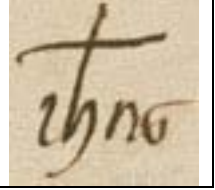


General Congregation 35



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HOMILY

XXXV General Congregation of the Society of Jesus

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His Eminence, the Most Reverend Franc Card. Rodé, C.M.

DEAR MEMBERS OF THE

XXXV GENERAL CONGREGATION OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

St Ignatius considered the General Congregation “work and a distraction” (Const. 677) which momentarily interrupts the apostolic commitments of a large number of qualified members of the Society of Jesus and for this reason, clearly differing from what is customary in other religious Institutes, the Constitutions establish that it should be celebrated at determined times and not too often.

Nevertheless, it must be called principally on two occasions: for the election of the Superior General and when things of particular importance or very difficult problems which touch the body of the Society must be treated.

This is the second time in the history of the Society wherein a General Congregation gathers to elect a new Superior General while his predecessor is still living. The first time was in 1983, when the XXXIII General Congregation accepted the resignation of the much loved Fr. Arrupe, for whom the exercising of the role of governance had become impossible, due to a serious and unforeseen illness. Today it gathers a second time, to discern, before the Lord, the resignation presented by Fr. Kolvenbach, who has directed the Society for nearly twenty-five years with wisdom, prudence, commitment and loyalty. This will be followed by the election of his successor.

I wish to express to you, Fr. Kolvenbach, in my name and in the name of the Church, a heartfelt thanks for your fidelity, your wisdom, your righteousness and your example of humility and poverty, Thank you Fr. Kolvenbach.

The election of a new Superior General of the Society of Jesus has a fundamental value for the life of the Society, not only because its centralized hierarchical structure constitutionally concedes to the General full authority for good governance, the conservation and growth of the whole Society, but also because as Saint Ignatius says so well, “the wellbeing of the head resounds throughout the whole body and as are the Superiors so in turn will their subjects be.” (cf. Const 820) For this reason your founder when pointing out the qualities which the general must have places first of all that he must be “a man very united to the Lord our God and familiar with prayer” (Const 723). After having mentioned other important qualities which are not easily found in a single person, he ends by saying “if any of the above qualities should be missing, at least may he not lack much goodness, love for the Society and good judgment” (Const 735).

I join you in your prayer that the Holy Spirit, the father of the poor, giver of graces, and light for hearts will assist you in your discernment and your election.

This Congregation also gathers together to treat important and very difficult matters which touch all members of the Society, such as the direction which the Society is presently taking. The themes upon which the General Congregation will reflect have to do with basic elements for the life of the Society. Certainly you will deal with the identity of today’s Jesuit, on the meaning and value of the vow of obedience to the Holy Father which has always defined your religious family, the mission of the Society in the context of globalization and marginalization, community life, apostolic obedience, vocation recruitment and other important themes.

Within your charism and your tradition you can find valuable points of reference to enlighten the choices which the Society must make today.

Certainly and necessarily, during this Congregation you are carrying out an important work but it is not a “distraction” from your apostolic activity. As St Ignatius teaches you in the *Spiritual Exercises* you must with the same vision of the three Divine Persons, look at “the entire surface of the earth crammed with men” (n 102) Listening to the Spirit, the creator who renews the world and returning to the fonts to preserve your identity without losing your own lifestyle, the commitment to discern the signs of the times, the difficulty and responsibility of working out final decisions are activities which

are eminently apostolic because they form the base of a new springtime of being religious and of the apostolic commitment of each of your brothers in the Society of Jesus.

Now the vision becomes broader. It is not only for your own Jesuit brothers that you provide a religious and apostolic formation. There are many institutes of Consecrated Life who, following an Ignatian spirituality, pay attention to your choices; there are many future priests in your Colleges and Universities who are preparing for their ministry. There are many peoples from both within and outside the Church who frequent your centers of learning seeking a response to the challenges which science, technology and globalization pose to humanity, to the Church, and to the faith, with the hope of receiving a formation which will make it possible for them to construct a world of truth and freedom, of justice and peace.

