

# **“Never forget you were called from the back of the sheepfold”**

***Pope Francis’ address to clergy, religious and seminarians  
in Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay***

## **1. GRATUITOUSNESS AND MEMORY**

---

### ***Pope Francis’ address to clergy, religious and seminarians in Ecuador***

*Good morning, dear brothers and sisters,*

In these days, during these last forty-eight hours I have had with you, I have noticed that there is something peculiar, forgive me, something different about the Ecuadorian people. Everywhere I go, I receive a really joyful, warm and prayerful welcome; everywhere. But here I see real piety in the way, for example, a blessing is sought from the eldest right down to the “wawa”, and that it is the first thing you learn to do. There was something quite unique which I also was tempted to ask along with the Bishop of Sucumbios: “What is the recipe of this people?” What is it? I gave this a lot of thought and prayed about it; I asked Jesus several times in prayer: “What is it that is so distinctive about this people? And this morning, praying about it, I was struck by the consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

I think I should offer this to you as a message from Jesus: all this richness that you have, the spiritual richness of piety and great depth, has come about because of the courage you have shown in very difficult moments when the nation was consecrated to the Heart of Christ, that human and divine Heart which loves us so dearly. And I notice it in this sense: divine and human. Yes you are sinners, as am I... but the Lord forgives everything... treasure this! Years later came the consecration to the Heart of Mary. Do not forget: that consecration is a milestone in the history of Ecuador’s people. I see that you have received this grace from such a consecration, the grace of piety that makes you unique.

Today I wish to speak to the priests, seminarians, and men and women religious, and offer them some thoughts. I do have some words prepared, but I don’t really feel like reading. So I will give that text to the President of the Conference of Religious so that it can be published.

### **1. We are those who receive God’s gratuitousness.**

I thought of the Blessed Virgin, I thought of Mary. Two phrases used by Mary, and here my memory fails me as I do not know if she added more: “Let it be done to me”; true, she asked the angel for an explanation of why she had been chosen, but she nevertheless says, “Let it be done to me”. And the second phrase, “Do whatever he tells you”. Mary did not want to stand out. She was a disciple all her life. She was the first disciple of her son. She was conscious that all she had brought forth was pure gratuitousness on God’s part. She was conscious of God’s gratuitousness.

This is why these words, “let it be done” and “do whatever he tells you” point to the gratuitousness of God. Women and men religious, priests and seminarians, I ask you to retrace your steps back to the time God gratuitously chose you. You did not buy a ticket to enter the seminary, to enter consecrated life. You were not worthy. If some religious brother, priest, seminarian or nun here today thinks that they merited this, raise your hands. It is all gratuitousness. And the entire life of a religious brother and sister, priest and seminarian must walk that path, and here why not add bishops as well. It is the path that leads to gratuitousness, the path we must follow each day: “Lord, today I did this, I did this thing well, I had this difficulty, all this but...all is from you, all is free gift”. That is gratuitousness. We are those who receive God’s gratuitousness. If we forget this, then slowly we begin to see ourselves as more important: “Look at these works you are doing”, or “Look at how they made this man a bishop of such and such a place... how important”, or “this man they made a Monsignor”, and so on. With this way of thinking we gradually move away from what is fundamental, what Mary never moved away from: God’s gratuitousness. Permit me as a brother to

offer you some advice: every day, perhaps night time is better, before going to sleep, look at Jesus and say to him: “All you have given me is a free gift”, and then go back to what you were doing. As a result, then, when I am asked to move or when there is some difficulty, I do not complain, because everything is free gift, I merit nothing. This is what Mary did.

Saint John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Mater*, which I would recommend you read, absorb and read again, had a rounded way of thinking; he was a teacher, but he was a man of God. For this reason the text has to be read again and again in order to gain the full benefit of its richness. He says, and I do not remember the exact phrase, that when Mary’s faithfulness experienced the greatest trial, she might have wanted to say, “And they told me he was going to save Israel! I was cheated!” But she did not say this. She did not allow herself to think like that, because she was the woman who knew that she had received everything freely. So my advice as a brother and a father is this: remember this gratuitousness every evening. “Let it be done; thank you, because everything has been given to me by you”.

