



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

ON OCCASION OF THE 20th ASSEMBLY OF

THE UNITED STATES OF VICARS FOR RELIGIOUS *Monday, 10 March 1986*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I extend a very warm welcome to all of you who have gathered in Rome this week for the Twentieth Assembly of the United States Conference of Vicars for Religious. It is a pleasure to be with you today. It is not my intention to speak to you at great length about the nature of religious life or about the special problems which religious are encountering today. Rather I wish to take this occasion to offer you encouragement in your delicate and important task.

1. It goes without saying that religious life is a vital part of the life of the Church, of her witness to holiness, her service to the poor and needy, her task of promoting reconciliation, her efforts to proclaim the Gospel of salvation. As Vicars and Delegates for Religious in your respective Dioceses, you are in a position which gives you the privilege of seeing more clearly the ecclesial dimension of religious life, and the opportunity of helping others to appreciate this truth.

You assist the Bishop in this ministry of service to the men and women religious of the Diocese. You keep him informed of particular needs and concerns; you assist him in solving problems which arise or in ordinating the activities for religious in the Diocese. Through your work, and even more by your own personal love for religious life, you help the Bishop in his serious responsibility of fostering and strengthening religious life in the Church.

2. In the Final Report of the recent Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, we find an observation that seems particularly relevant for religious life. It states: "Today, in fact, there are signs of a new hunger and thirst for the transcendent and divine. In order to favor this return to the sacred and to overcome secularism we must open the way to the dimension of the 'divine' or of mystery and offer the preambles of faith to mankind today" .

Who is in a position better to meet this challenge of the Synod than men and women religious? The radical commitment to Christ which is implied in the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience expresses boldly and profoundly the belief of religious in a transcendent reality, their absolute trust

in the love of God. It bears witness before the world of the value of living for God alone, especially when their lives are marked by joyful trust and generous service.

3. Religious consecration manifests in a concrete and eloquent way a preferential love for Christ – for Christ present in the Holy Eucharist, for Christ as he lives today in the poor and sick, in the elderly and in children, in families and in persons from broken homes. By the same token, a preferential love for Christ means a preference for what Christ loves, a desire to have the same attitude as Christ himself, a longing to see God's "kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven".

In this context, it is good to recall the words of Saint Paul who wrote: "Christ loved the Church. He gave himself up for her to make her holy, purifying her in the bath of water by the power of the word, to present to himself a glorious Church, holy and immaculate, without stain or wrinkle or anything of that sort". It is immensely significant in our day to emphasise again the love of Christ for the Church, and thus the call to all of us in the Church, and especially to religious by reason of the public nature of their vocation, to have an informed and zealous love for the Church.

4. Dear Brothers and Sisters, you are aware of the special interest which I have shown for religious life in the United States, of the various initiatives which I have undertaken to confirm my brother Bishops in their role of pastoral service to religious, and of my ardent desire to extend to religious directly my deep concern for each of them. You can be sure then that I pray in a special way for you, the Episcopal Vicars and Delegates for Religious. Never doubt the importance of your pastoral service in the Church. For in fostering religious life you are drawing near to "the very holiness of God".

May the Lord be your consolation and strength. May Christ fill you with his deep and abiding peace.

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