

Discourse of the Holy Father Francis to the members of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus

In the Aula of the General Congregation – General Curia of the Society of Jesus

24 October 2016.

Dear Brothers and Friends in the Lord,

While praying over what I would like to say, I remembered with particular affection the words of Paul VI to us as we came to the end of the 32nd General Congregation: “This is the way, this is the way, Brothers and Sons. Forward, *in nomine Domini*. Let us walk together, free, obedient, united to each other in the love of Christ, for the greater glory of God.”¹

Also, St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI have encouraged us to “**lead a life worthy of the vocation** to which we have been called”² [Eph 4:1] “and following the path of mission” in full fidelity to your original charism in the ecclesial and social context that characterises this beginning of the millennium. As my predecessors have often told, the Church needs you, counts on you and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach, or find it difficult to reach.”³ Walking together – free and obedient – going to the peripheries where others do not reach, “under Jesus’ gaze and looking to the horizon which is the ever greater glory of God, who ceaselessly surprises us.”⁴ The Jesuit is called as Ignatius says “our vocation is to travel through the world and to live in any part of it where there is hope of greater service to God and of help of souls” [Con, 304]. That is, as Nadal used to say “for the Society the whole world is our home.”⁵

Ignatius wrote to Borgia regarding a criticism of the Jesuits who were called “angels” (Oviedo and Onfroy). Some critics used to say that the Society was not well instituted, that it had to be instituted more in spirit. “The Spirit which is guiding these critics” – Ignatius used to say – “does not know the state of things of the Society which are *in the making*, other than what is necessary (and substantial).”⁶ I very much appreciate Ignatius’s way of seeing things which are coming into being, removing oneself from the constraints of the concrete. It takes the Society from all that paralyses it, freeing it from frivolities.

What is “necessary and substantial” is the Formula of the Institute, which we should keep before our eyes every day, keeping our eyes on God our Lord. “The nature of this Institute which is his pathway to God.” This is how it was for the first companions and they foresaw that this is how it would be “for those who would follow us in this pathway.” So both poverty and obedience or the fact of not being obliged to sing the office in choir, are neither demands nor privileges, but aids to mobility and thus being available in the Society: “to run in the path of

¹ PAUL VI, *Discorso in occasione della 32^a Congregazione Generale della Compagnia di Gesù*. 3 December 1974. [“Così, così, fratelli e figli. Avanti, in Nome Domini. Camminiamo insieme, liberi, obbedienti, uniti nell’amore di Cristo, per la maggior gloria di Dio”. (Quoted in Italian at the original Spanish version. N. of the T.)]

² JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse to the participants at the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*. 2 September 1983.

³ BENEDICT XVI, *Discourse to the participants at the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*. 21 February 2008.

⁴ FRANCIS, *Homily at the Church of the Gesù*. 3 January 2014.

⁵ MNadal V 364-365

⁶ IGNACIO DE LOYOLA, *Carta 51, A Francisco de Borja*, julio de 1549, 17 N. 9. Cfr. M. A. FIORITO y A. SWINNEN, “La Fórmula del Instituto de la Compañía de Jesús (introducción y versión castellana)”, *Stromata*, July-December 1977-nº 3/4, 259-260.

Christ our Lord” [Con 582]. In virtue of the vow of obedience to the Pope we have a “surer direction from the Holy Spirit” [Formula of the Institute 3]. In the Formula, we have this Ignatian intuition. Its centrality is what makes the Constitutions stress that we always keep in mind “places, times and persons” so that all rules are aids – *tantum quantum* – for concrete things.

For Ignatius, being on the road is not only coming and going, but it translates into something qualitative: It is drawing profit, and progress, is going forward, to do something for others. This is how the two Formulas of the Institute, approved by Paul III [1540] and Julius III [1550] express it, when they focus the work of the Society on the faith - and its defence and propagation – and on the life and teaching of persons. So Ignatius and the first companions used the expression “to draw greater fruit” (*aprovechamiento*) [*ad profectum*,⁷ cf. Phil. 1:12 and 25] which is the practical criterion of discernment proper to our spirituality.

