



## Grateful for the past – living the present with passion

*At the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life Pope Francis has written an Apostolic Letter to all religious in the Church. The Vatican Congregation responsible for religious has collected material from various talks and interviews in a document entitled "Rejoice". In these texts the Pope challenges us religious to live our call with „passionate love“, to allow ourselves to be challenged by the radicality of the Gospel and to respond creatively to new needs and demands of our world and of the Church. The following texts from these various sources are meant to inspire our personal reflection and community sharing during the weeks of Lent.*

- ✿ The first aim is to **look to the past with gratitude**... Each charismatic family to reflect on its origins and history, in order to thank God who grants the Church a variety of gifts which embellish her and equip her for every good work. Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging.
- ✿ More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to **grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them**, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. In this way we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted.
- ✿ For the various founders and foundresses, **the Gospel was the absolute rule**, whereas every other rule was meant merely to be an expression of the Gospel and a means of living the Gospel to the full. For them, the ideal was Christ; they sought to be interiorly united to him and thus to be able to say with Saint Paul: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21). Their vows were intended as a concrete expression of this passionate love. The question we have to ask ourselves during this Year is if and how we too are open to being challenged by the Gospel... It is not enough to read it..., nor is it enough to meditate on it ... Jesus asks us to practice it, to put his words into effect in our lives.
- ✿ This Year calls us **to live the present with passion**. Grateful remembrance of the past leads us, as we listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today, to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of our consecrated life... Are our ministries, our works and our presence consonant with what the Spirit asked of our founders and foundresses? Are they suitable for carrying out today, in society and the Church, those same ministries and works?



Source: [Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated people](#)

- When did I read for the last time the writings of our foundress / founder?
- How can we occasionally bring inspiring texts from the sources of our charisma into our community prayer?



## My first and only love

*At the origin of every call to religious life is a deep desire for God and a fascination with the person of Jesus and his liberating message. The way God's Spirit touches us can be very different for every individual. The cares of daily life, the power of habit, failures and disappointments can sometimes turn that first fire of love into ashes. Pope Francis invites us to rekindle in ourselves the fervour of the time of our first love.*

✿ For the various founders and foundresses, the Gospel was the absolute rule, whereas every other rule was meant merely to be an expression of the Gospel and a means of **living the Gospel to the full**. For them, the ideal was Christ; they sought to be interiorly united to him and thus to be able to say with Saint Paul: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21)... I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day

✿ Joy is born from the gratuitousness of an encounter! And the joy of the encounter with him and with his call does not lead to shutting oneself in but to opening oneself; it leads to service in the Church.... Service in the Church arises out of the **joy of meeting the Lord** and from his call. This mission is to bring to the men and women of our time the consolation of God, to bear witness to his mercy ... "Where there are religious, there is joy". We are called to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness; that we need not seek our happiness elsewhere.

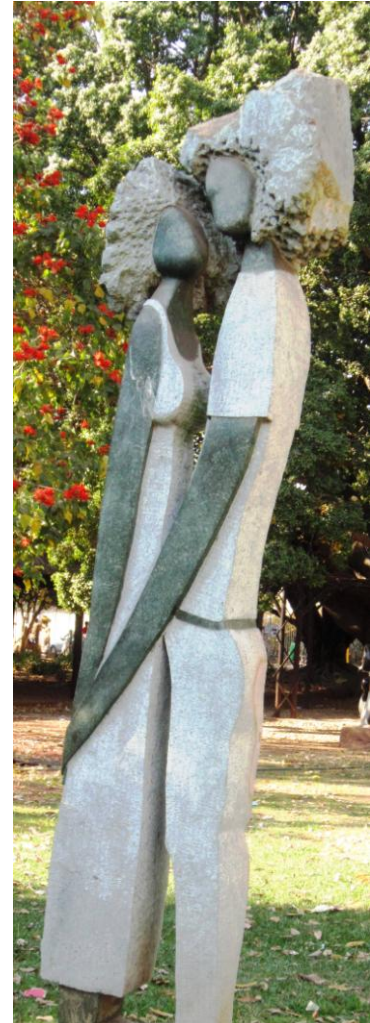
✿ We have to ask ourselves: **Is Jesus really our first and only love**, as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? Only if he is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path. For we will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will be able to love because we have his own heart.

