



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE APOSTOLIC UNION OF THE CLERGY

*Consistory Hall
Thursday, 16 November 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Priests, Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” (Ps 133[132]:1). This Psalm verse goes well after the words of Msgr Magrin, the enthusiastic president of the International Confederation ‘Apostolic Union of Clergy’. It is truly a joy to meet you and feel the fraternity that grows among us, called to the service of the Gospel in the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd. I offer each one of you my cordial greeting, which I extend to the representatives of the Apostolic Union of the Laity.

In this Assembly you are reflecting on the ordained ministry “*in, for and with* the diocesan community”. In continuity with previous meetings, you intend to focus on the role of pastors in the particular Churches; and in this review, the hermeneutic key is *diocesan spirituality*, which is the spirituality of communion *in the manner of Trinitarian communion*.

Msgr Magrin stressed the word, “diocesan”: it is a key word. Indeed, the mystery of Trinitarian communion is the lofty reference model for ecclesial communion. Saint John Paul ii, in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, recalled that “the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning” is precisely this: “to make the Church the home and the school of communion” (*n. 43*). This requires us, in the first place, “to promote a spirituality of communion”, which becomes “the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed” (*ibid.*). And today we have much need of communion, in the Church and in the world.

We become experts in the spirituality of communion above all thanks to a conversion to Christ, to

the docile opening to the action of his Spirit, and to the welcoming of brothers and sisters. As we well know, the fruitfulness of pastoral ministry does not depend solely on activity and on organizational efforts, although they are necessary, but in the first place on divine action. Today as in the past, saints are the most effective evangelizers, and all of the baptized are called to aim toward the pinnacle of Christian life, namely, to holiness. This applies even more to ordained ministers. I think of worldliness, of the temptation of spiritual worldliness, so often hidden in rigidity: one invites the other; they are “step sisters”; one invites the other. The *World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of the Clergy*, which is celebrated each year on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is a propitious occasion to implore from the Lord the gift of zealous and holy ministers for his Church. To achieve this ideal of holiness, each ordained minister is called to follow the example of the Good Shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. And from where can we draw this pastoral charity if not from the heart of Christ? In him the heavenly Father has filled us with infinite treasures of mercy, tenderness and love: here we may always find the indispensable spiritual energy to make his love and his joy shine in the world. Each day too, the filial relationship with our Mother, Mary Most Holy, leads us to Christ, especially in contemplation of the mysteries of the Rosary.

Closely connected to the journey of spirituality is the commitment, in *pastoral activity*, to serve the People of God, visible in the present and in the concreteness of the local Church: pastors are called to be “wise and faithful servants” who imitate the Lord; they don the mantle of service and bend to the past of their own communities, so as to understand their histories and to experience the joys and sorrows, the expectations and hopes of the sheep entrusted to them. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council taught that the very manner in which ordained ministers achieve holiness is “in performing their duties sincerely and indefatigably in the Spirit of Christ” (cf. Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 13); indeed, “by the sacred actions which are theirs daily as well as by their entire ministry ..., they are directed to perfection in their lives” (*ibid.*, 12).

You rightly emphasize that ordained ministers acquire a just pastoral style also by cultivating mutual *fraternal relationships* and by taking part in the *pastoral journey of their diocesan Church*, in their appointments, projects and initiatives that translate plans into action. A particular Church has a face, rhythms and concrete choices; she must be served with dedication each day, by witnessing to the harmony and unity that is to be experienced and developed with the bishop. The pastoral journey of the local community has as an essential reference point the pastoral plan of the diocese, which is to be placed before the programmes of the associations, movements and any particular group. This pastoral unity, of everyone around the bishop, will create unity in the Church. It is very sad when we find that this unity does not exist in the presbyterate; it is illusory. And there gossip dominates; gossip destroys the diocese, destroys the unity of the presbyters, among them and with the bishop. Brother priests, I ask, please: we always see bad things in others — because cataracts do not come to this eye — the eyes are always ready to see bad things, but I ask that it not lead to gossip. If I see bad things, I pray or, as a brother, I speak. I do not “play terrorist”, because gossip is a form of terrorism. Gossip is like dropping a bomb: I destroy the other person

and I go away calm. Please, do not gossip. It is the woodworm that eats away at the fabric of the Church, of the diocesan Church, of the unity among us all.

Dedication to the particular Church, then, must always be expressed with a broader scope which creates *attentiveness to the life of the whole Church*. Communion and mission are correlative dynamics. One becomes a minister to serve one's own *particular Church*, in docility to the Holy Spirit and to one's own Bishop and in cooperation with other presbyters, but with the awareness of being part of the *universal Church*, which goes beyond the borders of one's own diocese and one's own country. If the missionary spirit is indeed one of the essential properties of the Church, it is so above all for those who, ordained, are called to exercise the ministry in a community through its missionary nature, and to educate in 'globality' — not in worldliness, in globality! Indeed, mission is not an individual choice, owing to individual generosity or perhaps to pastoral disillusion, but is a choice of the particular Church which becomes a protagonist in communicating the Gospel to all peoples.

Dear brother priests, I pray for each one of you and for your ministry, and for the service of the Apostolic Union of Clergy. And I pray for you too, dear brothers and sisters. May my blessing accompany you. And I ask you, do not forget to pray for me too, because I too need prayers! Thank you.