

**HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES  
WEDNESDAY OF THE 29<sup>TH</sup> WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME  
CLOSING OF THE SESQUICENTENNIAL YEAR FOR THE  
SISTERS OF CHARITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD  
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHAPEL, HOUSTON, TEXAS  
OCTOBER 25, 2017**

Dear Friends in Christ,

I am very pleased to be with you as your celebrations for your Sesquicentennial Year draw to a close. I wish to thank Sister Kelvina Keating for her kind invitation, as well as Sr. Mary Patricia Driscoll and Sr. Elizabeth Ann Hayes, and all involved in coordinating and planning this liturgy and the events throughout the year. As the Holy Father's representative in this country, I want to express His Holiness Pope Francis's heartfelt congratulations, spiritual closeness, and paternal affection as you celebrate this historic moment in the life of your Congregation.

Today's Gospel, taken from the twelfth chapter of Saint Luke, relates the parable about the faithful and unfaithful servant. While the parable encourages vigilance, kindness, and dedication in the Lord's service, the context of the parable is also important. Just prior to its telling, the Lord instructed his disciples not to be anxious about anything (Luke 12:22), pointing out that God provides for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Furthermore, He exhorted them, "*Seek first the kingdom of God,*" (cf. Luke 12:31) reminding them that *where their treasure is, there also their hearts will be* (Luke 12:34).

The priority of the Kingdom of God and its urgency is at the heart of the Gospel. This was clearly understood by Bishop Claude Marie Dubuis, the second bishop of Galveston, who wanted to advance the Kingdom. Christ's healing miracles in the Gospels are set within the context of the proclamation of the Kingdom, and so it is no surprise that the bishop requested sisters, writing: "*Our Lord Jesus Christ, suffering in the persons of a multitude of sick and infirm of every kind, seeks relief at your hands.*"

One hundred fifty years ago, three sisters responded generously to that call, and today we celebrate all that God has done in and through your Congregation to help relieve the sufferings of so many. If the Gospel speaks of being vigilant for the return of the Master, it also implies being attentive. Your Congregation has been attentive to the "signs of the times", adapting and expanding your mission to relieve the sufferings of those who struggle to read and write; to those who struggle, especially immigrants, to find a place to work or to have a place to call home; to relieve the sufferings of persons who are trafficked or traded or whose family life is jeopardized by violence and poverty, including spiritual poverty.

You have responded to the call to be good and faithful servants in a way that far surpasses that of a social service worker or a non-governmental organization. As consecrated persons, you serve the Lord looking forward to being with Him in eternity. Through the life of the evangelical counsels, you witness to the priority of the Kingdom. Through your own poverty, you show solidarity with the poor but also profound trust in Divine Providence, knowing that *life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.* (Luke 12:23)

Through your lived chastity, you testify to the coming of the Kingdom and that God is to be loved above all else, storing up for yourselves *treasure in heaven that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys* (Luke 12:33). Indeed, as Saint Paul says, you *present yourselves to God as raised from the dead to life and the parts of your bodies to God as weapons for righteousness*. (Romans 6:12). Truly, your weapons are love and the righteousness by which you work is the justice, since you are *not under the law but under grace*. (Romans 6:14)

Through your obedience, and Paul speaks of being a *slave of righteousness* (cf. Romans 6:15-18), you recognize the priority of God's will in your lives. Your consecration to the Lord is not rooted in blind obedience to the law, but your obedience and consecration is situated in the context of the love you have for God and that God has for you. Your desire is to be a servant of God's justice and love.

As consecrated persons, you witness to the Kingdom, one built on justice, love, and truth, rather than on power and violence. In the parable of today's Gospel, the unfaithful steward forgets that he is the steward and not the master. He deals with the workers severely, as happens even in our day. In the end, his violence and self-centeredness backfires when the master returns unexpectedly. In contrast, the wise and prudent steward of the master's gifts is set over the whole household and acts according to his master's will.

The Gospel is an invitation for each of us to reflect on our vocations and our own stewardship of God's gifts as builders of and witnesses to the Kingdom of God. As we reflect on the many gifts and blessings to your Congregation over these 150 years, we give thanks to God for the many women of faith who have preceded you, living and dying in the service of the sick, orphans, students and migrants. Yes, you have a rich spiritual heritage and a great responsibility! Jesus says, "*Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.*" (Luke 12:48)

Recall the words of the Holy Father as he concluded the Year for Consecrated Life: "*Consecrated persons are called to be a concrete and prophetic sign of God's closeness, of this sharing in a condition of fragility, of sin and of the wounds of man in our time. All forms of consecrated life, each according to its characteristics, are called to be in a permanent state of mission....*" (HOMILY, WORLD DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE, FEBRUARY 2, 2016)

One hundred fifty years have passed, but your mission of making the Word of God Incarnate continues. May the Immaculate Virgin Mary, who joyfully accepted her mission from the Lord, continue to assist you in your mission of building the Kingdom of her Son.