## **2. Do not fall into spiritual Alzheimer’s**

A second thing that I would like to tell you is to take care of your health, but above all, take care not to fall into that illness which can be dangerous, to a lesser or greater degree, for those called freely by the Lord to follow and serve him. Do not fall into *spiritual Alzheimer’s*, that is, do not forget your memories, especially the memory of where you were taken from. The scene comes to mind when the Prophet Samuel is sent to anoint the king of Israel. He goes to Bethlehem, to the home of a man named Jesse who has seven or eight children, I am not sure of the number, and God tells him that among them there is one who will be king. Naturally, Samuel sees them and says, “It must be the eldest one” for he was tall, great in stature, well built, and seemed brave... But the Lord says, “No, it is not him”. God’s way of seeing is different from the way we see. And so he looks at each of the sons in turn, and says, ‘No, not him’.” The prophet realizes that he does not know what to do, and so asks the father of the family: “Do you not have any other sons?”. Jesse replies, “Yes, there is the youngest son who is tending the sheep”. Samuel said, “Send for him”, and he came, just a boy, probably seventeen or eighteen years old, and God says to Jesse: “This is the one”. He was taken from the back of the flock. And another prophet, when God told him to act as a prophet, replied: “But who am I? One who has been taken out of the remotest part of the sheepfold”. The moral is never to forget where you have been brought from. Never forget your roots.

Saint Paul clearly understood the danger of forgetting one’s memory. To his beloved son, the bishop Timothy, whom he ordained, Paul offered some pastoral advice; one particular piece touched Timothy’s heart: “Do not forget the faith that your grandmother and mother had”, that is to say, “Do not forget from where you were taken, do not forget your roots, do not consider yourself to have been promoted”. Gratuitousness is a grace that cannot exist side by side with promotion, and when a priest, seminarian, religious brother or sister embarks on a career, and I am not saying a human career is evil, then they become ill with spiritual Alzheimer’s and they begin to forget where they were taken from.

Two principles for you who are priests and consecrated persons: every day renew the conviction that everything is a gift, the conviction that your being chosen is gratuitousness – we do not merit it – and every day ask for the grace not to forget your memories, and not to fall into self-importance. It is really sad when we see a priest or consecrated person who used to speak in his or her dialect at home, or in another language like those ancient languages – and how many does Ecuador have – it is so sad when they forget that first language, so sad when they choose not to speak it. What this means is that they have forgotten where they have come from, where they have been taken from. Do not forget this, and ask for the grace to keep your memories alive: these are the two principles I wish to emphasize.

## **Two principles and two attitudes**

And these two principles, if you live them each day – which entails a daily effort to remember these two principles and to ask for grace – then those two principles, when lived, will bring you life, will help you live with two attitudes.

### ***The first attitude: service***

The first is service. God chose me, he took me to himself, but why? In order to serve; and a service which is particular to me and my circumstances. It is not about having my time, having my things, I have this to do, I have to close the office, I have to bless a house, but I am tired, or there is a good soap opera on television; I say this with nuns in mind... No, it is none of these but rather it is service, to serve, to serve and nothing else, and to serve when we are tired, and to serve when people tire us.

An elderly priest told me that he had been a teacher all his life at colleges and university. He taught literature, the arts. He was a genius. When he retired he asked the Provincial to move him to a poor area, where people come and go, seeking work. In short, good, simple people. Once a week this religious priest went back to his community and spoke to them; he really was quite intelligent. And the community was made up of professors from the theology faculty; he spoke to his brother priests about theology, at their level. But one day he said to one of them, "You who are... Who teaches the course on the Church?" One professor raised his arm and said, "I do". The elderly priest said, "You're missing two arguments". "Which ones?" the professor replied. "The holy, faithful People of God is essentially Olympian, that is to say, it does what it wants, and is ontologically tiring". These words reveal much wisdom because the person who follows the path of service must allow themselves to be tired out, without losing patience in the name of service. No moment belongs to us. I am here to serve, to serve in the things I am called to do, to serve before the Blessed Sacrament, asking for my people, praying for my work, for the people that God has entrusted to my care.

Service, if combined with gratuitousness leads to... those words of Jesus: "What you have received freely, give freely". Please, please, don't put a charge on grace; please, let our pastoral works be free. It is so repulsive when one loses this sense of gratuitousness and is transformed into... yes, a doer of good deeds but one who loses the sense of freely giving.

