

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FRIDAY OF THE TWENTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF MERCY OF ALMA
OUR LADY OF GRACE CHAPEL, ALMA, MICHIGAN
SEPTEMBER 11, 2020

My Dear Sisters in Christ,

It is my great privilege to be with you. As the Apostolic Nuncio, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and express to you his spiritual closeness and gratitude for your vocations as consecrated women. I thank Mother Mary McGreevy for her kind invitation. We are blessed to have Sr. Maria Carmen working at the Nunciature, but I am also grateful for the service that your community renders to bishops here and throughout the United States and beyond. Moreover, your sisters, well-formed and well-educated, continue to spend themselves as instruments of God's mercy, in the spirit of the Venerable Mother McAuley, in the service of the sick and the poor.

Here at this Motherhouse, most of you received your formation. Certainly, the foundresses of this community were thoroughly imbued with the spirit and tradition established by Mother McAuley. Here it is that you learned and continue to learn how to surrender yourselves to Christ, embodying the prayer of Mother McAuley:

My God, I am yours for time and eternity. Teach me to cast myself entirely into the arms of your loving Providence with a lively, unlimited confidence in your compassionate, tender pity. Grant, O most merciful Redeemer, That whatever you ordain or permit may be acceptable to me. Take from my heart all painful anxiety; let nothing sadden me but sin, nothing delight me but the hope of coming to the possession of You my God and my all, in your everlasting kingdom.

I encourage you, Sisters, to learn from her. Today's Gospel is about learning and training. Jesus says: "When fully trained every disciple will be like his teacher." Jesus wants us to conform our lives to His: to love as He has loved, to live as He has lived. The essence of human life and of Christian existence is to become "fully trained."

We are all disciples, and we will always be disciples – in need of further training. God provides this training, through his Word, through his Church, and even through the suffering and little humiliations he permits. In the Gospel parable of the splinter and the wooden beam, Jesus indicates that He wants us to be attentive to the ways that we need to grow, to those aspects of our own conduct that still need to be trained, rather than to obsess about others' faults and flaws, which we can easily do in communal life.

To judge others, I must assume that I am the center of the world – the omniscient center whose every insight is perfect, even infallible. As such, God ceases to be the center of my life. This is why the Holy Father warns constantly against being a self-referential Church, for if we are God-centered and allow ourselves to be conformed to Christ, we would forgive every offense or for someone who was truly sorry my judgment would consist of forgiveness and mercy, for my judgment would acknowledge the misery that underlies so many human actions, especially hurtful ones.

The habit of judging others entrenches us in the impossibility of receiving God's forgiveness, not because God does not offer us mercy, but because we cease little by little to think of ourselves as needing it, setting ourselves up as the just judge and arbiter of everything. But, by refusing to judge others, I am training myself in the divine art of forgiveness. With respect to our neighbor – whether it is a sister in community or someone to whom I minister – I have a choice to judge or forgive; to exclude or to love.

But to be God-centered and forgiving on a consistent basis, we need training. Saint Paul in the First Reading speaks of the training necessary to become saints. He makes an analogy to the training of championship athletes: *Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.*

Religious life, as you know all too well, demands discipline, but it is this discipline that makes disciples. The required discipline comes not through punishment from superiors but by imitating their good example. At least this was the method of Paul with the Corinthians: *Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.* He was taking out the beams from his life, from his own eye, and that was why he was able to see so clearly how best to help others. The disciple's training must necessarily involve ongoing, deeper conversion to Christ.

This deeper conversion to Christ and conformity to Him meant leading through humble service. Paul, exacting discipline upon himself, made himself *a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible, becoming all things to all, to save at least some.* His love for others and his recognition of God's love for them became the driving force of his zeal.

This then must be the driving force of our mission. For although we are disciples first, we are also missionaries. Our mission is not motivated by worldly respect, honors, or influence, whether in the Church or in the community; rather, it is an interior obligation that flows from having been privileged to be called by name to this way of life, having first heard the Gospel. This interior obligation is to share the joy of what we ourselves have received – the Gospel of His Mercy!

Paul writes: *Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!* A Christian spiritual athlete, fully-formed, will have this same holy woe. Sisters, you have been given a spiritual treasure of which you, like Paul, must not only be good stewards but also generous dispensers. How much our world needs you as consecrated women to be true disciples, outstanding spiritual athletes! How much our world needs mercy!

As consecrated women, you are witnesses to the power of the Risen Lord, which manifests itself in mercy and love. I conclude with the words of our Holy Father:

“Consecrated persons are called to be a concrete and prophetic sign of God's closeness, of this sharing in a condition of fragility, of sin and of the wounds of man in our time.”
(POPE FRANCIS, HOMILY FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE YEAR FOR CONSECRATED LIFE, 2 FEBRUARY 2016)