

Address of Holiness Pope Francis to participants of a meeting for Formators of Consecrated men and women,

11 April 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

[The Cardinal Prefect] told me how many of you there are, and I said: “But with the shortage of vocations there are more formators than candidates!”. This is a problem! We need to ask the Lord to do everything possible to ensure more vocations!

I thank Cardinal Braz de Aviz for the words he has addressed to me on behalf of all those present. I also thank the Secretary and the other coworkers who organized the Congress, the first at this level to be celebrated in the Church, in precisely the Year dedicated to Consecrated Life, with men and women formators of many Institutes from many parts of the world.

I have been looking forward to this meeting with you, for what you represent as educators and formators, and because behind each one of you I see your and our young people, protagonists of a present lived with enthusiasm, and promoters of a future enlivened by hope; young people who, spurred by God’s love, seek in the Church the paths by which to attain it in their own lives. I feel their presence here and I direct an affectionate thought to them.

Seeing you in such numbers one would not say that there is a vocational crisis! But in reality there is undoubtedly a quantitative reduction, and this necessitates even more the task of formation, a formation which truly moulds Jesus’ heart in the hearts of young people, so they may share his own sentiments (cf. Phil 2:5-11; Vita Consecrata, nn., 9, 65). I am also certain that there is no vocational crisis where there are consecrated people capable of passing on, by their witness, the beauty of consecration. Testimony bears fruit. If there is no testimony, if there is no consistency, there will be no vocations. You are called to bear this testimony. This is your ministry, your mission. You are not only “teachers”; you are above all witnesses of the sequela

of Christ in your own charism. One can do this if every day one joyfully rediscovers being a disciple of Jesus. This also leads to the need to always attend to your own personal formation, beginning from a close friendship with the one Teacher. During these days of the Resurrection, the word which often resonated within me in prayer was that of “Galilee”, “there, where everything began”, Peter says in his first speech. Things happen in Jerusalem but they began in Galilee. In our life too, it began in a “Galilee”: each one of us has had a Galilee experience, of the encounter with the Lord, that encounter which is never forgotten, often gets buried by things, by work, by fears and even by sins and worldliness. To bear witness it is necessary to often make the pilgrimage to one’s own Galilee, to recall the memory of that encounter, that astonishment, and from there to set out again. But if one does not follow this path of remembrance there is the danger of just staying there, where one is and, there is even the danger of not knowing why one is there. This discipline is followed by those men and women who want to bear witness: to go back to one’s own Galilee, where we encountered the Lord; to that first astonishment.

Consecrated life is beautiful, it is one of the Church’s most precious treasures, rooted in baptismal vocation. Thus it is beautiful to be its formators, because it is a privilege to take part in the work of the Father who forms the heart of the Son in those whom the Spirit has called. At times one may feel this service to be a burden, as if it detracted something more important from us. But this is a mistake, it is a temptation. The mission is important, but it is equally important to educate for the mission, to educate in the enthusiasm for proclaiming, to educate in that passion of going to whatever place, to every periphery, to tell everyone of the love of Jesus Christ, especially to those who are distant, to communicate it to the little ones and to the poor, and to let oneself also be evangelized by them. All of this requires a firm foundation, a strong Christian framework and character which today even families are rarely able to provide. This increases your responsibility.

One of the qualities of a formator is that of having a great heart for young people, to form in them great hearts capable of welcoming everyone, hearts rich in mercy, full of tenderness. You are not only friends and companions of the consecrated life of those who are entrusted to you, but real fathers, real mothers, cable of asking and of giving them the best. To generate life, to give birth to a religious life. This is possible only through love, the love of fathers and mothers. It is not true that today’s young people are mediocre and ungenerous; they need to feel that “it is more blessed to give than to receive!” (Acts 20:35), that there is great freedom in an obedient life,

great fruitfulness in a virgin heart, great wealth in owning nothing. This gives rise to the necessity to be lovingly attentive to the journey of each one and evangelically demanding in every phase of the formative journey, starting with vocational discernment, so that the possible crisis in numbers does not cause a greater crisis in quality. This is the danger. Vocational discernment is important: everyone, all the people who know the human personality — be they psychologists, spiritual fathers, spiritual mothers — tell us that the young who unconsciously sense they have an imbalance or some form of imbalance or of deviation, unconsciously seek strong structures that protect them, to protect themselves. That is where discernment lies: knowing how to say ‘no’. Do not send them away: no, no. I am accompanying you, go on, go on, go ahead.... As one accompanies the entry, accompany the exit too, so that he or she may find the path in life, with the necessary help. Not with that defence that is bread for today and hunger for tomorrow.

The crisis of quality.... I do not know if it is written, but it comes to mind now to say: seeing the qualities of so very many consecrated people.... Yesterday at lunch, there was a small group of priests who were celebrating their 60th year of priestly ordination: that wisdom of the elderly.... Some are a bit ..., but most elderly people have wisdom! The nuns who get up every day to work, the nuns in the hospital, who are “doctors of humanity”: how much we should learn from these years and years of consecration!... And then they die. And the missionary sisters, who go out and die there.... Look for example at the elderly! And do not only look at them: go and visit them, because the Fourth Commandment counts in religious life too, with these elderly of ours. These too, for a religious institution, are a “Galilee”, for in them we find the Lord who speaks to us today. It does young people much good, sending them to be close to these elderly, wise consecrated men and women: how much good it does! Because young people have a flare for finding authenticity: this does good.

Initial training, this discernment, is the first step of a process intended to last a lifetime, and young people should be formed in the humble and intelligent freedom of letting oneself be educated by God the Father every day of one’s life, at every age, in mission as in fraternity, in action as in contemplation.

Thank you, dear men and women formators, for your humble and discreet service, for the time given to listening — the apostolate “of the ear”, listening — for the time dedicated to accompanying and caring for each one of your young people. God has a virtue — if one can speak of God’s virtue —, a quality, that is not often spoken of: it is patience. He has patience. God knows how to wait. You too, learn this,

this attitude of patience, which so often is in some measure martyrdom: waiting... When you are tempted by impatience, stop; or by curiosity.... Think of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, when a novice began telling her a story and she wanted to hear how it ended, but then the novice went elsewhere, St Thérèse said nothing, she waited. Patience is one of the virtues of formators. To accompany: in this mission neither time nor energy should be spared. One must not be discouraged when results do not correspond to one's expectations. It is painful, when a young man or young woman comes, after three or four years and says: "Ah, no, I do not feel I can; I've found another love that is not against God, but I cannot go on, I am leaving". This is hard. But it is also your martyrdom. And these failures, these failures from the formator's point of view may foster the formator's continuing path of formation. If at times you feel that your work is not appreciated enough, know that Jesus follows you with love, and the entire Church is grateful to you. And always in this beauty of consecrated life: some — I have written here, but you see that even the Pope is censored — say that consecrated life is Heaven on Earth. No. If anything it is Purgatory! But go forth with joy, go forth with joy.

May you live this ministry with joy and in gratitude, with the certainty that there is nothing more beautiful in life than belonging for ever and wholeheartedly to God, and giving one's life to the service of one's brothers and sisters.

I ask you to please pray for me, that God may also give me some of that virtue that He has: patience.