



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO SEMINARIANS OF THE DIOCESE OF AGRIGENTO

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 24 November 2018*

[Multimedia]

Extemporaneous speech of the Holy Father

Prepared speech of the Holy Father

EXTEMPORANEOUS SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER

There is a prepared address, with the icon of the disciples of Emmaus, which you can read quietly at home and meditate in peace. I am consigning it to the Rector. I will feel more at ease speaking somewhat spontaneously.

In that discourse, the last word was 'mission'. I liked what the Rector said about the horizon of Albania. Because mission, truly, is something that the Spirit impels us to do: to go out, go out, always go out; but if there is no apostolic horizon, there is the danger of making mistakes and going out not to *bear a message* but to 'take a stroll', that is, to go out ineffectively. Rather than making a journey of strength, going out of oneself, it is entering a labyrinth, where one never manages to find a way, or takes the wrong path! 'How can I be sure that my outward bound ministry is what the Lord wants, what the Lord wants from me, whether in formation or afterwards?'. There is the bishop! The bishop is the one who says on behalf of God: '*This* is the way'. You can go to the bishop and say: 'I feel *this*', and he will discern whether or not that is it. But ultimately the one who gives the mission is the bishop. Why do I say this? One cannot live

priesthood without a mission. The bishop not only gives a task — ‘handle this parish’, as a bank manager gives tasks to his employees — no, the bishop gives a mission: ‘Sanctify those people, bring Christ to those people’. It is another level. This is why dialogue with the bishop is important: this is what I wanted to get at, at the dialogue with the bishop.

The bishop must get to know you as you are: each one has his own personality, his own way of feeling, his own way of thinking, his own virtues, his own flaws.... The bishop is a father: he is a father who helps one to grow; he is a father who prepares for the mission. And the better the bishop knows the priest, the less danger there will be of making a mistake in the mission he is called to. One cannot be a good priest without a filial dialogue with the bishop. This is something non-negotiable. Some like to say: ‘No, I am an employee of the Church’. You are mistaken. Here there is a bishop; there is no assembly where one negotiates his position. There is a father who creates unity: this is how Jesus wanted things. A father who creates unity. It is beautiful when Paul writes to Titus, to Titus who has left Crete in order to ‘*organize*’ things. And he recounts the virtues of presbyterates, of the bishop and of lay people, of deacons too. But he allows the *bishop* to *organize*: to organize in the Spirit, which is not the same as sorting into an organizational chart. The Church is not an organogramme. It is true that at times we use an organizational chart to be more functional, but the Church goes beyond an organogramme; she is something else: she is life, life ‘organized’ in the Holy Spirit.

And who plays the role of the father? The bishop. The bishop is not the head of the company, no. He is not the one who commands: ‘I command here’, some obey, others pretend to obey and others do nothing. No, the bishop is father; he is fruitful; he is the one who creates the mission. This word *mission*, that I wished to take up, is *laden*, laden with Jesus’ will; it is laden with the Holy Spirit. For this reason, from the Seminary, may you learn to see in your bishop the father who was placed there to help you grow, to go forth and to accompany you in the moments of your apostolic ministry: in good times, in bad times, but always to accompany you; in moments of success, in moments of defeat that you will always have in life, everyone.... This is something very, very important.

Another thing, that of the *potter’s clay*. I like to refer to Jeremiah. He says: when the vessel does not come out well, the potter reworks it. While the vessel is being made and there is something that does not work, there is time to take it all up again and start over; but once it is baked.... Please, *allow yourselves to be shaped*. What the formators propose are not passing fancies. If you do not agree, talk about it. But be men, not children, courageous men, and tell the rector: ‘I do not agree with this; I do not understand it’. This is important, to say what you feel. In this way your character can be shaped, in order to be truly a vase full of grace. But if you stay silent and do not dialogue, do not state your difficulties, do not recount your apostolic apprehensions and all that you want: a silent man, once ‘baked’, cannot be changed. All of life is like this. It is true that at times it is unpleasant that the potter may intervene in a decisive way, but it is for your own good. Allow yourselves to be shaped, let yourselves be shaped. Before the baking, because this way

you will be good.

