and aptitude assessment paths are also part of the process, so that a generational renewal of the leadership of institutes can take place in the best possible way. Without improvisations. In fact, understanding modern-day problems, often unprecedented and complex, requires adequate formation. Otherwise, one does not really know where to go and “plays it by ear”. Moreover, the reorganization or reconfiguration of an institute must always take place with the safeguarding of communion in mind, so as not to reduce everything to the amalgamation of circumscriptions, which may then prove difficult to manage or a cause for conflict. In this regard, it is important for superiors to be careful to avoid having some people who are not well occupied, because this not only harms them, but also generates tensions in the community.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for this encounter! I hope you will continue to carry out your service with serenity and fruitfulness, and that you will be artisans of peace. May Our Lady accompany you. I offer you my heartfelt blessing and I ask you, please, to pray for me.