✿ 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 by hardening it? God awaits you, he seeks you; how do you respond to him? Are you aware of the state of your soul? Or have you nodded off? Do you believe God is waiting for you or does this truth consist only of "words"?

✿ There is a temptation to seek God in the past or in a possible future. God is certainly in the past because we can see the footprints. And God is also in the future as a promise. But **the 'concrete' God**, so to speak, **is today**.

Sources: [Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated people](#); [Vatican Congregation for institutes of consecrated life](#); [Rejoice!](#)

- Take a quiet moment and recall the times in your life when God touched you in a special way!
- What in me tends to diminish my enthusiasm and my fervour?  
How can I give expression to my love at this period of my life?







## Becoming experts in communion

*Excessive individualism, living on my own and for my own interests characterizes large sections of our society. The possibilities of digital communication are fascinating, yet often remain superficial and unfulfilling. Increasingly people have a longing for deeper communion, for mutual acceptance, for personal encounter. Do our communities respond to this desire?*

- ✿ Our founders and foundresses were **attracted by the unity of the Apostles with Christ and by the fellowship** which marked the first community in Jerusalem. In establishing their own communities, each of them sought to replicate those models of evangelical living, to be of one heart and one soul, and to rejoice in the Lord's presence.
- ✿ Living the present with passion means **becoming "experts in communion"**, witnesses and architects of the 'plan for unity' which is the crowning point of human history in God's design. In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters.
- ✿ Communion is lived first and foremost within the respective communities of each Institute...The path of charity open before us is almost infinite, since it entails **mutual acceptance and concern**, practising a communion of goods both material and spiritual, fraternal correction and respect for those who are weak ... I would ask you to think about my frequent comments about criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility as ways of acting which have no place in our houses. It is the "mystique of living together" which makes our life "a sacred pilgrimage".
- ✿ Those of you who are young... you are the future, for soon you will be called to take on roles of leadership in the life, formation, service and mission of your communities. This Year should see you actively engaged in dialogue with the previous generation. In fraternal communion you will be enriched by their experiences and wisdom, while at the same time inspiring them, by your own energy and enthusiasm, to recapture their original idealism.
- ✿ We need to ask ourselves about **the way we relate to people from different cultures**, as our communities become increasingly international. How can we enable each member to say freely what he or she thinks, to be accepted with his or her particular gifts, and to become fully co-responsible?
- ✿ **Live the mysticism of encounter**, which entails the ability to hear, to listen to other people; to seek together ways and means. Live in the light of the loving relationship of the three divine Persons (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), the model for all interpersonal relationships.



Sources: [Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated people](#): [Vatican Congregation for institutes of consecrated life](#): [Rejoice!](#)

- How good am I at the art of listening – in community and in my daily encounters?
- Visitors feel quickly where there is an atmosphere of mutual affection or irritation and tension. What do they sense when they come to our community?



## Living our prophetic mission radically

*Through baptism all Christians are commissioned and empowered to participate in the prophetic mission of Christ. Pope Francis believes that religious, by their consecration to the Lord, are called in a special way to live and act prophetically. For him the source of prophetic action is a life close to the poor and the marginalised and an active involvement in their concerns.*

✿ The Church is the salt of the earth; she is the light of the world. She is called to make present in society the leaven of the Kingdom of God and she does this primarily by her witness, her witness of brotherly love, of solidarity and of sharing with others... I am counting on you “to wake up the world”, since the distinctive **sign of consecrated life is prophecy**. Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way. This is the priority that is needed right now: to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth... A religious must never abandon prophecy.

✿ Prophets receive from God the ability to scrutinize the times in which they live and to interpret events: they are **like sentinels who keep watch in the night** and sense the coming of the dawn (cf. Is 21:11-12). Prophets know God and they know the men and women who are their brothers and sisters. They are able to discern and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. Because they are free, they are beholden to no one but God, and they have no interest other than God. Prophets tend to be on the side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God is on their side.

✿ I ask you **to work concretely** in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray. Consequently, I would hope that structures can be streamlined, large religious houses re-purposed for works which better respond to the present demands of evangelization and charity, and apostolates adjusted to new needs.