And then, another two things. What is the *spirituality of the diocesan clergy*? As that priest was saying to the religious: 'I have the spirituality of the religious congregation that Saint Peter founded'. What is the spirituality of diocesan clergy? It is diocesan communion. Diocesan communion has three approaches, three relationships. The first is the *relationship with the bishop*, but I have already spoken enough about this. The first relationship: one cannot be a good diocesan priest without a relationship with the bishop. Second: the *relationship within the presbyterate*. Friendship among you. It is true that one cannot be a close friend to everyone, because we are not equals, but good brothers, yes, whom we love. And what is the sign that there is brotherhood in a presbyterate, there is fraternity? What is the sign? When *there is no gossip*. Gossip, chatter is the scourge of the presbyterate. If you have something against him, say it to his face. Say it man to man. But do not talk behind his back: this is not human! I am not speaking of spiritual humanity, no, it is simply not human. When there is no gossip in a presbyterate, when that door is closed, what happens? Well, there is a little racket, in meetings things are said to one's face, 'I disagree!', one raises one's voice a bit.... But as brothers! At home, we brothers would argue like this. But in *truth*. And then, taking care of one's brothers, loving them. 'Yes, Father, but you know, I find that other person unpleasant...'. But I too find many who are unpleasant and I am unpleasant to someone else; this is a natural part of life, but the level of our consecration leads us to something else, to be harmonious, in harmony.

This is a grace that you must ask of the Holy Spirit. That phrase of Saint Basil — which some say was not Saint Basil's — in the treatise on the Holy Spirit: '*Ipse harmonia est*', He is harmony. The Holy Spirit seems somewhat curious, because with his charisms — because all of you are different — he creates, so to speak, disorder: everyone diverse. But then he has the power to create within that disorder a richer order, with many different charisms that do not nullify each one's character. *The Holy Spirit is the One who creates unity: unity in the presbyterate.*

The relationship with the bishop, the relationship among you. A negative sign: gossip. No gossip. A positive sign: to state things clearly, to debate, even to get angry, but this is healthy, this is human. Gossip is cowardly.

The relationship with the bishop, the relationship among you, and third: the *relationship with the People of God*. We are called by the Lord to *serve* the Lord in the People of God. Rather, we have been *drawn* from the People of God! This helps a great deal! That memory of Amos, when he says: 'You are a prophet...'. Me? What prophet? I was taken from the back of the flock, I was a shepherd.... Each of us was drawn from the People of God, was chosen, and we must not forget where we come from. Because many times, when we forget this, we fall into *clericalism* and forget the people we came from. Please, do not forget mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, the village, the poverty, the difficulties of the families: do not forget them! The Lord has drawn you from there, from the People of God. Because with this memory, you will know how to *speak* to the

People of God, how to *serve* the People of God. The priest who comes from the people and does not forget that he is drawn from the people, from the Christian community, at the service of the people. 'But no, I have forgotten; now I feel a little superior to everyone...'. *Clericalism*, my dear friends, is our worst perversion. The Lord wants you to be shepherds, shepherds of the people, not clerics of the State.

This is the spirituality [of the diocesan priest]: the relationship with the bishop, the relationship among you, and the contact, the relationship with the People of God with the memory — where I come from — and in service — where I am going. And how does one make this grow? With the spiritual life. You have a spiritual father: open your heart to the spiritual father. And he will teach you how to pray, prayer; how to love Our Lady...: do not forget this, because She is always close to the vocation of each of you. The meeting with the spiritual father. Who is not an inspector of conscience; he is one who, on behalf of the bishop, helps you to grow. Spiritual life.