Your work must be eminently apostolic with a universal human, ecclesial and evangelical fullness. It must always be carried out in the light of your Charism, in such a way that the growing participation of laity in your activities does not obscure your identity but rather enriches it with the collaboration of those who, coming from other cultures, share your style and your objectives.

Once again I join in your prayer that the Holy Spirit may accompany you in your delicate work.

As a brother who is following your works with great interest and expectation, I want to share with you “the joys and hopes” (GS. 1) as well as “the sorrows and anguish” (GS. 1) which I have as a man of the Church called to exercise a difficult service in the field of Consecrated Life, in my role as Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

With pleasure and hope I see the thousands of religious who generously respond to the Lord’s call and, leaving all they have behind consecrate themselves with an undivided heart to the Lord to be with him and to collaborate with him, in his salvific desire to “conquer all things and thus enter unto the Glory of the Father” (Spiritual Exercises, 95). It is clear that consecrated life continues to be a “divine gift which the Church has received from the Lord” (LG 43) and it is for this very reason that the Church wants to carefully watch over it in order that that the proper Charism of each Institute might be evermore known, and, although with the necessary adaptations to respond to the present time, it keeps its proper identity intact for the good of the whole Church. The authenticity of religious life is characterized by the following of Christ and by the exclusive consecration to Him and to his Kingdom through the profession of the

evangelical counsels. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council teaches that “this consecration will be the more perfect, in as much as the indissoluble bond of the union of Christ and His bride, the Church, is represented by firm and more stable bonds” (LG 44) Consecration to service to Christ cannot be separated from consecration to service to the Church. Ignatius and his first companions considered it thus when they wrote the Formula of your Institute in which the essence of your charism is spelled out: “To serve the Lord and his Spouse the Church under the Roman Pontiff” (Julio III, Formula I). It is with sorrow and anxiety that I see that the *sentire cum ecclesia* of which your founder frequently spoke is diminishing even in some members of religious families. The Church is waiting for a light from you to restore the *sensus Ecclesiae*. *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* are your specialty. The rules of *sentire cum Ecclesiae* form an integral and essential part of this masterpiece of Catholic spirituality. They form, as it were, a golden clasp which holds the book of *The Spiritual Exercises* closed.

You hold in your very hands the elements needed to realize and to deepen this desire, this Ignatian and Ecclesial sentiment.

Love for the Church in every sense of the word, – be it Church people of God be it hierarchical Church – is not a human sentiment which comes and goes according to the people who make it up or according to our conformity with the dispositions emanating from those whom the Lord has placed to direct the Church. Love for the Church is a love based on faith, a gift of the Lord which, precisely because he loves us, he gives us faith in him and in his Spouse, which is the Church. Without the gift of faith in the Church there can be no love for the Church.

I join in your prayer asking the Lord to grant you the grace to grow in your belief in and love for this holy, catholic and apostolic Church which we profess.

With sadness and anxiety I also see a growing distancing from the Hierarchy. The Ignatian spirituality of apostolic service “under the Roman Pontiff” does not allow for this separation. In the Constitutions which he left you, Ignatius wanted to truly shape your mind and in the book of the Exercises (n 353) he wrote” we must always keep our mind prepared and quick to obey the true Spouse of Christ and our Holy Mother, the Hierarchical Church”. Religious obedience can be understood only as obedience in love. The fundamental nucleus of Ignatian spirituality consists in uniting the love for God with love for the hierarchical Church. Your XXXIII Congregation once again took up this characteristic of obedience declaring that “the Society reaffirms in a spirit of faith the

traditional bond of love and of service which unites it to the Roman Pontiff? You once again took up this principle in the motto “In all things love and serve”.

You must also place this XXXV General Congregation, which opens with this liturgy, celebrated close to the remains of your founder in this line, which has always been followed by the Society throughout its multi-century history in order to show your desire and your commitment to be faithful to the charism which he left you as an inheritance and to carry it out in ways which better respond to the needs of the Church in our time.