### ***The second attitude: joy***

The second attitude seen in a consecrated man or woman, seen in a priest who lives this gratuitousness and shows the ability to recall the past (those principles which I spoke of earlier, gratuitousness and memory), is joy and pleasure. It is a gift of Jesus, a gift which he gives if we ask for it and if we do not forget those pillars of our priestly or consecrated spiritual, namely the sense of gratuitousness renewed daily and the ability not to forget from where we were taken.

I desire this for you. "Yes, Father, you have spoken to us of a recipe that works for our people... we are like this because of the Sacred Heart". Yes, this is true, but I propose to you another recipe which is on the same lines, existing in the heart of Jesus: the sense of gratuitousness. He did nothing, he humbled himself, he became poor in order to enrich us by his poverty. Pure gift. And the sense of memory... we recall the memories of the marvels that the Lord has done for us in our lives.

May the Lord grant this grace to everyone, may he grant it to all of us who are here, and may he continue – I was going to say *precede us* – blessing this Ecuadorean people whom you must serve and are called to serve; may he continue to bless you with that particular characteristic which I noticed as I arrived here. May the Lord bless you and the Blessed Virgin protect you.

Let us now pray to the Father, who gave us everything freely, and who keeps alive in us the memory of Jesus. [Our Father...] And May Almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And please, please, I ask you to pray for me because I too am often tempted to forget the gratuitousness with which God chose me, and to forget where I have been taken from. Pray for me.

*Meeting with the Clergy, Religious and Seminarians at the Marian National Shrine of "El Quinche" Quito, Ecuador, 8 July 2015*

## 2. THREE RESPONSES TO THE CRY OF THE POOR

---

### ***Pope Francis' address to clergy, religious and seminarians in Bolivia***

*Dear brothers and sisters, good afternoon.*

I am very pleased to be able to meet you and to share the joy which fills the heart and the entire life of the missionary disciples of Jesus. This joy was expressed in the words of welcome offered by Bishop Roberto Bordi, and by the testimonies of Father Miguel, Sister Gabriela, and by Damián, our seminarian. I thank each of you for sharing your own experience of vocation.

In the Gospel of Mark we also heard the experience of another disciple, Bartimaeus, who joined the group of Jesus' followers. He became a disciple at the last minute. This happened during the Lord's final journey, from Jericho to Jerusalem, where he was about to be handed over. A blind beggar, Bartimaeus sat on the roadside – greater exclusion than this is difficult to imagine – and he was pushed aside. When he heard Jesus passing by, he began to cry out, he made himself heard, rather like the young Sister who played the drums and made herself heard, saying "I am here!". (Congratulations, Sister: you play very well!)

Walking with Jesus were his apostles, the disciples and the women who were his followers. They were at his side as he journeyed through Palestine, proclaiming the Kingdom of God. There was also a great crowd. If we translate this by stretching the words a little, we can say that alongside Jesus walked the bishops, the priests, the sisters, the seminarians, the committed lay faithful, all who followed him, listening to him, namely, the faithful people of God.

Two things about this story jump out at us and make an impression. On the one hand, there is the cry of a beggar, and on the other, the different reactions of the disciples. Let us consider the different reactions of bishops, priests, sisters, seminarians, to the cries we hear or fail to hear. It is as if the Evangelist wanted to show us the effect which Bartimaeus' cry had on people's lives, on the lives of Jesus' followers. How did they react when faced with the suffering of that man on the side of the road, who no one takes any notice of, who receives no more than a gesture of almsgiving, who is wallowing in his misery and who is not part of the group following the Lord?

There were three responses to the cry of the blind man and today these three responses are also relevant. We can describe them with three phrases taken from the Gospel: "pass by", "be quiet", "take heart and get up".

### **1. "THEY PASSED BY".**

#### **Deafness and "the spirituality of zapping".**

Some of those who passed by did not even hear his shouting. They were with Jesus, they looked at Jesus, they wanted to hear him. But they were not listening. Passing by is the response of indifference, of avoiding other people's problems because they do not affect us. It is not my problem. We do not hear them, we do not recognize them. Deafness. Here we have the temptation to see suffering as something natural, to take injustice for granted. And yes, there are people like that: I am here with God, with my consecrated life, chosen by God for ministry and yes, it is normal that there are those who are sick, poor, suffering, and it is so normal that I no longer notice the cry for help. To become accustomed. We say to ourselves, "This is nothing unusual; this were always like this, as long as it does not affect me". It is the response born of a blind, closed heart, a heart which has lost the ability to be touched and hence the possibility to change.