Drawing profit is not individualistic, but it is for the common good: “The end of this Society is to devote itself with Gods grace not only to the salvation and perfection of the members own souls, but also with that same grace to labour strenuously in giving aid toward the salvation and perfection of the souls of their neighbours” [General Examen, I, 2]. If at all the balance of Ignatius’ heart was inclined towards something, that was towards helping our neighbours, so much so that he used to get angry if somebody was to tell him that the reason that someone remained in the Society was “in order to save his own soul. Ignatius did not want men, who although being good, were not zealous for the service of their neighbour” (Aicardo I punto 10 p. 41).

We are to draw profit from everything. The Formula of Ignatius expresses a tension: “not only... but also...” and this conceptual framework combining tensions – the salvation and perfection of one’s own soul, and the salvation and perfection of one’s neighbour’s – from the higher realm of Grace – is proper to the Society of Jesus. The harmonization of this and of all the other tensions (contemplation and action, faith and justice, charism and institution, community and mission...) is not expressed in abstract formulations but is achieved in the course of time through what Faber called “our way of proceeding”⁸. Journeying and progressing in the following of the Lord, the Society moves towards harmonizing the tensions brought about by the diversity of the men whom it brings together and of the missions it receives.

Drawing profit is not elitist. In the Formula, Ignatius proceeds to describe the means for seeking the greater and more universal good which are truly sacerdotal. However, we observe that the works of mercy are taken for granted. The Formula says “without these being an obstacle” to mercy!!! Works of mercy – caring for the sick in hospitals, begging for alms, sharing, teaching catechism to children, the patient suffering of insults... are the daily bread of Ignatius and his first companions. They took care that none of these became obstacles!

Drawing profit in the final analysis is “that which they sought the most.” This is the *magis*, this more, which moves Ignatius to start accompanying people and helping them reflect on the various experiences of their lives with regard to faith, justice, mercy and charity. The *magis* is the fire, the fervour in action, awakening those who have become dormant. Our saints have always incarnated this fervour. It used to be said of St. Alberto Hurtado that he was a thorn in the flesh of the dormant Church. This militates against that temptation which Paul VI called *spiritus vertiginis* and de Lubac called “spiritual worldliness.” This temptation is not primarily moral, but spiritual, and distracts us from the essential: that we be fruitful persons, to let our

⁷ “*Ad profectum animarum in vita et doctrina Christiana*” in Monumenta Ignatiana, Constitutiones T. I (MHSI), Roma, 1934, 26 y 376; cfr. *Constituzioni della Compagnia di Gesù annotate dalla CG 34 e Norme complementari*, Roma, ADP, 1995, 32-33.

⁸ Cf. MF. 50, 69, 111, 114, etc.

footsteps leave marks in history, especially in the lives of the very least in our society. “The Society is zealous”⁹ as Nadal used to say. To revive the zeal for mission for the greater good of persons in their life and doctrine, I would like to make more concrete these reflections in **three points**: given that the Society’s way of proceeding for the greater good is accomplished through joy, the cross and through the Church our Mother. We need to look at how we move forward by overcoming the impediments which the enemy of our human nature tries to put in our way when we are in the service of God and seeking the greater good.

1.- To ask insistently for consolation

We can always take a step forward asking insistently for consolation. In the two Apostolic Exhortations and in *Laudato Si*, I consistently underlined the importance of joy. In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius invites us to contemplate “the office of consolation,” which is the work of the Risen Christ Himself [Sp. Ex. 224]. This is the true work of the Society: to console the faithful people of God and to help them through discernment so that the enemy of human nature does not rob us of our joy: the joy of evangelising, the joy of the family, the joy of the Church, the joy of creation.... Let the enemy of our human nature not rob us of our joy, neither by despair before the magnitude of the evils of the world, and the misunderstandings between those who want to do good, nor let him replace it with foolish joys that are always at hand in all human enterprises.

