



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE ORDER OF CLERICS REGULAR OF SOMASCA**

*Consistory Hall
Thursday, 30 March 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers,

I am happy to receive you and I greet you warmly, beginning with the Superior General, whom I thank for his words. The motto you have chosen for your General Chapter: *“Let us go to the other shore together with our brothers with whom we want to live and die”*, is inspired by Jesus’ words (cf. Lk 8:22). It refers to a crucial time in your Institute’s history, grasping its prophetic nature. In fact, in 1921, a small group of Somascans left Europe’s shores to land on the distant coast of the American Continent. This was a decisive missionary moment which brought renewed enthusiasm and abundant apostolic prospects to your religious family.

You have now set yourself to drawing from the idealistic motivations of that evangelical impetus, to implement them in the present-day Church and the societies faithful to the charism of your Founder, keeping in mind changes in social and cultural conditions. In this discernment, you were supported by the spiritual fruits of the 2011-2012 *Somascan Jubilee*, which has done and continues to do much good in your communities. On that significant occasion, in which you gratefully recalled the fifth centenary of the foundation of your Order, my venerable predecessor Benedict xvi sent you a message in which he urged you to follow the enlightened example of Saint Jerome Emiliani, taking “to heart every form of poverty in our young people, whether moral, physical or existential, and especially the poverty of love, the root of every serious human problem” (20 July 2011).

The ideal which moved Jerome Emiliani was the reform of the Church through works of charity. His plan was first to reform oneself in faithfulness to the Gospel, then the Christian community and

civil society, which cannot ignore the little ones and the marginalized, but must assist them and foster their integral human development. I also encourage you to remain faithful to the original inspiration and “to set forth” toward the wounded and rejected of humanity with effective evangelical choices stemming from the ability to look at the world and humanity through the eyes of Christ. The characteristic trait of your vocation is above all the care of the least, in particular of orphans and abandoned young people, according to the educational method of your Founder, strongly centred on the human person, on his or her dignity and on the development of intellectual and manual skills. And speaking of orphans, there are new “half orphans”: those young migrants, youth, children who come to our lands on their own and need to find “fathers” and “mothers”. I would like to highlight this: many people on the boats are on their own and they need this. This and other things are your responsibilities.

In order to make your service to the Gospel more relevant to people’s concrete life situations, you are developing new ways to carry out your mission. In particular, starting from the current situation of your Order, you are addressing the question of its international and intercultural makeup in relation to services to the poor and to the least. I encourage you to be attentive to the different forms of marginalization existing in geographical and existential peripheries. Do not be afraid to “*leave the old wineskins*”, and to face the transformation of structures, where this can be beneficial to a service which is more evangelical and coherent with the original charism. Structures, in some cases, give false protection and restrain the vitality of charity and service to the Kingdom of God. I would like to repeat this: structures, in certain cases, give false protection and restrain the vitality of charity and service to the Kingdom of God. But at the basis of these processes there is always the joyful experience of the encounter with Christ and of consecration to Him; there is the joyful demand of the primacy of God and of placing nothing before him and before “matters” of the Spirit; there is the gift of manifesting his mercy and his tenderness in fraternal life and in mission.

In order to provide an adequate service in the field of disadvantaged minors and youth, you have the opportunity to involve lay Somascans, for a more consistent commitment in the charism’s social arena. Human Rights, the protection of minors, the rights of children and adolescents, protection against child labour, the prevention of exploitation and trafficking are issues that should be faced with the liberating force of the Gospel and, at the same time, with appropriate operative tools and professional expertise.

Saint Jerome Emiliani, a contemporary of Luther, experienced suffering as a result of the laceration of Catholic unity. He cultivated and promoted the reform of the Church in Italy, “*his most ardent thirst*”, with works of charity, obedience to Pastors, contemplation of Christ Crucified and of His mercy, catechistic teaching, faithfulness to the Sacraments, worship of the Eucharist, and love for the Virgin Mary. May his example and his intercession spur you to consecrate your strengths to proclaiming the Salvation of Christ, so that He may reach the people and communities of the nations in which you are present, and their traditions. This is how inculturation progresses, and it is a necessary condition for the Church to take root in the world. In particular, I would like to

encourage you to actively continue your formation of catechists, lay coordinators and clergy. One of the strongest and most serious dangers in the Church today is clericalism. Work with lay people. May they move things forward, may they have the courage to move forward, and you, support them and help them as priests, as religious. This is a very precious service for local Churches, in communion with the pastors and in union with the entire Church and her living tradition.

Ecumenical dialogue also deserves your contribution. The journey toward full unity is long and requires patient listening to what the Spirit says to Churches and, today in particular, to the ecclesial communities in Africa and Asia, in which you work with apostolic zeal. The collaboration possible among all the baptized and the search for greater faithfulness to the one Lord are part of your mission. May the Lord help your efforts in this direction.

Dear Brothers, before you lies the task of continuing and developing the God-inspired work of Saint Jerome Emiliani, who was declared *Universal Patron of Orphans and Abandoned Youth* by Pope Pius xi. May a renewed missionary zeal spur you to dedicate yourself to serving the Kingdom of God through the education of young people, so that they may grow firmly in faith, free and responsible, courageous in witness and generous in service. I encourage you to carry on with your journey *in sequela* and your apostolic zeal, rich in many works and always open to new expressions, according to the most urgent needs of the Church and society in different times and places. Faithful to the charism of the Institute and united with the Pastors, you will continue to give a fruitful contribution to the evangelizing mission of the Church. I ask the Holy Spirit with the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, to enlighten you in the work of your Chapter and I impart to you my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.