How many of us followers of Christ run the risk of losing our ability to be astonished, even with the Lord? That wonder we had on the first encounter seems to diminish, and it can happen to anyone. Indeed it happened to the first Pope: "Whom shall we go to Lord? You have the words of eternal life". And then they betray him, they deny him, the wonder fades away. It happens when we get accustomed to things. The heart is blinded. A heart used to passing by without letting itself be

touched; a life which passes from one thing to the next, without ever sinking roots in the lives of the people around us, simply because it is part of the elite who follow the Lord.

We could call this “the spirituality of zapping”. It is always on the move, but it has nothing to show for it. There are people who keep up with the latest news, the most recent best sellers, but they never manage to connect with others, to strike up a relationship, to get involved, even with the Lord whom they follow, because their deafness gets worse.

You may say to me, “But those people in the Gospel were following the Master, they were busy listening to his words. They were intent on him.” I think that this is one of the most challenging things about Christian spirituality. The Evangelist John tells us, “How can you love God, whom you do not see, if you do not love your brother whom you do see?” (1 Jn 4:20). They believed that they were listening to the Master, but they also made their own interpretation, and the words of the Master are distilled by their blinded hearts. One of the great temptations we encounter on the path as we follow Jesus is to separate these two things, listening to God and listening to our brothers and sisters, both of which belong together. We need to be aware of this. The way we listen to God the Father is how we should listen to his faithful people. If we do not listen in the same way, with the same heart, then something has gone wrong.

To pass by, without hearing the pain of our people, without sinking roots in their lives and in their world, is like listening to the word of God without letting it take root and bear fruit in our hearts. Like a tree, a life without roots is one which withers and dies.

## **2. The second phrase: “BE QUIET”.**

### **Never forget you were called from the back of the sheepfold.**

This is the second response to Bartimaeus’ cry: “Keep quiet, don’t bother us, leave us alone, for we are praying as a community, we are in heightened state of spirituality. Don’t bother us. Unlike the first response, this one hears, acknowledges, and makes contact with the cry of another person. It recognizes that he or she is there, but reacts simply by scolding. It is the bishops, priests, sisters, popes, who point their finger threateningly. In Argentina we say of teachers who point their fingers in this way: “This is like the teacher from the time of the Yrigoyen who used particularly strict methods”. And the poor faithful people of God, how often are they tested, either by the bad temper or the personal situation of a follower of Christ. It is the attitude of some leaders of God’s people; they continually scold others, hurl reproaches at them, tell them to be quiet. Please embrace them, listen to them, tell them that Jesus loves them. “No, you can’t do that”. “Madam, take your crying child out of the church as I am preaching”. As if the cries of a child were not a sublime homily.

This is the drama of the isolated consciousness, of those disciples who think that the life of Jesus is only for those who deserve it. There is an underlying contempt for the faithful people of God: “This blind man who has to interfere with everything, let him stay where he is”. They seem to believe there is only room for the “worthy”, for the “better people”, and little by little they separate themselves, become distinct, from the others. They have made their identity a badge of superiority. That identity which makes itself superior, is no longer proper to the pastor but rather to a foreman: “I made it here, now you wait in line”. Such persons no longer listen; they look, but they cannot see.

Let me tell you an anecdote, something I experienced around 1975 in your Archdiocese. I had made a promise to *Nuestro Señor de los Milagros* to go to Salta on pilgrimage every year if he blessed us with 40 novices. He sent forty-one. After a concelebrated Mass – as at all important sanctuaries, there were many Masses, confessions, and you don’t stop – I was walking up with another priest who was with me and had come with me, and a lady came up to us, almost at the top, with an image of a saint. She was a simple woman, maybe from Salta itself, or perhaps she had come from another place, as so often happens when people take a few days to reach the capital for the Feast of the Lord of Miracles. She said to the priest who was accompanying me, “Father, please bless this image”. He replied, “Lady, you were at Mass”. “Yes, Father”. “Well then, the blessing of God, the presence of God there blesses everything”. “Yes Father, Yes Father” came the reply. At that moment another

priest came up, a friend of the priest that had just spoken, but they hadn't seen each other so he says, "Oh, you're here!". He turned away and the woman – I do not know her name, we'll call her the "Yes Father Lady" – looked at me and said: "Father, please bless it".

