



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SUPERIORS GENERAL***

Hall of Blessings

Monday, 7 May 2007

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Sisters,*

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the International Union of Superiors General. I greet and thank Cardinal Franc Rodé, Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, for the cordial words addressed to me.

I extend my thanks to the President of your Union, Sr Therezinha Rasera, who has been the interpreter not only of your affectionate sentiments but also of the women religious of the entire world.

Then, I greet each one of you, dear Superiors General, who represent 794 female religious families working in 85 countries on the five continents. And I thank you for the immense army of witnesses of Christ's love, who work on the frontiers of evangelization, education and social charity.

As your President recalled, the theme of the Plenary Assembly, which is being held in these days, is particularly interesting: *"Called to weave a new spirituality that generates hope and life for all of humanity"*. The topic you have chosen is the fruit of an ample reflection on the following question: "In contemplating our world, listening to its cries, its needs, its thirst and its aspirations, what thread are we Religious, responsible for our Congregations, called to weave in this moment in order to become prophetic and mystic "weavers of God'?".

The careful analysis of the responses received have helped your Union's Executive Council to understand that the chosen symbol of "weaving" is a typically feminine image used in all cultures, and it responds to what the Superiors General felt to be a spiritual and apostolic urgency of the present moment.

In the same responses some "threads" have been emphasized - the woman, migrants, the earth and its sacredness, laity, dialogue with the religions of the world - that you deem useful in order to "weave" in this, our age, a renewed spirituality of Consecrated Life and to launch an apostolic approach that corresponds more to people's longings. And it is exactly on these themes that you have been reflecting during the work of your Plenary.

You are aware that each Superior General is called to be an animator and promoter, as your President opportunely emphasized, of a "mystic and prophetic" Consecrated Life, strongly committed to the realization of the Kingdom of God.

These are the "threads" with which the Lord urges you today, dear women Religious, to "weave" the living fabric of a useful service to the Church and to an eloquent Gospel witness, "ever ancient and ever new" in its fidelity to the radicalness of the Gospel and courageously incarnated in contemporary reality, especially where there is greater human and spiritual poverty.

Certainly, the social, economic and religious challenges that Consecrated Life in our day must face are not few! The five pastoral areas that you emphasized constitute other "threads" to be woven and inserted into the complex web of daily life, interpersonal relationships and apostolate.

Often, it means taking unexplored missionary and spiritual paths, yet always maintaining solid interior relations with Christ. In fact, only from this union with God can that "prophetic" role of your mission flow and be nourished, which consists of "proclaiming the Kingdom of heaven", an indispensable announcement in every age and in every society.

Never cede, therefore, to the temptation to distance yourself from intimacy with your Heavenly Spouse by allowing yourselves to be overly attracted by the interests and problems of daily life.

The Founders and Foundresses of your Institutes have been "prophetic pioneers" in the Church because they never lost the acute awareness of being in the world, but not of the world, according to the clear teaching of Jesus (cf. Jn 17: 14). Following his example they tried to communicate God's love with words and concrete gestures through the total gift of themselves, always keeping their gaze and their heart fixed on him.

Dear Religious Sisters, if you want to walk faithfully in the footsteps of your Founders and Foundresses to help your own Sisters to follow their examples, cultivate the "mystical" dimension of Consecrated Life, that is, always keeping your soul united to God through contemplation.

As the Scriptures teach, the "prophet" first listens and contemplates, then speaks, allowing himself to be totally permeated by that love for God which fears nothing and is even stronger than death.

The authentic prophet, therefore, is not concerned so much to accomplish works, which undoubtedly are important but never essential. Above all, he tries to be a witness of God's love, seeking to live it among the realities of the world, even if his presence can sometimes be "uncomfortable" because he offers and incarnates alternative values.

May it be your prime concern, therefore, to help your own Sisters to seek Christ above all else and to place themselves generously at the service of the Gospel. Never tire of taking every possible care in the human, cultural and spiritual formation of the persons entrusted to you, so that they are able to respond to today's cultural and social challenges.

Be the first to set an example by fleeing commodities, comforts, convenience in order to bring your mission to fulfilment. Share the richness of your charisms with those who are committed to the one mission of the Church, which is to build the Kingdom.

For this purpose establish a serene and cordial collaboration with priests, the lay faithful and especially families in order to meet the suffering, the needs, the material and above all the spiritual poverty of many of our contemporaries.

In addition, cultivate a sincere communion and a genuine collaboration with Bishops, the first to be responsible for evangelization in the particular Churches.

Dear Sisters, your General Assembly is taking place during the Easter Season, when the liturgy invites us to proclaim with constant exultance: "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad!".

May the joy and peace of Easter accompany you and always dwell in you and in each of your communities.

In every circumstance be messengers of this Easter joy like the women who went to the tomb, found it empty and had the gift of meeting the Risen Christ. Happily, then, they ran to give the news to the Apostles.

May Mary, Queen of Virgins, and your Saints and blessed Founders and Foundresses watch over you and your respective Religious Families.

In entrusting yourselves to their intercession, I assure you from my heart of a prayerful remembrance and willingly impart to all a special Apostolic Blessing.

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