



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PONTIFICAL MARONITE COLLEGE IN ROME

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 16 February 2018*

[Multimedia]

Your Excellency, Dear Brothers,

I greet you with affection, pleased to welcome you. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the approval of the new Statute of your College. It is the occasion, other than to meet together, also to commemorate your history and to *deepen your roots*. In reality, this very time that you are spending in Rome is a time for strengthening roots. I think of roots present in the very name of your Church, which takes us back to Saint Maron — you have celebrated him just days ago — and, with him, to monasticism, to that form of life that is not content with a moderate and discrete faith, but perceives the need to go further, to love wholeheartedly. Lives poor to the eyes of the world, but invaluable to God and others. And by drawing from these wellsprings too, your ministry will be good water for today's thirsty. Our heart, like a compass, seeks where to orient itself and steers toward that which it loves; "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt 6:21), Jesus says. In these years, helped by spiritual formation, by study, by community life, you have the grace to settle your heart well, so that you may find the enthusiasm of your great fathers and mothers in the faith.

However, today there is the risk of being absorbed by the culture of the provisional and of appearance. These years are the occasion to become antibodies against worldliness and mediocrity. They are years of exercise in the "Roman gym", where, with the help of God and of those who accompany you on the journey, you are able *to reinforce the foundations*: first and foremost those of an indispensable spiritual discipline, which is founded on the pillars of *prayer* and *interior effort*. A liturgical and personal prayer which is not satisfied by beautiful rites but which brings life before the Lord and the Lord into life. A patient interior effort which, open to discussion, helped by study and tempered by commitment, fosters a discernment that recognizes temptations

and unmasks falsehoods, in order to live out the ministry in the greatest freedom, without duplicity, without hypocrisy.

The human, intellectual and spiritual enrichment that you receive in these years is not an award for you, much less an asset to cultivate for one's career, but a treasure earmarked for the faithful who await in your Eparchies and to whom your life waits to be given. Because you will not be called to perform a task, even well — it is not enough! — but *to live a mission*, without holding back, without many calculations, without limited availability. You yourselves will need to listen closely to the people: God, indeed, will also confirm you through their lives, through many encounters, through his unpredictable surprises. And you, as Pastors in close contact with the flock, will taste the most genuine joy when you bend down to them, making their joy and their suffering your own, and when, at the end of the day, you can tell the Lord of the love you have given and received.

You are called to live all this in a time not lacking in suffering and danger, but also full of hope. The people who will be entrusted to you, disoriented by the instability that unfortunately continues to impact the Middle East, will seek in you Pastors who console them: Pastors with the Word of Jesus on their lips, with hands ready to dry the tears and to caress the suffering faces; Pastors who forget themselves and their own interests; Pastors who never become discouraged, because each day they draw from the Eucharistic Bread the sweet strength of satiating love; Pastors who are not afraid to “be consumed” by the people, as good bread offered to your brothers and sisters. Before the many needs that await you, the temptation may come to act in a worldly manner, seeking those who are strong rather than those who are weak, looking to those who have means rather than to those who have none. But when this temptation arrives, you must immediately return to the roots, to Jesus who rejected success, glory, money, because the one treasure that directed his life was the will of the Father: to proclaim salvation for all peoples, to proclaim with his life the mercy of God. This changes the narrative. And everything begins from not losing sight of Jesus, from looking to him as Saint Maron, Saint Charbel, Saint Rafqa and many of your other “heroes of holiness” looked to him. They are the role models to imitate in order to ward off the temptations of careerism, power, clericalism. The path that honours Christian life is not the ascent toward worldly rewards and gratifying certainties, but the humble descent in service. It is the path of Jesus; there is no other.

I would again like to share two wishes with you, considering your valuable ministry. The first: *peace*. Today fraternity and integration represent urgent challenges; they can no longer be postponed. And in this regard, Lebanon has not only something to say, but a special *vocation of peace* to fulfil in the world. Among the sons and daughters of your land, you will be called in a special way to serve everyone as brothers and sisters, first and foremost feeling that you are brothers and sisters of all. Helped by your knowledge, strive so that Lebanon may always correspond “to its vocation to be light for the peoples of the region and a sign of the peace that comes from God” (John Paul ii, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *A new hope for Lebanon*, 125).

The second wish is about young people. As a Church we want to keep them ever more at heart, to accompany them with trust and patience, by dedicating time and listening to them. Young people are the promise of the future, the most serious investment for your ministry. Pope Benedict, in meeting them, said: “young people of Lebanon, be welcoming and open, as Christ asks you and as your country teaches you” (*Meeting with young people, 15 September 2012*). It is your mission to help them to open their hearts to the good, so they may experience the joy of welcoming the Lord into their life.

Dear brothers, I thank you for your presence and, as I entrust you to the protection of Our Lady of Lebanon and of your great Saints, I give you my blessing and I ask you to remember me in your prayers. Thank you.