This “service of joy and spiritual consolation” roots us in prayer. This consists in animating ourselves and animating others “to ask insistently for God’s consolation.” Ignatius formulated this in a negative way in the sixth rule of the first week when he said “It is very profitable to make rigorous changes in ourselves against desolation” by insisting more on prayer [Sp. Ex. 319] It is beneficial because one is “worth little in time of desolation.” [Sp. Ex. 324] To practice and teach this prayer of petition and supplication for consolation is the principal service we render to joy. If somebody does not consider himself worthy (something which is very common in practice), he should at least remain persistent in prayer for consolation for love of the message, because joy is constitutive of the Gospel message; he should therefore also ask for it for love of others, for his family and for the world. One cannot give a good piece of news with a sad face. Joy is not only decorative, it is also a clear indicator of grace, it shows that love is active, working and present. For this reason, in an age of instant gratification and unabated consumption, the search for joy should not be confused with the search for “a spiritual effect,” when our existential identity is more concerned with long lasting effects: Ignatius opens the eyes and wakes us up to the discernment of Spirits to discover the difference between long-lasting joys and transient joys. (Autobiography 8) Time is the key to recognising the action of the Spirit.

In the Exercises, “progress” in the spiritual life is brought about in consolation. It is to go from “good to better,” it is also “every increase in hope, faith and charity and every interior joy.” (Sp. Ex. 316) This service to joy was what led the first companions to decide not to disperse, but to institute the Society and celebrate spontaneously their companionship, which was characterised by joy and which made them pray together, go on missions together and then to reunite again, in imitation of the life of the Lord and his apostles. This joy of the explicit announcing of the Gospel - through preaching, faith and the practice of justice and mercy – is that which leads the Society to go to the peripheries. The Jesuit is a servant of the joy of the Gospel, both when he is working as an artisan, conversing and giving the spiritual exercises to a single person, helping him or her to encounter “this interior forum whence comes the power of the Spirit, which guide, free and renew him”¹⁰ and when he is working with structures, organising works of formation, of mercy, or of reflection which are institutional expansions of

⁹ Cf. MNadal V, 310.

¹⁰ PIERRE FAVRE, *Mémorial*, Paris, Desclée, 1959 ; cf. Introduction de M. de CERTAU, p. 74.

those turning points where the individual will is broken down and the Spirit enters to act. As M. de Certeau rightly said: The Spiritual Exercises are the apostolic method *par excellence* which made possible the “a return to the heart, the beginning of docility to the Spirit which awakens and propels the exercitant to personal fidelity to God”¹¹.

2.- Letting ourselves be moved by our Lord placed on the cross

We can always take a step forward in letting ourselves be moved by the Lord crucified, by him in person, by him present in so many of our brothers and sisters who are suffering – the great majority of humankind! Father Arrupe used to say that wherever there is pain, the Society is there.

The Jubilee of Mercy is an appropriate time to reflect about the works of mercy. I have deliberately used the plural, because mercy is not an abstract word, but a lifestyle that places concrete gestures before the word. These gestures touch the flesh of the neighbour and become institutionalised in works of mercy. For those who do the Exercises this grace by which Jesus commands us to resemble the Father (cf. Lk 6:36), begins with this colloquy of mercy which is the expansion of the colloquy with the Lord placed on the cross for my sins. The entire second exercise is a colloquy full of sentiments of shame, confusion, pain and grateful tears, seeing who I am – making myself less – and who God is – making Him more – “who has given me life till now” – who Jesus is, hanging on the cross for me (Exx. 61 and preceding). The way Ignatius lives and formulates his experience of mercy is of great personal and apostolic benefit, and requires an acute and sustained experience of discernment. Our father said to Borgia: “I am personally convinced regarding myself that both before and after I am totally an obstacle. Because of this I feel increased spiritual happiness and joy in the Lord in as much as I cannot attribute to myself even a semblance of good.”¹² So Ignatius lives from the pure mercy of God even in the smallest details of his life and of his person. And he used to feel that, the greater an obstacle he might pose, the more Lord treated him with goodness: “Such was the mercy of the Lord, and such was the abundance of his tenderness and the sweetness of his grace with him, that the more he wished to be punished in this way, so much more benign was the Lord, and the more generously he lavished his treasures from his infinite freedom. With that, he said that he believed that there is no person in the world in whom these two things coincided as much as in him: how much he failed God, and received all and many continuous graces from his hand.”¹³

Ignatius, describing his experience of mercy in these comparative terms – the more he failed the Lord, the more the Lord reached out in giving him his grace – released the life-giving power of mercy which we, many times, dilute with our abstract formulations and legalistic conditions. The Lord who looks at us with mercy and chooses us, sends us out to bring with all its effectiveness, that same mercy to the poorest, to sinners, to those discarded people, and those crucified in the present world, who suffer injustice and violence. Only if we experience this healing power first-hand in our own wounds, as people and as a body, will we lose the fear of allowing ourselves be moved by the immense suffering of our brothers and sisters, and will we hasten to walk patiently with our people, learning from them the best way of helping and serving them. (cf. GC 32, d.4 n.50)

¹¹ Ibid., p. 76.

