



CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS

HOMILY FOR THE 75TH CONVENTION OF SERRA INTERNATIONAL

Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus – 23 June 2017, 10am

Dear Priests

Dear brothers and sisters of Serra International,

The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which we celebrate today, has been described by Pope Francis as “*the feast of God’s love, of Jesus Christ...a feast we celebrate with joy*” (FRANCIS, *Homily on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, 27 June 2014).

Coming here to Rome for your International Convention, gives you the opportunity to pause and to contemplate the beauty of Father’s love that flows from the Heart of Christ, touches us intimately, transforms us and then sends us out to anoint the world with the joy of the Gospel.

I would like to reflect with you on the beauty of the Heart of Jesus, listening to the invitation he makes to us: to be joyous, to be creative, to be consolation for others.

The Heart of Jesus, where the love of God for mankind burns without ever being extinguished, invites us above all to joy. In today’s Gospel, we see that Jesus rejoices, exults in spirit and addresses the Father with a prayer of praise, because the mystery of the Kingdom has been heard and welcomed by the little ones. Jesus rejoices because, be it even as small as a mustard seed, he sees that the mission for which he was sent into the world is being fulfilled: that everyone, even those who have been excluded until now or who hadn’t the means to understand, can know the Father’s love, can be touched by it and healed. No one is kept at a distance or excluded from the Heart of God: it for this that Jesus rejoices.

This is also the cause of our joy: to know that God's Heart does not hesitate before our weakness but that instead, as Pope Francis reminds us, it is precisely when we experience failure, darkness and limitations that “*the needle of his compass inevitably points, there we see a particular ‘weakness’ of his love, which desires to embrace all and lose none*” (FRANCIS, *Jubilee of Priests*, 3 June 2016).

When the circumstances of our life cast doubt over this invitation to joy – as Pope Francis had occasion to say when he canonized St. Junipero – we risk being caught up in our daily routine and this “can often lead us to a kind of glum apathy which gradually becomes a habit, with a fatal consequence: our hearts grow numb” (FRANCIS, *Homily for the Mass of Canonization of Junipero Serra*, 23 September 2015).

Therefore, we could say that the Heart of Jesus invites us to be **alert, creative and audacious**. The Heart of Jesus is in no way numb but, on the contrary, is deeply involved with the destiny of each person, weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice. The Heart of Jesus beats with the passionate love for the creature that has been given him by the Father. His only desire is to reach each person, to reveal that it is by the Father's love that we can discover the beauty of life, and realise that nothing is lost forever, that he can live by the hope of joy without end. He is consumed by the desire to awaken the hearts of people from resignation, freeing them from being prisoners of evil, fear, rigidity, appearances and conformism.

Jesus tells of the Father's love in a creative manner by parables and images taken from the daily life of the people, and he sets out boldly along the roads of Galilee to announce the Kingdom of God, unafraid of the effort it demands. It is a Heart that never loses inner joy even when misunderstood or resisted; he is not deterred from his mission, even when, in the terrible and dark days of the Passion, fear threatens to have the upper hand. This is how the Heart of Jesus loves even to the total giving of himself, to the offering of his own life: because it is the place of a love that is “limitless; it is never exhausted and it never gives up” (FRANCIS, *Jubilee of Priests*, 3 June 2016).

Lastly, the Heart of Jesus invites us to be **consolation for those who are overburdened and oppressed**. The love that flows from the Heart of Jesus powerfully challenges the culture of indifference in which we are caught up and that threatens to make us “anesthetized individualists”. It is a Heart that never rests, that never closes itself to the needs of our brothers and sisters. Instead, it is profoundly

moved and filled with compassion for all who are beaten down in body or spirit, becoming for them a font of consolation and healing.

It is a “meek and humble” heart, as we have just heard in the Gospel, that never imposes itself on others, never raises its voice to silence them, does not break the wavering reed of human frailty, but, on the contrary, offers itself as a “place” in which all feel welcome, listened to and find relief for their burdens. Jesus never leaves us to be conquered by resignation, by a sense of defeat or by individualism, but opens his Heart to the blows of human life, the questions that arise in our hearts, the inner wounds of the weak, and the hopes of the people.

We can speak, therefore, of a Heart that is going always going forward, “*Siempre Adelante!*”. It never stops; it seeks out the lost, raises the fallen, and offers rest to the tired and oppressed.

My dear brothers and sisters, your mission in the Church is exactly this, to show to everyone the beauty of the Heart of Christ, the boldness of his love, the rest he offers when we are oppressed, the joy that can joy to our lives. You, who are members of Serra, who have chosen to serve the Church by promoting priestly vocations and dedicate yourselves to offering friendship and support to Priests, can learn from the Heart of Jesus. I encourage you to be witnesses to the joy of the Gospel, so that everyone, especially the young, can know how beautiful it is to consecrate one’s life to the Lord. I invite you to be creative in promoting initiatives for the support of vocations without confining yourselves to what you have already done and without fear of renewing yourselves, of changing and finding new avenues and methods for the promotion of vocations. Above all, I ask you to continue to be a consolation for priests, offering them your friendship and your support.

Allow me to emphasize this one last aspect on this day in which we celebrate the **World Day of Sanctification of Priests**; I would encourage you to never tire of praying for priests and offering them your sincere, discreet and generous friendship

With your service, your cooperation in the mission of the Church, but even more, with your willingness to listen and to share, may you be a place of rest for Priests. Pastors too need to be listened to, accompanied and encouraged, and you are

called to receive them when they are fatigued, to comfort them in the loneliness and defeat that at times can burden them, and to anoint their wounds with the oil of prayer and friendship.

Pope Francis has remarked that the heart of a Priest is like the Heart of Jesus: “*No one is excluded from his heart, his prayers or his smile*” (FRANCIS, *Jubilee of Priests*, 3 June 2016). It is in the same way that the brothers and sisters of the Serra Club can live out their concern for priests: let none of them be excluded from your heart, from your prayer and from your smile! Like this, you will help them to go forward! Going always forward, as your motto says. You will help them to be Shepherds with the Heart of Christ and servants of joy in the world.

May Mary, the Most Holy Mother of Christ and of the Church, grant that you have the same Heart as her son; to be joyous and creative in the service of promoting priestly vocations; to be a comfort, consolation and strength for Priests. May she, as a most attentive Mother, guide us on our journey and intercede for us always.