✿ Rather than living in some utopia, you will find ways to **create “alternate spaces”**, where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive.

✿ At times, like Elijah and Jonah, you may feel **the temptation to flee**, to abandon the task of being a prophet because it is too demanding, wearisome or apparently fruitless. But prophets know that they are never alone. As he did with Jeremiah, so God encourages us: “Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you”. (Jer 1:8)



Sources: [Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated people](#); [Vatican Congregation for institutes of consecrated life](#); [Rejoice!](#)

- Where and how can I give witness to the radicalism of the Gospel in the concrete circumstances of my life?
- How much contact do I / we have with the poor, with disadvantaged groups, with refugees... where we are?



## Responding to new needs of Evangelisation

*It is a central concern of Pope Francis that the Church and especially religious should not be preoccupied by themselves and their internal problems, but go out to the poor and the marginalised in society. The older we become the greater is the risk to turn around our personal problems and ailments. The greater the need to stay alert for the world around us, to try out new ways of Evangelisation and to stay focussed in prayer and action toward the coming of God's kingdom.*

- ✿ I expect from you what I have asked all the members of the Church: to **come out of yourselves and go forth** to the existential peripheries. “Go into all the world”; these were the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers and which he continues to address to us (cf. Mk 16:15). A **whole world awaits us**: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world's goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine. Never lose the impulse to **keep moving** on the roads of the world, the conviction that moving ahead– even if it is with unstable steps and lame legs – is always better than being motionless and locked into your own problems and your own security.\*
- ✿ **You are leaven** that produces good bread for everybody, the kind of bread for which there is a great hunger: to lend an open ear to people's needs and the desires, disappointments and hopes... As those who preceded you in your vocation, you are also able to give young people new hope, assist the elderly, open up new ways to the future, spread love in all places and situations.\*
- ✿ **You are like antennas**, sensitive to pick up fresh initiatives which are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and you can help communities of the church to acquire this vision and find new and daring ways to reach out to all.\*
- ✿ The **missionary excitement**, the joy of encountering Christ which urges you to share the beauty of faith with others, all this removes far to the danger to get caught in individualism.\*
- ✿ The **apostolic effectiveness** of consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. It depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full.
- ✿ Genuine faith always leads to **a deep desire to change the world**. We should ask ourselves some questions: Do we have the drive for great visions? Are we daring? Do we have high-flying dreams? Are we filled with fervour?\*



Sources: [Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated people](#); [Vatican Congregation for institutes of consecrated life: Rejoice!](#) \* [Scrutate!](#) (Free translation)

- Where do I see new needs and opportunities for Evangelisation today? What possibilities do we have to respond to them?
- In how far are the needs of the world and of people around us part of our personal and community prayer?

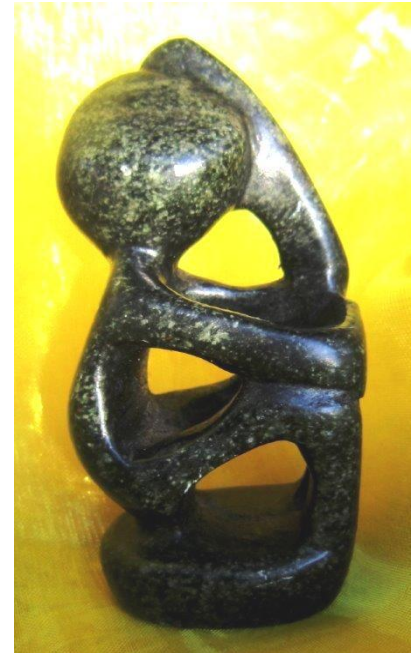




## Discernment in decision making

*As Jesuit Provincial and later as Archbishop of Buenos Aires during the military dictatorship the present Pope had to take some difficult decisions. Not all were good decisions, as he frankly admits. In a remarkable interview with the editor of a Jesuit magazine Pope Francis speaks about his experience and explains how the Ignatian „discernment of spirits“ can give us an inner peace even when we cannot have a absolute certainty.*

