The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE PONTIFICAL LEONINE COLLEGE IN ANAGNI

Clementine Hall
Monday, 14 April 2014

Dear Brother Bishops, Priests and Seminarians,

I greet all of you who form the community of the Pontifical Leonine College in Anagni. I thank the Rector for the words which he addressed to me on your behalf. A special greeting to you, dear seminarians, who chose to come to Rome on foot! Courageous! This pilgrimage is a very beautiful symbol of your formative journey, which should be travelled with enthusiasm and perseverance, in Christ's love and in fraternal communion.

The "Leonine", as a regional seminary, serves several of the dioceses in Lazio. In line with its formative tradition it is called, in the Church today, to offer candidates to the priesthood a vital experience that transforms their vocational aspiration into a fruitful apostolic reality. Every Seminary, yours too, aims to prepare future ordained ministers in a climate of prayer, study and fraternity. It is this evangelical atmosphere, this life full of the Holy Spirit and of humanity, that allows those who immerse themselves therein to assimilate day by day the mind of Jesus Christ, his love for the Father and for the Church, his unreserved dedication to the People of God. Prayer, study, fraternity and also apostolic life: these are the four pillars of formation, which interact. A strong spiritual life; a deep intellectual life; community life; and lastly, apostolic life; with no order of importance. All four are important. If one of them is missing, formation is not comprehensive. And these four interact. Four pillars, four elements on which a seminary must base its life.

You, dear seminarians, are not preparing for a career to become officials in a company or office. We have many, many priests who have only gone halfway. It is a source of sorrow that they have not attained fullness: there is something of an official in them, a bureaucratic element which does not benefit the Church. I urge you, be careful not to fall into this! You are becoming shepherds in

the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd, in order to be like him and to act *in His person* amid his flock, to feed his sheep.

In view of this vocation, we might respond as Mary did to the angel: “How can this be?” (Lk 1:34). Becoming “good shepherds” in the image of Jesus is something too great, and we are too little... It is true! Over the last days, I have been thinking of the Holy Thursday Chrism Mass and I have felt this, that our littleness is made strong through this great gift that we receive: we are among the least of men. It is true, it is too great; however, it is not our work! It is the work of the Holy Spirit, with our cooperation. It is a matter of humbly offering oneself as clay to be moulded, so that the potter, who is God, may work it with water and fire, with the Word and the Spirit. It is a matter of entering into what St Paul says: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Only thus can one be a deacon or priest in the Church, only thus can we feed God’s people and guide them, not along our ways but on the way of Jesus; indeed, on the *Way* that is Jesus.

It is true that there is not always a complete rectitude of intention right from the start. However, I would dare say: it is difficult that this be so. All of us have always had these little things that were not consistent with an upright intention, but this resolves itself in time, through ongoing daily conversion. Let us think about the Apostles! Think of James and John, one wanted to become the prime minister and the other the minister of the economy, because it was more important. The Apostles still did not have this uprightness, their minds were elsewhere, and the Lord with great patience corrected their intention and ultimately their intention was so upright that they gave their lives in preaching and martyrdom. Do not be afraid! “But I’m not sure whether I want to be a priest in order to be promoted...”. “But do you love Jesus?”. “Yes”. “Speak with your spiritual father, speak with your formators, pray, pray, pray and you will see that the uprightness of your intention will grow and progress”.

And this journey means meditating on the Gospel every day, in order to transmit it by your life and preaching; it means experiencing the mercy of God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Never omit this! Always go to confession! And thus shall you become generous and merciful ministers because you will feel God’s mercy upon you. It means nourishing yourselves with faith and love for the Eucharist, in order to nourish the Christian people; it means being men of prayer so as to become the voice of Christ praising the Father and interceding continually for the brethren (cf. Heb 7:25). The prayer of intercession, that made by those great men — Moses, Abraham — who contended with God for the people, that courageous prayer before God. If you — but I say this from the heart, without wishing to give offense — if you, if someone among you is not ready to follow this path, with these attitudes and these experiences, it is better that you have the courage to seek another path. There are many ways in the Church of bearing Christian witness and there are many paths that lead to holiness. In following as a minister of Jesus Christ there is no place for mediocrity, that mediocrity that always leads to using the People of God to one’s own advantage. Woe to the bad shepherds who feed themselves and not the flock! — the Prophets so forcefully exclaimed (cf. Ez 34:1-6)! And Augustine takes up this prophetic phrase in his *De Pastoribus*,

which I recommend you read and meditate upon. But woe to the bad shepherds, because the seminary, to tell the truth, is not a refuge for the many limitations we might have, a refuge for psychological defects or a refuge because I don't have the courage to go on with life and I am looking for a place to protect me. No, it is not this. If your seminary were this, it would become a hypothecary of the Church! No, the seminary is intended precisely to go forward, proceeding along this path. And when we hear the prophets say "woe!", may this "woe!" make you reflect seriously on your future. Pius XI once said that it was better to lose a vocation than risk accepting an unsure candidate. He was a mountain climber, he knew about these things.

Beloved, I thank you for your visit. I thank you for having come on foot. I accompany you with my prayer and blessing, and I entrust you to the Virgin, who is our Mother. Never forget her! The Russian mystics said that in moments of spiritual turmoil we need to take refuge under the mantle of the Holy Mother of God. Never leave there! Covered with her mantle. And please, pray for me!

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