



Pope to Canossian Sisters: Be 'Women of the Word' like Mary

In his address to participants at the General Chapter of the Canossian Daughters of Charity, Pope Francis encourages the nuns in their mission of service to God and the poor, and invites them to become “Women of the Word” in the footsteps of Our Lady.

By Benedict Mayaki, SJ

Pope Francis on Friday received the participants at the General Chapter of the Canossian Daughters of Charity in audience in the Vatican.

Addressing them, the Pope thanked the Superior General for the presentation of the Chapter, and shared with them some reflections suggested by the theme “Women of the Word, loving without measure” that guides the work of the Chapter.

Women of the Word

The Holy Father upheld the Blessed Virgin as a “woman of the Word” and a disciple. By looking at her and by dialoguing with her in prayer, said the Pope, the women religious can learn what it means to be “women of the Word.”

Here, the older women can witness to the younger ones “an awe that does not wane, an appreciation that grows with age, an acceptance of the Word that becomes fuller, more concrete, more incarnate in life.”

The younger ones, for their part, can witness to the older ones, “the enthusiasm of discoveries, the surges of the heart that, in silence, learns to resonate with the Word, letting themselves be surprised, even questioned, and to grow in the school of the Master.”

As for those in middle age, the Holy Father acknowledged that they are more at risk because it is an age of passage with some pitfalls, and also a stage of greater responsibility, thus making it easy to slip into activism.

“So, welcome this motto for all!” Pope Francis urged. “To put ourselves in the school of Mary, refocus on the Word, and be women who love without measure.”

Loving without measure

Loving without measure – the second element of the theme of the Chapter – said the Pope, “is a capacity that comes from the Holy Spirit”, not from our efforts but “from God who always loves without measure.”

The Pope further noted that the theme of the Chapter speaks of a “reconfiguration to a life of holiness” in and for mission today. He added that “holiness” and “mission” are constitutive dimensions of Christian life and are inseparable from each other and, in simple terms, “every saint, every holy person is a mission” as demonstrated by the testimony of St. Magdalene of Canossa.

Service of God and the poor

Reflecting on the life of the saint, the Holy Father highlighted that she felt called to give herself entirely to God and also to be close to the poor.

In this twofold belonging, he said, “it was the Spirit that guides her through concrete situations, and she lets herself be guided; she seeks her own way but always remaining docile.” St. Magdalene’s life was, in this manner, “configured” to the holiness of Christ, modeled after Mary, in “the concrete missionary form dictated by the reality in which she lived.”

The Holy Father thus encouraged the nuns to “re-configure” themselves according to this form of life, adding that the secret is “to be guided by the Holy Spirit to love God and the poor” in the “today” of the Church and the different societies in which the sisters are present.

He also thanked them for the courage, generosity and joy in their “hearts and faces.” He added that “joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit and is a clear sign of the Gospel,” especially when it shines through in sharing with brothers and sisters in conditions of hardship and marginalization.

Community

Pope Francis went on to highlight the community dimension, recalling the Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate* that says that “Growth in holiness is a journey in community...living or working alongside others is surely a path of spiritual growth and sharing the word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community.”

The Pope specified that it is not the big things, but rather everyday details that count, as it is in families where charity can be found. He said this is so because “a community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father’s plan.”

Adoration prayers

The Holy Father then stressed the importance of prayers of adoration, recalling the witness of the foundress who, like other saints, drew her apostolic impetus from remaining in adoration in the presence of the Lord.

He added that “the movement of the spirit that de-centers itself from self to center itself in Christ is what makes possible a service to neighbor that is not pietism or welfarism, but openness to the other, closeness, sharing; in a word: charity.”

Concluding, Pope Francis thanked the nuns for the visit and for what they are and do in the Church. He prayed that the Holy Spirit may give them light and strength to conclude the Chapter well and invoked a blessing upon all the sisters in every part of the world.