- ✿ Die Discernment is always done **in the presence of the Lord, looking at the signs**, listening to the things that happen, the feeling of the people, especially the poor. My choices, including those related to the day-to-day aspects of life, like the use of a modest car, are related to a spiritual discernment that responds to a need that arises from looking at things, at people and from reading the signs of the times. Discernment in the Lord guides me in my way of governing.
- ✿ This **discernment takes time**. For example, many think that changes and reforms can take place in a short time. I believe that we always need time to lay the foundations for real, effective change... I have to wait and assess, looking deep into myself, taking the necessary time... **God manifests himself in time** and is present in the processes of history. This gives priority to actions that give birth to new historical dynamics. And it requires patience, waiting.
- ✿ We can always look at the horizon from the position where we are. That means being able to do the little things of every day with a big heart open to God and to others. That means being able **to appreciate the small things inside large horizons**, those of the kingdom of God... You can have large projects and implement them by means of a few of the smallest things. Or you can use weak means that are more effective than strong ones.
- ✿ In this quest to seek and find God in all things there is still **an area of uncertainty**. There must be. If a person says that he met God with total certainty and is not touched by a margin of uncertainty, then this is not good. For me, this is an important key. If one has the answers to all the questions—that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble. Uncertainty is in every true discernment that is open to finding confirmation in spiritual consolation.
- ✿ **A contemplative attitude** is necessary: it is the feeling that you are moving along the good path of understanding and affection toward things and situations. Profound peace, spiritual consolation, love of God and love of all things in God—this is the sign that you are on this right path.



Source: [Antonio Spadaro S.J. Interview with Pope Francis](#)

- How do we take important decisions in our communities and in our leadership teams?
- How do I deal with / do we deal with the 'area of uncertainty' that is part of all decisions?



## Waiting for the Tomorrow of God

*Looking at many negative developments in the world and in the Church we could be tempted to become pessimistic and discouraged. But it is precisely in times of crisis that christian hope proves itself because it is more than a naive optimism. Only religious and religious communities which radiate hope and joy, are attractive to people. "Can we wait for the Tomorrow of God?", is a challenging question the Pope puts to us.*

- ✿ This hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:2), the One for whom "nothing is impossible" (Lk 1:37). This is the **hope which does not disappoint**; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that he can still do great things with us.
- ✿ We all know the difficulties which the various forms of consecrated life are currently experiencing: decreasing vocations and aging members, particularly in the Western world; economic problems stemming from the global financial crisis; issues of internationalization and globalization; the threats posed by relativism and a sense of isolation and social irrelevance... But it is precisely amid these uncertainties, which we share with so many of our contemporaries, that we are called to practice the virtue of **hope, the fruit of our faith in the Lord of history**, who continues to tell us: "Be not afraid... for I am with you" (Jer 1:8)
- ✿ We have our troubles, our dark nights of the soul, our disappointments and infirmities, our experience of slowing down as we grow older. But in all these things we should be able to **discover "perfect joy"**. For it is here that we learn to recognize the face of Christ, who became like us in all things, and to rejoice in the knowledge that **we are being conformed to him** who, out of love of us, did not refuse the sufferings of the cross.
- ✿ At the foot of the Cross, Mary is at the same time the woman of sorrow and of watchful expectation of a mystery far greater than sorrow, which is about to be fulfilled. It seemed that everything had come to an end; every hope could be said to have been extinguished. She too, at that moment, remembering the promises of the Annunciation could have said: they did not come true, I was deceived. But she did not say this. And so she who was blessed because she believed, sees blossom from her faith a new future and awaits God's tomorrow with expectation. At times I think: **do we know how to wait for God's tomorrow? Or do we want it today?** For her the tomorrow of God is the dawn of Easter morning, the dawn of the first day of the week. It would do us good to think, in contemplation, of the embrace of mother and son. The single lamp lit at the tomb of Jesus is the hope of the mother, which in that moment is the hope of all humanity. I ask myself and I ask you: is this lamp still alight in monasteries? In your monasteries are you waiting for God's tomorrow?



Sources: [Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated people](#); [Vatican Congregation for institutes of consecrated life: Rejoice!](#)

- What prevails in my heart: sadness or joyful hope?
- What do people sense when they visit our communities?