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APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CMSWR
MEMORIAL OF ST. HILDEGARD OF BINGEN,
RELIGIOUS AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
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My Dear Sisters,

It is wonderful to join you this year as you gather for your National Assembly, addressing the theme “Bearers of a Promise.” As the Apostolic Nuncio, I express to you the spiritual closeness and the paternal affection of the Holy Father Pope Francis, who accompanies you with his prayers during these days.

One way in which consecrated religious are bearers of a promise is through the embrace of poverty, a reminder that God is our true treasure and that He is to be loved above all else. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that we must make a decisive choice between serving God or mammon, because we will either use mammon to serve God or try to use and manipulate God and religion to serve mammon. In today’s readings we see on display that fundamental contrast between the idolatry that is greed and poverty in spirit treasuring God’s kingdom.

In the Gospel, we hear that Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna and the “*many others*” using their resources to care for Jesus and the Twelve. All they had they were dedicating to the spread of the kingdom. They “*provided for them out of their resources,*” which were far more than financial. They are models for us of spiritual maternity. These “women from Galilee” will follow Jesus even to His death and burial, and Mary Magdalene will be the one who will bring the joyful news of the Resurrection to the Apostles. Joanna too is mentioned in Luke’s account of the Resurrection.

This was not a group of women who thought that these wandering 13 men would be lost without their feminine genius and maternal practicality, nor were they women who sought influence; rather, Luke tells us, that they were all “*women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities.*”

Each had received from Jesus a physical healing, a spiritual healing, or probably both. In Mary Magdalene’s case, she had been delivered from seven demons and had been healed. Having received much, they loved much, and they wanted to give Jesus and His mission all the love, the time and the material goods they could. All of their money, like their hearts, was consecrated to God.

My dear sisters, their story is also your story. You have left everything to follow the Lord in response to His love and mercy in your lives. Yours is response of grateful and humble service, and you are living witnesses and bearers to the promise of hope that comes from knowing Jesus Christ. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Spe Salvi*:

“It is important to know that I can always continue to hope, even if in my own life, or the historical period in which I am living, there seems to be nothing left to hope for. Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are

held firm by the indestructible power of Love and that this gives meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and persevere.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 30 November 2007, 35)

Persevering in hope as witnesses to this indestructible Love, you exercise your prophetic charism. In the first reading, Paul warns Timothy about the false prophets, theological sophists, who use “*religion to be a means of gain.*” They were trying to use religion to fulfill their three-fold desire: to be famous; to be praised; and to grow wealthy to gain influence.

The same temptation remains today of faking faith to profit in some material way. Pope Francis warns of spiritual worldliness infecting the Church, echoing Paul who says, in a shocking synthesis, that “*the love of money is the root of all evil.*” Acquisitiveness, the worship of the ancient golden calf, is a spiritual cancer that metastasizes into all parts of life and leads to conceit, arguments, verbal disputes, envy, rivalry, insults, evil suspicions, and mutual friction. You can begin to see how this can tear your communities and, indeed, the whole Church, apart.

So much harm comes when money is placed above the love of God. When we place our love in mammon, we are never satisfied with what we have, because there is always someone with more money and influence. The pursuit for more is endless, and sometimes in our pursuit for wealth, fame, or influence we destroy our relationships with others, with the environment, with ourselves, and with God. The Psalmist comments on those who are attached to the things of this world: “*They trust in their wealth; the abundance of their riches is their boast,*” and reminds us that when someone dies, “*his wealth shall not follow him down.*”

Unfortunately, experience teaches us that worldliness infects even members of the Church. Today, we remember Saint Hildegard of Bingen, whom Pope Benedict XVI declared a doctor of the Church in 2012 and whom Pope Francis added to the Roman calendar. Hildegard saw contradictions in the lives of individual members of the faithful, including religious. She saw that individualism in doctrine and in practice among laity, religious, and ordained as an expression of pride, which served as a barrier to the Church’s evangelizing mission.

True humility and a communal spirit demanded a commitment to virtue, as Pope Benedict XVI noted in declaring her a Doctor of the Church:

“One of the salient points of Hildegard’s magisterium was her heartfelt exhortation to a virtuous life addressed to consecrated men and women. Her understanding of the consecrated life is a true “theological metaphysics”, because it is firmly rooted in the theological virtue of faith, which is the source and constant impulse to full commitment in obedience, poverty and chastity. In living out the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person shares in the experience of Christ, poor, chaste and obedient, and follows in his footsteps in daily life. This is fundamental in the consecrated life.” (Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Lux sui populi suaeque aetatis*, 7 October 2017.)

In contrast to spiritual worldliness, Paul reminds us that it is possible to practice “*religion with contentment.*” It is a way of living by faith-filled gratitude, like the women of the Gospel, content with what we have rather than obsessed about what we do not have. Those women were content to have been healed; to have been called to follow Jesus; and, to have Jesus in their lives. They were happy with what

God provided rather than desirous of mammon. Theirs was a lifestyle that drew them daily toward God and made their experience of the Kingdom fuller.

Paul reminds us, "*We brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it. If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that.*" That spirit of gratitude allows one to "*pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.*" It helps us to "*compete well for the faith*" and to "*lay hold of eternal life.*" Stripped of worldliness, we become bearers of the promise of the greater reward that awaits us. This is what only those who are poor in spirit, those who place their treasure in God, know.