Thank you for coming. I forgot to bring you a booklet that I wanted to give you, but I will send it to the bishop, for each of you. And pray for me; I will pray for you. Do not forget this: the spirituality of the diocesan clergy. Take courage!

PREPARED SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER

Dear Brothers,

I welcome you and thank you for coming. I also thank your Rector in particular, for his introductory words.

In this brief time of our meeting I would like to suggest a few ideas for your personal and community reflection, and I take them from the recent Synod of young people.

First and foremost, the biblical icon: *the Gospel of the disciples of Emmaus*. I would like to propose this icon to you again because it guided all the work of the last Synod and can continue to inspire your journey. And *journey* is precisely the first key word: Jesus the Risen One meets us on the journey which, at the same time, is the way, that is, the reality in which each of us is called to live, and is the inner journey, the way of faith and hope, which knows moments of light and moments of darkness. Here, on the journey, the Lord meets us, listens to us and speaks to us.

First of all, he *listens* to us. This is the second key word: *listening*. Our God is the Word, and at the same time he is the listening silence. Jesus is the Word who has become listening, welcoming our human condition. When he appears beside the two disciples, he walks with them, listens to them,

and also encourages them to express what they have within them, their hope and their disappointment. This, in your life in the seminary, means that in the first place there is the dialogue with the Lord made of mutual listening: he listens to me and I listen to him. No pretense. No mask.

This prayerful listening in the heart teaches us to be people able to listen to others, to become, if God wishes, priests who offer the service of listening — and how much need there is of this! And it teaches us to be more and more a *listening Church*, a community able to listen. You especially experience it now in contact with young people, meeting them, listening to them, inviting them to express themselves.... But this applies to all pastoral life: like Jesus, the Church is sent into the world to listen to the cry of humanity, which is often a silent cry, at times suppressed, stifled.

Journeying; listening; the third word is *discernment*. The seminary is a place and time of discernment. And this requires accompaniment, as Jesus does with the two disciples and with all his disciples, in particular, the Twelve. He accompanies them with patience and wisdom, teaches them to follow him in truth, unmasking the false expectations they hold in their hearts. With respect and decisiveness, as a good friend and also a good doctor, who at times must use a scalpel. Many problems that surface in a priest's life are due to a lack of discernment in the years at the seminary. Not everyone and not always but many. It is normal, it applies likewise to marriage: certain things that are not confronted earlier can become problems later on. Jesus does not pretend with the two on their way to Emmaus; he is not evasive, does not circumvent the problem: he calls them "foolish men, and slow of heart" (Lk 24:25) because they do not believe the prophets. And he opens their minds to Scripture, and then, at the table, he opens their eyes to his new Presence, in the Sign of the broken Bread.

The mystery of vocation and of discernment is a masterpiece of the Holy Spirit which requires the cooperation of the young person called and of the adult who accompanies him.

The fourth word, as we know, is *mission*; and the Synod on young people highly valued the synodal dimension of mission: the *travelling together* to meet others. The two of Emmaus return together to Jerusalem and above all join the apostolic community which, by the power of the Spirit, becomes wholly missionary. This emphasis is important, because the temptation to be good individual missionaries is always lurking. Already as seminarians one can fall prey to this temptation: feeling one is good because one is good at preaching, or at organizing events, or beautiful ceremonies, and so forth. Too often our preparation has been individual, rather than collegial, fraternal. And thus the presbyterate and diocesan ministry perhaps present splendid individuality but little witness to communion, to collegiality. Thank God we are growing in this, even compelled by the scarcity of clergy, but communion does not come about through coercion; one must believe in it and be docile to the Spirit.

Dear brothers, these are the ideas that I leave you, all contained in the Gospel icon of the disciples of Emmaus: journeying; listening; discerning; travelling together. I ask the Lord and the Virgin

Mary to accompany you, I bless you and pray for you. And you, please, remember to pray for me.