



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF JESUS

*Consistory Hall
Monday, 2 October 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Sisters,

I am happy to welcome you on the occasion of your General Chapter. I greet the Superior General and, through you, all the Little Sisters of Jesus.

The celebration of a General Chapter is a time of grace for every institute of consecrated life. In a climate of prayer and fraternal affection, the religious come together to listen to the Holy Spirit, to face together the many questions and challenges that the institute faces at a precise time in its history. However, before being a moment of reflection on practical matters, a Chapter is the common spiritual experience of a return to the source of the call, both the personal and the community one.

And at the source of your institute is the overwhelming experience of God's tenderness experienced by your Foundress, Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus. In the footsteps of Blessed Charles de Foucauld, she perceived that Almighty God, Creator and Lord of the Universe was not afraid to be a small, trusting child in Mary's arms out of love for us, and he still wants to give Himself humbly to each of us, for love. Today, almost 80 years after the founding of the Institute, there are more than 1,000 Little Sisters around the world. They are in humanly difficult situations, with the littlest and the poorest. They are not primarily there to heal, educate and catechize — though they do these things well — but to love, to be with the littlest ones, just as Jesus did, to proclaim the Gospel with the simple life of work, presence, friendship and unconditional welcome. It is important, of vital importance, that you return continually to this original experience of the closeness of God, who offers himself meekly and humbly to us in order to save us and fill us with

His love. And this love of God must express itself more in the gestures of evangelization than in words: a smile, silence, adoration, patience. I remember that dialogue between the oak and the almond tree. The oak said to the almond tree, "Tell me about God", and the almond tree blossomed. This is what the Church asks of you: to blossom, to flourish in the gestures of God's love.

Above all, dear sisters, be sure to keep your spiritual life fervent, for it is from this love, received from God in an incessant and ever-new way, that your love for your brothers and sisters overflows. It is this spiritual life that young people thirst for, and this allows them to respond in turn to the Lord's invitation. It is from this spiritual life that the evangelical witness that the poor long for, springs forth. The recipes may be useful, but later; if this is not present, they have no effect.

Do not be afraid to go ahead, bringing the little Child Jesus into your hearts, in all the places where the littlest of our world are present. Stay free from bonds with works and things, free to love those you encounter wherever the Spirit leads you. Free to fly, free to dream. The difficulties of the present time make you share the sorrows of so many brothers and sisters: with them, you too sometimes find yourself forced to close or abandon your homes to flee elsewhere; you too know the trials of age, solitude and suffering; you too experience the harshness of the journey when you must remain faithful while crossing the desert. But in all this, the love you bear in your hearts makes you free women attached to the essentials.

Hold dear the quality of fraternal life in your communities. Despite difficulties, in following Jesus, poor among the poor, Little Sister Magdeleine, found true joy, a joy she shared with everyone, beginning with her sisters. Simplicity and joy belong to consecrated life, and in a special way to yours. The Child Jesus was joyful in Nazareth; He certainly played and laughed with Mary and Joseph, with children of his age and with neighbours. To rediscover the taste of community life, you must always search for simplicity, affection, thoughtfulness, service, and wonder.

It is from this fraternity among you that the service of authority is born. The exercise of responsibility in the Church is rooted in the common and fraternal will to listen to the Lord, to place oneself in His school and to live in his Spirit so that his Kingdom can extend to all hearts. It is in this context of common and fraternal listening that dialogue and obedience can find their place. And in such obedience, like the Child Jesus, all the Little Sisters will grow "in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2:52).

The fellowship you experience with each other opens your hearts to fraternity towards everyone. Your Foundress invited you to become "Arabs among the Arabs, nomads among nomads, workers among workers and, above all, human beings among humans" (Annie de Jésus, *Petite soeur Magdeleine de Jésus: L'expérience de Bethléem jusqu'aux confins du monde*, Cerf, 2008, p. 184). Luna Park workers among Luna Park workers, [amusement park workers] like those here in Rome. And so the Institute has spread to many countries and you have met many of these little

ones, of all races, languages and religions. Your hearts have no barriers. Of course, you cannot change the world by yourselves, but you can illuminate it by bringing the joy of the Gospel to the neighbourhoods, the streets, mixing with the crowds, always close to the littlest.

Since you are among the little ones that the Blessed Virgin presents to her Son Jesus, our Lord, you can count on her maternal intercession, as well as on the Church's prayer for your Institute, especially during this General Chapter.

Thank you very much, thank you for your visit, and I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you.