Those who always put up barriers between themselves and the people of God, push them away. They hear, but they don't listen. They deliver a sermon, but look without seeing. The need to show that they are different has closed their heart. Their need to tell themselves, consciously or subconsciously, "I am not like that person, like those people", not only cuts them off from the cry of their people, from their tears, but most of all from their reasons for rejoicing. Laughing with those who laugh, weeping with those who weep; all this is part of the mystery of a priestly heart and the heart of a consecrated person. Sometimes there are elite groups that are created by not listening and seeing, and we distance ourselves. In Ecuador, I told the priests and religious sisters present, to please ask for the grace of remembering, to never forget the memories of where they were taken from. They were called from the back of the sheepfold. Never forget, never deny your roots, don't reject that culture where you learnt from your people just because you now have a more sophisticated, important culture. There are priests who are embarrassed to speak in the native language and so they forget their Quechua, Aymara, Guarani: "No, no, I now speak well". The grace to not lose the memory of the faithful people. It is a grace. In the Book of Deuteronomy, how many times does God say to his People, "Do not forget, do not forget, do not forget". And Paul, to his beloved disciple Timothy whom he ordained, says, "remember your mother and grandmother".

### **3. The third word: "TAKE HEART AND GET UP".**

#### **There can be no compassion without stopping**

This is the third response. It is not so much a direct response to the cry of Bartimaeus as a reaction of people who saw how Jesus responded to the pleading of the blind beggar. In other words, those who gave no importance to the beggar, those who did not let him pass, or those who told him to be quiet... when they see Jesus' reaction they change their attitude: "Get up, he is calling you". In those who told him to take heart and get up, the beggar's cry issued in a word, an invitation, a new and changed way of responding to God's holy and faithful People.

Unlike those who simply passed by, the Gospel says that Jesus stopped and asked what was happening. "What is happening here?" "Who is making noise?" He stopped when someone cried out to him. Jesus singled him out from the nameless crowd and got involved in his life. And far from ordering him to keep quiet, he asked him, "Tell me, what do you want me to do for you?" Jesus didn't have to show that he was different, somehow apart, and he didn't give the beggar a sermon; he didn't decide whether Bartimaeus was worthy or not before speaking to him. He simply asked him a question, looked at him and sought to come into his life, to share his lot. And by doing this he gradually restored the man's lost dignity, the man who was on the side of the path and blind; Jesus included him. Far from looking down on him, Jesus was moved to identify with the man's problems and thus to show the transforming power of mercy.

There can be no compassion – and I mean compassion and not pity – without stopping. If you do not stop, you do not suffer with him, you do not have divine compassion. There is no "compassion" that does not listen and show solidarity with the other. Compassion is not about zapping, it is not about silencing pain, it is about the logic of love, of suffering with. A logic, a way of thinking and feeling, which is not grounded in fear but in the freedom born of love and of desire to put the good of others before all else. A logic born of not being afraid to draw near to the pain of our people. Even if often this means no more than standing at their side and praying with them.

This is the logic of discipleship, it is what the Holy Spirit does with us and in us. We are witnesses of this. One day Jesus saw us on the side of the road, wallowing in our own pain and misery, our indifference. Each one knows his or her past. He did not close his ear to our cries. He stopped, drew near and asked what he could do for us. And thanks to many witnesses, who told us, "Take heart; get up", gradually we experienced this merciful love, this transforming love, which enabled us to see the light. We are witnesses not of an ideology, of a recipe, of a particular theology.

We are not witnesses of that. We are witnesses to the healing and merciful love of Jesus. We are witnesses of his working in the lives of our communities.

And this is the pedagogy of the Master, this is the pedagogy which God uses with his people. It leads us to passing from distracted zapping to the point where we can say to others: “Take heart; get up. The Master is calling you” (*Mk* 10:49). Not so that we can be special, not so that we can be better than others, not so that we can be God’s functionaries, but only because we are grateful witnesses to the mercy which changed us. When we live like this, there is joy and delight, and we can identify ourselves with the testimony given by the religious sister who made her own Saint Augustine’s counsel, “Sing and walk”. This is the joy that comes from witnessing to the mercy that transforms.

