



"Rejoice!" A message from the teachings of Pope Francis

A letter to consecrated men and women  
for the year dedicated to Consecrated Life

Dear brothers and sisters,

"The joy of the Gospel fills the heart and lives of all who encounter Jesus.  
With Jesus Christ, joy is constantly being born anew."

The beginning of *Evangelii Gaudium*, within the fabric of the teaching of Pope Francis, rings out with surprising vitality, proclaiming the wonderful mystery of the Good News that transforms the life of the person who takes it to heart. We are told the parable of joy: our meeting with Jesus lights up in us its original beauty, the beauty of the face on which the Father's glory shines, radiating happiness.

This Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life invites us to reflect on the graced time we have been given to live, at the special invitation that the Pope addresses to those in consecrated life.

To accept this teaching means to renew our existence in accordance with the Gospel, not in a radical way understood as a model of perfection and often of separation, but by adhering wholeheartedly to the saving encounter that transforms our life. "It is a question of leaving everything to follow the Lord. No, I do not want to say 'radical'. Evangelical radicalness is not only for religious: it is demanded of all. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way. It is this witness that I expect of you. Religious should be men and women able to wake the world up."

In their finite humanity, on the edge, in their everyday struggles, consecrated men and women live out their fidelity, giving a reason

for the joy that lives in them. So they become splendid witnesses, effective proclaimers, companions and neighbors for the women and men with whom they share a common history and who want to find their Father's house in the Church. Francis of Assisi, who took the Gospel as his way of life "made faith grow and he renewed the Church, and at the same time he renewed society, he made it more fraternal, but he always did it with the Gospel and by his witness. Always preach the Gospel and if necessary use words"!

Numerous suggestions come to us from listening to the words of the Pope, but we are particularly challenged by the absolute simplicity with which Pope Francis offers his teaching, in tune with the appealing sincerity of the Gospel. Plain words disseminated from the open arms of the good sower, who trustingly does not discriminate one sort of soil from another.

An authoritative invitation is offered to us with gentle trust, an invitation to do away with institutional arguments and personal justifications. It is a provocative word that questions our sometimes apathetic or sleepy way of life, as we often live on the sidelines of the challenge: "If you had faith as big as this mustard seed..."(Luke 17:5). It is an invitation that encourages us to impel our spirits to acknowledge the Word living among us, the Spirit who creates and continues to renew the Church.

This letter is motivated by this invitation, in the hope of initiating a shared reflection. It is offered as a simple tool for examining our lives honestly in the light of the Gospel. This Congregation therefore presents a shared itinerary, a space for personal, communal and institutional reflection as we journey during this year the Church has dedicated to consecrated life, with the desire and the intention of making courageous evangelical decisions leading to revitalization, bearing fruits of joy. "The primacy of God gives full meaning and joy to human lives, because men and women are made for God, and their hearts are restless until they rest in God."

Questions for reflection from Pope Francis:

I want to say one word to you and this word is "joy".  
It is the joy of freshness, the joy of following Jesus;  
the joy that the Holy Spirit gives us, not the joy of the world.  
There is joy! - where is joy born?

Look into the depths of your heart. Look into your own inner depths and ask yourself: Do you have a heart that desires something great or a heart that has been lulled to sleep by things?  
Has your heart preserved the restlessness of seeking or have you let it

be suffocated by things that end up by hardening it?  
God awaits you! God seeks you! How do you respond to God?  
Are you aware of the situation of your soul or have you nodded off?  
Do you believe God is waiting for you or does this truth consist only  
of "words"?