¹² IGNACIO DE LOYOLA, *Carta 26 a Francisco de Borja*, fines de 1545.

¹³ P. RIBADENEIRA, *Vida di S. Ignazio di Loiola*, Roma, La Civiltà Cattolica, 1863, 336. [Tanta era la misericordia del Signore, e tanta la copia della soavità e dolcezza della grazia sua con esso lui, che quante egli più desiderava d'essere in questo modo gastigato, tanto più benigno era Iddio e con abbondanza maggiore spargeva sopra di lui i tesori della sua infinita liberalità. Laonde diceva, che egli credeva non vi essere nel mondo uomo, i cui queste due cose insieme, tanto come in lui, concorressero; la prima mancare tanto a Dio e l'altra il ricevere tante e così continue grazie dalla sua mano. (Quoted in Italian at the original Spanish version N. of the T.)]

3.- Doing good led by the good spirit, thinking with the Church

We can always take a step forward in doing good in the Good Spirit, *sentire cum ecclesia*, as Ignatius says. The way we do things in using discernment is also proper to the Society. Faber used to formulate it asking for the grace that “everything good would be realised, thought or organised, be done through the good spirit and not through the bad.”¹⁴ This grace of discernment, it’s not enough to think, do or organise the good, but do it of the good spirit, is what roots us in the Church, in which the Spirit works and distributes the diverse charisms for the common good. Faber used to say that, in many things, those who wanted to reform the Church were right, but that God did not want to correct it through their means.

It is proper of the Society to do things thinking with the Church. Doing this without losing peace and with joy, in the context of the sins we see, in us as well as in others, and in the structures that we have created, involves carrying the cross, experiencing poverty and humiliations, where Ignatius encourages us to choose between bearing them patiently or desiring them.¹⁵ Where the contradiction was very clear, Ignatius used to advise to recollect oneself, before talking or acting, in order to work in the Good Spirit. We do not read the rules for thinking with the Church as precise instructions about controversial points (some rules could be out of date), but examples where Ignatius was inviting in his times to “act against” the anti-ecclesial spirit, inclining ourselves totally and decisively towards our Mother, the Church, not in order to justify a debatable position, but to open space so that the spirit could act in its own time.

Service of the good spirit and of discernment makes us men of the Church – not clericalists, but ecclesiastics – men “for others,” with nothing of our own which cuts us off from others, but rather everything that is ours placed in common and for service.

We neither walk alone nor comfortably, but we walk with “a heart that does not rest, that does not close in on itself but beats to the rhythm of a journey undertaken together with all the people faithful to God.”¹⁶ We walk becoming all things to all people, with the goal of helping others.

This self-emptying makes the Society have and always able to have more the face, the accent and the lifestyle of all peoples, of every culture, inserting ourselves in all of them, in the very heart of every people, to become the church, there with every people, inculturating the gospel and evangelising every culture.

In a filial colloquy, or as a servant to his Mistress, we beg *Our Lady of la Strada* to intercede for us before the “Father of mercies and God of all consolation” (2 Cor 1:3), to constantly place us with her Son, with Jesus who carries, and invites us to carry the cross of the world with Him. We entrust to Her “our way of proceeding” that it should be ecclesial, inculturated, poor, attentive, free from all worldly ambition. We beg Our Mother to direct and accompany every Jesuit along with that part of the people faithful to God whom he has been sent, **along these paths of consolation, of compassion and discernment.**

¹⁴ PIERRE FAVRE, *Mémorial* quoted. N° 51.

¹⁵ Cfr. IGNACIO DE LOYOLA, *Directorio Autógrafo* 23.

¹⁶ FRANCIS, *Homily at the Church of the Gesù*, 3 January 2014.