On this journey we are not alone. We help one another by our example and by our prayers. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses (cf. *Heb* 12:1). Let us think of Blessed Nazaria Ignacia de Santa Teresa de Jesús, who dedicated her life to the proclamation of God’s Kingdom through her care for the aged, her “kettle of the poor” for the hungry, her homes for orphaned children, her hospitals for wounded soldiers and her creation of a women’s trade union to promote the welfare of women. Let us also think of Venerable Virginia Blanco Tardío, who was completely dedicated to the evangelization and care of the poor and the sick. These women, and so many other anonymous persons, from the crowd, from the ones like us who follow Jesus, are an encouragement on our journey. That cloud of witnesses! May we press forward with the help and cooperation of all. For the Lord wants to use us to make his light reach to every corner of our world. Go forward, sing and walk. And while you do this, please, pray for me as I need it. Thank you.

*Coliseum of Don Bosco College, Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), 9 July 2015*

### **3. REBUILT FOR GOD WHENEVER WE PRAY**

---

#### ***Pope Francis’ address to clergy, religious and seminarians in Paraguay***

How good it is for all of us to pray Vespers together! How can we not dream of a Church which reflects and echoes the harmony of voices and song in her daily life! That is what we are doing in this Cathedral, rebuilt so many times over the years. This Cathedral symbolizes the Church and each one of us. At times, storms from without and within force us to tear down what had been built and to begin again, but always with the hope given us by God. And when we look at this building, we can surely say that it has not disappointed the hopes of the Paraguayan people... because God never disappoints! For this we give thankful praise.

Liturgical prayer, in its unhurried structure, is meant to be an expression of the whole Church, the Spouse of Christ, as she strives to be ever more conformed to her Lord. Each one of us, in prayer, wants to become more like Jesus.

Prayer expresses what we experience and what we ought to experience in our daily lives. At least that is true of prayer that is not self-centered or merely for show. Prayer makes us put into practice, or examine our consciences about, what we have prayed for in the Psalms. We are the hands of the God who “lifts up the poor from the dust” (*Ps* 112:7). We work to turn what is dry and barren into the joy of fertile ground. We cry out that “precious in the eyes of the Lord is the life of his faithful ones”. We are those who fight, speak up and defend the dignity of every human life, from conception to old age, when our years are many and our strength fails. Prayer is the reflection of our love for God, for others and for all creation. The commandment of love is the greatest way for the missionary disciple to be conformed to Jesus. Union with Jesus deepens our Christian vocation, which is concerned with what Jesus “does” – which is something much greater than mere “activities” – with becoming more like him in all that we do. The beauty of the ecclesial community is born of this union of each of her members to the person of Jesus, creating an “ensemble of vocations” in the richness of harmonic diversity.

The antiphons of the Gospel canticles for this weekend evoke for us the sending of the Twelve by Jesus. It is always good to grow in this awareness that apostolic work is carried out in communion!

It is admirable to see you cooperating pastorally, with respect for the nature and ecclesial role of each of the vocations and charisms. I want to encourage all of you, priests, men and women religious, laity and seminarians, bishops, to be committed to this ecclesial collaboration, especially with regard to diocesan pastoral plans and the continental mission, and to work together with complete availability in the service of the common good. If our divisions lead to barrenness (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 98-101), then there is no doubt that communion and harmony lead to fruitfulness, because they are deeply attuned to the Holy Spirit.

Each of us has his or her limitations, and no one is able to reproduce Jesus in all his fullness. Although all vocations are associated with certain aspects of the life and work of Jesus, some vocations are more general and essential. Just now we praised the Lord for “he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited” (*Phil* 2:6). This is the case with every Christian vocation, not regarding “equality with God as something to be exploited”. A person called by God does not show off; he or she does not seek recognition or applause; he or she does claim to be better than others, standing apart as if on a pedestal.

Christ’s supremacy is clearly described in the liturgy of the Letter to the Hebrews. As we just read from the final part of that Letter, we are to become perfect like “the great Shepherd of the sheep”. And this means that all consecrated persons are to be conformed to Jesus, who in his earthly life, “with prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears” achieved perfection when, through suffering, he learned the meaning of obedience. This too is part of the calling.

Let us conclude our celebration of Vespers. The bell tower of this Cathedral was rebuilt a number of times. The sound of its bells anticipates and accompanies our liturgical prayer on so many occasions. Rebuilt for God whenever we pray, steadfast like a bell tower, joyful in preaching the wonders of God, let us share the Magnificat and, through our consecrated life, allow the Lord to accomplish great things in Paraguay.

*Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption, Asunción, Paraguay, 11 July 2015*