

Pope Francis's address to six thousand pilgrims on the 'Year of Faith Pilgrimage to the Tomb of Peter for Novices, Seminarians and those on a vocational journey 4-7 July 2013'. Paul VI Audience Hall. Saturday 6th July 2013



“Good afternoon. I checked with Msgr Fischella and I feel a bit better that you all have simultaneous translations. I thank Msgr Fischella for his kind words and also for his work. He has worked a lot, not just for this event but for everything he has done and will do for the Year of Faith. Thank you very much.

Msgr Fischella said something to me, which I am not sure is true but I take it up again. He said that all of you want to give your life FOREVER to Christ. Now you clap and celebrate because it is the time of the wedding but when the honeymoon is over what will happen? I heard a good seminarian say that he wanted to serve Christ for 10 years and then he would think of living another life. This is dangerous.

Now listen well. All of us, even us oldies are under pressure from this culture which is all about the provisional. This is dangerous because we don't play with life: I will marry as long as love lasts! I'll become a sister for a while and then, well, we'll see! I'll become a seminarian in order to become a priest but who knows how things will end! This isn't OK with Jesus But I'm not telling you off, I am reprimanding this culture of the provisional, the temporary, which creates so much noise. This isn't good because today it becomes very difficult to make a definitive choice. In my days it was much easier because our culture enabled a definitive choice, whether for marriage, consecrated life or priesthood. But a permanent choice isn't easy in this era. We are victims of this culture of the provisional.

I want you to think about this. How can I become free of this culture of the provisional, the temporary? We have to learn how to close the doors of our interior cell, on the inside. Once a priest, a good priest but he didn't feel like a good priest because he was humble, he felt like a sinner and he prayed a lot to Our Lady. He said this to Our Lady and I'm saying it in Spanish, it's a beautiful poem, he said to her, never, never let me leave Jesus. [He reads the Spanish poem] 'This evening Mother my promise is sincere but please don't forget to leave the key on the outside'. One can say this out of love for the Virgin, one says it to Our lady. But when one always leaves the key outside just in case something will happen, that's no good. We have to learn to close the door from the inside and if I am not certain then I think about it, I take time, and then when I feel certain /secure (in Jesus of course because without Jesus no one is certain) then I close the door. Have you understood this?

When I came in I saw a word I'd written which I wanted to share with you and the word is joy. Whenever there are consecrated men and women: seminarians, male and female religious, joy is always around. It is the joy of freshness, of following Jesus, the joy that the Holy Spirit gives, not the joy of the world. Where does joy come from? Saturday night coming back from the dancing with my friends in the nightclub? A seminarian perhaps? [Laughter] No, it's not like that. For some people joy comes from possessions. Hence the search for the latest model of smartphone, the quickest scooter. The car that makes one noticed. But I tell

you sincerely, I feel really bad when I see a priest or sister with the latest model of car. But this can't happen. [cheers] You must be thinking well we have to go by bicycle, Yes, bicycles are good. Mons Alfredo rides the bicycle. We have to go cycling. [He looks at his right hand man and everyone laughs]. I believe a car is necessary for our work to go from one place to another, but take one that's more humble. If you want the beautiful one, think of how many children are dying of hunger. Just think of that. Joy doesn't come from the possessions you have.

Others think it comes from thrill-seeking. Young people like to walk on the cliff edge. Others get their joy from the latest fashions, or entertainment in the most fashionable places. I'm not saying sisters go there but I'm talking about young people in general. [Laughter] Others again from success with boys and girls, maybe passing from one relationship to another. This comes from the insecurity of a love that isn't secure, love that is being tried out. We could carry on. You will also find yourself in front of realities that you cannot ignore. We know that all of this can satisfy some desire, create some emotional pleasure but in the end it is a joy that stops at a superficial level, it doesn't descend deep within oneself, it isn't intimate.

