

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
FRIDAY OF THE 27TH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
COUNCIL OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI, OCTOBER 13, 2017

My Dear Sisters in Christ,

I am pleased to be with you as you celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of your foundation at this National Assembly, entitled, "The Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious: A Gift Given, Received, and Shared." As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's representative in this country, I express to you His Holiness' heartfelt congratulations, spiritual closeness, and paternal affection as you gather for this assembly. Indeed, the Lord has given you the beautiful gift of a religious vocation. Humbly you have received this gift and joyfully shared it with others in your apostolates and with the whole Church. The religious vocation is a sign, not only that the God who is to be loved above else, remains close to His people, but it is also a witness to the Kingdom of Christ, your Beloved Spouse.

The question of the Kingdom and union with Christ are at the heart of the Gospel passage from Saint Luke. Jesus had just taught his disciples to pray the *Our Father* and to pray to the heavenly Father *who knows how to give good gifts to His children*. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus has made known the Kingdom, performing healing miracles and exorcisms, which are signs of the coming of the Kingdom. The whole Gospel of Jesus is a proclamation of the Kingdom, a liberation from the slavery of sin, the oppression of the Evil One, and from all that keeps us from crying out *Abba*, that is, Father.

Opposition to this Kingdom and to Jesus comes from those committed to preserving their own little kingdoms. Jesus' adversaries – largely the religious and political leaders of his day – accuse Him of driving out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Unlike earthly kingdoms in which only the rich, powerful, and learned gather around the king, Jesus draws to Himself the poor, the weak, the marginalized, foreigners, and the lowly of the earth. Their association with Him is a sign that they will share in the heavenly banquet in the Kingdom of His Father. Of course, their association with Him evokes a response of conversion and love in them and provokes opposition from the scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus' opponents ask for a sign, as if the many miracles and His teaching were not already proof that He was the Son of God. It is not unlike the signs the devil demanded of him during the temptation in the desert or the demands of the crowd to come down from the cross during His Passion. Those desirous of a sign reveal their unbelief, for God reveals Himself in works of mercy and love, not in magic tricks! He performs miracles to bring people to faith, not to resolve earthly problems or satisfy curiosities. Those demanding a sign are like those who, during the Exodus, asked, "*Is God in our midst or not?*" (Ex 17:7)

Here we see the opposition to Jesus as the Son of the Father. The opposition comes from those who are secure in their own intelligence and their own truth; who have been tempted by the Evil One to place themselves on the same level as God – to be like God, hearkening back to Genesis.

Jesus places the real issue before them, *“If it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God is upon you.”* Does He perform miracles and cast out demons by the finger of God – as the Son of God – or not? It is a way of asking the question: *Who do you say that I am?* One must choose to serve Jesus and His Kingdom or to choose someone or something else. Jesus says, *“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather scatters.”*

This is the fundamental question: Are we – are our hearts – with Jesus? Sometimes a great temptation, especially among religious communities, is to distinguish ourselves into two groups: those who are with us and those who are against. This is the division that the Evil One wants to sow within the Church. But are we with Jesus? Can we remain with Jesus in all our works and in our consecrated life? If we do not remain with Jesus, in prayer, where we cultivate intimacy with our beloved Spouse, then we will not bear fruit. As Jesus says in the Gospel of John: *“I am the Vine. You are the branches. Apart from me, you can do nothing.”*

The Evil One is a “strong man”, a crafty, powerful opponent; he wants to place sister against sister; community against community; and, to turn our religiosity into an ideology, not rooted in the love of God. However, Jesus is stronger than the Evil One and overcomes Him by the power of love and fidelity. He empties Himself, humbling Himself even to the point of death on the Cross, in a great outpouring of love, to win our hearts. This is the immense love that Christ has for each of us. We have done nothing to earn His love. It is a gift to be received.

This same love calls you daily to deeper consecration to Him in the religious life, a life which involves ongoing conversion to Christ. This is the core of the message of Fatima. Today marks the 100th anniversary of the sixth appearance of Our Lady there, the day that more than 70,000 witnessed the miracle of the sun. Our Lady encouraged the children not only to pray the rosary, but also told them, “People must amend their lives and ask pardon for their sins. They must not offend our Lord anymore, for He is already too much offended.” The need for conversion, pardon, and amendment of life begins with cherishing the gifts of mercy and our vocations, given to us by the Lord.

The conclusion to the Gospel is a reminder of the need to vigilantly guard our hearts, preserving and nurturing these gifts, so that they may be shared with others. Otherwise, we may be dressed in the trappings of religiosity, but our hearts will be empty of the Spirit of God. Then, the Evil One, represented by the seven wicked spirits, will return to do more damage, acting like a virus, more resistant and powerful before, infecting us and those around us.

As consecrated women, you are witnesses to the power of the Risen Lord, which manifests itself in love and which opens new horizons that lead to peace and joy. As the Holy Father said in his Easter Vigil homily this year: “The beating heart of the Risen Lord is given to us, and we are asked to give it in turn as a transforming force, as the leaven of a new humanity.” (POPE FRANCIS, HOMILY AT THE EASTER VIGIL, 15 APRIL 2017)

This is what the CMSWR has been doing for the last twenty-five years. May Christ, your beloved Spouse, sustain and strengthen you in your witness to the God whose love is stronger than death.