The service of the Society is a service “under the banner of the Cross” (Formula I). Every service done out of love necessarily implies a self-emptying, *a kenosis*. But letting go of what one wants to do in order to do what the beloved wants is to transform the *kenosis* into the image of Christ who *learned obedience through suffering* (Hebrews 5, 8). It is for this reason that St. Ignatius, realistically, adds that the Jesuit serves the Church “under the banner of the Cross” (Formula I).

Ignatius placed himself under the orders of the Roman Pontiff “in order to not err *in via Domini*” (Const 605) in the distribution of his religious throughout the world and to be present wherever the needs of the Church were greater.

Times have changed and the Church must today confront new and urgent necessities, I will mention one, which in my judgment is urgent today and is at the same time complex and I propose it for your consideration. It is the need to present to the faithful and to the world the authentic truth revealed in Scripture and Tradition. The doctrinal diversity of those who at all levels, by vocation and mission are called to announce the Kingdom of truth and love, disorients the faithful and leads to a relativism without limits. There is one truth, even though it can always be more deeply known.

It is the “living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ” (DV 10) which is the voucher for revealed truth. The exegetes and theological scholars are involved in working together “*under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church, to an exploration and exposition of the divine writings (DV 23)*”. Through your long and solid formation, your centers of research, your teaching in the philosophical-theological-biblical fields you are in a privileged position to carry out this difficult mission. Carry it out with study and in-depth examination, carry it out with humility, carry it out with faith in the Church. carry it out with love for the Church.

May those who, according to your legislation, have to oversee the doctrine of your magazines and publications do so in the light of and according to the “rules for *sentire cum ecclesia*”, with love and respect.

The feeling of ever growing separation between faith and culture, a separation which constitutes a great impediment for Evangelization (*Sapientia Cristiana*, proemio) also worries me.

A culture immersed with a true Christian spirit is an instrument which fosters the spreading of the Gospel, faith in God the Creator of the heavens and of the earth. The Tradition of the Society, from the first beginnings of the Collegio Romano always placed itself at the crossroads between Church and society, between faith and culture, between religion and secularism. Recover these avant-garde positions which are so necessary to transmit the eternal truth to today’s world, in today’s language. Do not abandon this challenge. We know the task is difficult, uncomfortable and risky, and at times little appreciated and even misunderstood, but it is a necessary task for the Church. The apostolic tasks demanded of you by the Church are many and very diverse, but all have a common denominator: the instrument which carries them out, according to an Ignatian phrase must be an instrument united to God. It is the Ignatian echo to the Gospel proclaimed today: *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit (Jn.15, 15)*. Union with the vine, which is love, is realized only through a personal and silent exchange of love which is born in prayer, “from the internal knowledge of the Lord who became man for me and who, integral and alive, extends himself to all who are close to us and to all that is close to us”. It is not possible to transform the world, or to respond to the challenges of a world which has forgotten love, without being firmly rooted in love.

Ignatius was granted the mystic grace of being “a contemplative in action”(annotation to the Examine MNAD 5, 172). It was a special grace freely given by God to Ignatius who had trodden a tiring path of fidelity and long hours of prayer in the Retreat at Manresa. It is a grace which, according to Fr. Nadal, is contained in the call of every Jesuit. Guided by your Ignatian *magis* keep your hearts open to receive the same gift, following in the same path trodden by Ignatius from Loyola to Rome, a path of generosity, of penance, of discernment, of prayer, of apostolic zeal of obedience, of charity, of fidelity to and love for the hierarchical Church.

Despite the urgent apostolic needs, maintain and develop your charism to the point of being and showing yourselves to the world as “contemplatives in action” who

communicate to men and women and to all of creation the love received from God and to orient them once again toward the love of God. Everyone understands the language of love.

The Lord has chosen you to go and bear fruit, fruit that lasts. Go, bear fruit confident that “*all that you ask the Father in my name, he will give you (cfr. Jn 15, 16)*).

I join with you in prayer to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit together with Mary, Mother of Divine Grace, invoked by all the members of the Society as *Santa Maria della Strada*, that he may grant you the grace of “seeking and discovering the will of God for the Society of today which will build the Society of tomorrow”.