Joy isn't the emotion of a moment. It's something else. True joy doesn't come from having things. It's born from an encounter, from a relationship with others. It's born from feeling accepted, understood and loved. From being loved to being accepted, from being understanding to being loving. And this is not just because of a momentary interest but because the other is a person. Joy comes from the free gift of an encounter. It comes from hearing someone say 'You are important for me'. Not necessarily with words. That's so beautiful. It's really what God helps us to understand. In the calling of God, he is saying 'You are important to me, I am counting on you.' Jesus says this to each one of us, and it's from this that joy comes. Joy from the first moment that Jesus looked at me.

To understand and hear this is the secret of our joy. To feel oneself loved by God, to recognise that to him we are not just numbers, we are people. To hear that it is he who is calling us to be a priest or a brother or a sister. It is not primarily a choice of ours. I don't trust that seminarian or that novice who says 'I have chosen this way of life'. [cheers] I don't like that. It's not right. [Claps] But it is the response to a call of love. I feel something within me which makes me feel uneasy and I respond 'yes'. In prayer Our Lord helps us experience this love. And also through lots of signs that we can read in our own lives. Lots of people he puts on our path.

It's the joy of meeting Him. And the joy of his call leads us not to close in on ourselves but to open ourselves up. It leads us to serve the Church. St Thomas says, 'bonum est diffusivum sui'. It's not too difficult this Latin: 'Good spreads itself'. Joy also spreads out. So don't be afraid to show joy for having responded to the call of God to his loving choice to witness to the Gospel in the service of the Church. That's the true joy that's contagious. It makes us carry on. [Cheers]

Instead when you see a seminarian that is too serious, too sad, or a novice like that, you think to yourself 'Something's not right here'. [Cheers] It means the joy of the Lord is missing, the joy that brings to service, the joy that makes you reach out to others to announce Jesus. That's what's missing. There's no holiness in sadness. [Applause] St Theresa of Avila said: 'A saint who is sad is a sad saint'. When you see a seminarian, a novice, a sister or a priest with a long face - like a wet blanket - you think 'Something's not right here.' But please, never sisters, never priests with a sour face Peperroncino in aceto Never. [Cheers] But just think, when a priest or a sister lacks joy it is sad. Then you may think there's some mental illness, a psychiatric problem. But be careful because that can happen and people can get ill, have a psychiatric problem. It does happen. For most of them it's not like that, it's usually a problem of dissatisfaction. But where is the centre of that lack of joy. It's a problem of celibacy. I'll explain myself.

You seminarians and sisters consecrate your love to Jesus, it's a big love. The heart for Jesus and it leads us to take vow of chastity, the vow of celibacy. But the vow of chastity,

the vow of celibacy doesn't stop in the moment you take it, it carries on, along a road, gradually maturing, maturing, maturing, towards pastoral paternity, towards pastoral maternity. When a priest isn't father in his own community and a sister isn't mother to those she works with, they become sad, and that's the problem. So I say to you that the root of sadness in pastoral life is the lack of paternity and maternity - and this lack takes one to live badly a consecration that is supposed to make us fruitful. You can't imagine a priest or sister who is not fruitful – this isn't Catholic! [Applause] This is the beauty of consecration, joy, joy.

[He singles out a very elderly nun, on crutches, in the front row] I don't want to embarrass this sister, but she has a happy face -- your face helped me -- she was getting squashed there, but she smiled, she didn't complain. And there are many years of consecrated life behind her. She has beautiful eyes. When you find examples like this, lots of sisters and lots of priests that are happy, it is because they are fruitful, they give life, life, life. They give this life because they find it in Jesus. It's the joy of Jesus. Joy, no sadness, but pastoral fecundity.

To be joyous witnesses of the Gospel one has to be authentic, coherent. That's another word that I want to give you - authenticity. Jesus really hit out at hypocrites, those who are two-faced. To speak of authenticity to young people, it doesn't take much because they have this desire to be authentic and coherent. They find it disgusting to find, in the Catholic Church, priests or sisters who are not authentic. [Cheers] This is primarily a responsibility of adults and formators, those who are here, to give an example of coherence to young people. If we want authentic young people we need to be authentic. Otherwise the Lord will say the same about us as he said about the Pharisees: 'Do what they tell you but don't do what they do'.

Try and follow this road. I always say what St Francis of Assisi affirmed, 'Christ has asked us to announce the Gospels also with words' - 'Announce the Gospel always and if necessary use words.' What's this mean? It means announcing the Gospel with authenticity, with coherence of life. But in this world where wealth corrupts it's important that we priests, we sisters, all of us are coherent with our poverty. But when you find that the first concern of an institution, whether educational or of a parish, is money, well, that's not good. It's not good. It's incoherence. We need to be coherent, authentic. So let's do what St Francis did – let's teach the Gospel by example, then with words: First of all it is in our own lives that people must be able to read the Gospel. And also here without fear of our defects which we try to correct, with our limits that the Lord knows, but also with the generosity to allow him to work in us. Defects, limits and I add a little more even with our sins.

I would like to know something - if there's anyone here in this hall that is not a sinner, who has not sinned? Who's going to raise their hand? No, no one is going to put their hands up because from here to the back of the hall we are all sinners. How do I carry my sin, my sins? I want to advise you, suggest something to you: be transparent with your confessor. Always say everything, don't be afraid. "Father, I have sinned." Think of the Samaritan woman: she had to try and tell her contemporaries that she had seen the Messiah, she tried to tell them "he told me everything I've ever done". They all knew what she'd done, they knew what her life was like, already knew who this woman was. So always tell the truth to your confessor. This transparency is good and will do good because it makes us humble before everyone. "Father, I've done this, I've fallen into this, I've hated", whatever it is but tell the truth. It means saying the truth without trying too hard to hide it, without half-truths or beating around the bush. You're speaking with Jesus in the person of your confessor. And Jesus knows the truth. He forgives you, always, but he wants you to tell him what he already knows. Transparency.

It is so sad when I see seminarians or sisters confessing with this person to clean their sleeves and then tomorrow he goes to that other person, then to another one, a different person - they become a pilgrim between confessors so as to hide their own truth. Transparency, It is Jesus you are confessing to. Always have this transparency before Jesus in the confessor. But this is a grace. "Father I have sinned. I have done this and this and this"

with all the words. And Our Lord will embrace you, will kiss you, "go and sin no more". And if you come back again another time, that's fine. I'm telling you this from my own personal experience. I have found many consecrated people who fall into this trap of hypocrisy because of the lack of transparency. Say, "I've done this" - humbly. Just like the publican at the back of the church. "I've done this, I've done this". And the Lord will do it all. He will do it. Have you understood? Where sin has abounded, grace has abounded even more. Open the doors to grace with this transparency. [Applause]

The saints and the masters of the spiritual life tell us that another indispensable tool for increasing in authenticity is the daily practice of the examination of conscience. What's happening in my soul? Be open with the Lord, with the confessor, with the spiritual director. This together with confession is very important to increase in transparency.

Up to what time can I carry on Msgr Fischella? [Laughter] He says we can stay until tomorrow. But if that's the case, then they should bring at least a sandwich and a coca cola to each one of you. [Laughter]

So, coherence is fundamental for our witness to be credible. But that's not enough. You also need a cultural preparation; I underline a cultural preparation, to be able to give a reason for our faith and our hope. The current context in which we're living is asking us constantly to be able to give a reason. And this is a good thing because it also allows us not to take anything for granted. Nowadays we cannot take anything for granted. This is demanding and requires a good formation that is well balanced and incorporates all the dimensions of life: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral.

In your formation they are four basic pillars: spiritual formation - that is the spiritual life, intellectual life - to study, to be able to give reason, the apostolic life - to start to go out to spread the gospel, and fourth, community life. Four. And for this last one in particular it is necessary that formation happens in community, in novitiate, in juniorates, in seminaries. But I always think this: it's better to have the worst seminary than no seminary at all. Why? Because it is necessary for community life. Remember, the four pillars on which you have to build your vocation. And here I want to underline for community life the importance of friendships and fraternal relationships that are an integral part of this formation.

Another problem comes up here. I say this in relationship to relationships and fraternity. Why do I say this about fraternity? How many times I have seen in my own life, in life, communities: seminaries, religious communities, diocesan, where the most common ejaculations are gossip. This is terrible. They talk badly one about the other. This in our clerical and religious world! Excuse me for saying it, but it is common: jealousy, envy, people speaking badly about others. I don't mean just talking badly about superiors. That's a classic one. [Laughter] I would like to say that this is very common. Even I have fallen into it. Many times I've done it, spoken badly about my superiors. I'm embarrassed about that. It's not good to do it. Spreading gossip. "Hey have you heard this? Have you heard that?" But then it becomes a hell in that kind of community. That's no good. That's why we need to have fraternal friendships. True friends are few in life, the bible tells us that, one or two, but fraternal relationships with everyone is important. My dear brothers, if you have got something against your brother or my sister tell it straight to them, tell them face to face. Or I say it to someone who can help. But I don't tell it to others to dirty their name. Gossip is terrible. Under gossip there's always jealousy, envy, ambition. Just think about this. Once I heard a person who did the spiritual exercises - it was a consecrated person, a sister [Laughter] -- no, this is a good story! [More laughter] -- this sister had promised Our Lord never to speak badly of another person. This is a wonderful, beautiful road to holiness, not to speak badly about others. If you've got a problem say it to the superior or to the Bishop who could intervene, don't talk about things with people who can't help. This is important - fraternity. Tell me, do you speak badly about your own mother? Your father? Your brothers? Never. So why do you do it in consecrated life or in the seminary? Just think about this, fraternity. Fraternal love.

There are however two extremes in friendship and fraternity: isolation just as much as dissipation. Friendship in fraternity helps me not to fall into isolation or into dissipation. To cultivate friendships is a true good. But I have to educate myself not to be closed but to go out of myself. A priest or a brother or sister can't ever be an island but is made to go out towards the other. And friendships are enriched by the different charisms of your religious families. It is a great wealth. Think of the beautiful friendships of many saints. [He looks at his watch] I think I'm going to have to cut it a bit short. [NOOO]. Your patience is great.

I would like to say to you, go out of yourselves to announce the Gospel. But to do this you've got to out of yourselves to meet Jesus. There are two exits; one towards the encounter with Jesus, towards transcendence, and the other is towards others, to announce Jesus. These two go together. If you do only one of these it's no good. I am reminded of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: she was good this sister [Claps and laughter] but she wasn't afraid of anything. She went throughout the streets. But she also had no fear of kneeling before Our Lord for two hours. So don't be afraid to go beyond yourselves - in prayer, and in pastoral work. Be courageous. Both to pray, and to go and announce the Gospel.

I would like to have a Church that is more missionary, not so tranquil, not a nice church that just plods along. In the last few days many missionaries have been coming to morning Mass at St Martha and when we greeted each other they said "I'm an old sister now but I've been forty years in Chad, and I've been so many years here, so many years there" - isn't that beautiful? But you knew that this sister spent so many years doing that because she never stopped meeting Jesus in prayer? Go out of yourselves, in transcendence towards Jesus in prayer, in transcendence towards others in the apostolate and in love. Give the content of the church teaching constantly. Faithful to the road that Jesus wants.

Don't learn from us who are no longer young, don't learn from us that sport that we oldies often have, the sport of complaining, don't learn from us the cult of the goddess of lamentation – that's a god that is - but be always positive and cultivate the spiritual life at the same time. Go and be capable of encountering people, especially those who are most despised, most unfortunate. Don't be afraid to go against the current, be contemplatives and missionaries.

Keep Our Lady always with you. Please pray the rosary as well. [Applause] Keep Our Lady close to you in your house, like the apostle John did. May she always accompany you and protect you. And pray also for me, because I also need a lot of prayers because I am a poor sinner that still carries on. Thank you very much. I will see you again tomorrow [at Mass in St Peter's]. So go ahead with joy, with coherence, always with the courage to speak the truth. And the courage to go out of yourselves to be able to meet Jesus in prayer, and to go out of yourselves to meet others and give them the Gospel with pastoral fruitfulness. Please don't become dried out spinsters. Let's go!