

CLOSING MASS OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATION OF THE
PRESENTATION BROTHERS OF THE WEST AFRICA PROVINCE

7TH DECEMBER 2018

Homily notes

1. *Congratulations to the Presentation Brothers*

Dear Br Francis, CTL, The Provincial Team Leader (of the WA Province), beloved Brothers of the Presentation, my dear People of God;

On behalf of the Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese, I wish to extend our heartfelt **congratulations** to members of the West Africa Province of the Presentation Brothers on the occasion of their **Golden jubilee**.

I have shared these **personal memories** of my encounter with the PB to underline the fact that my personal story as a priest has been part of the story of the 50 years of the Congregation in Ghana. And I am very sure that many others of my generation can equally testify to this fact.

As we gather to mark this Golden milestone of the presence of the PB in our diocese, I would like;

-**first of all**, to pay tribute to **my predecessors**, beginning with Bishop Bertrand, down to Bishops Akanlu and Abadamloora whose vision, wisdom and tenacity facilitated the arrival and eventual stay of the PB in the diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga.

-I would like, secondly, to thank the **Congregational Leadership** of the PB, then and now, for keeping faith and trust with the diocese by continually ensuring that the original commitment to the mission of the Congregation in Ghana has been maintained and sustained all these 50 years.

-We also pay tribute to the three **pioneer brothers**, Stephen, Tom and Xavier whose courage and apostolic obedience, sustained by the grace of God, gave birth to the mission of the Brothers in Ghana 50 years ago.

-All these years, amidst the traffic of arrivals and departures, some individual brothers have enjoyed the **vow of stability more than** others; mentioned should be made in this regard of Brs Edwin O'Sullivan (40), *Joe Gilleece*(33), *Denis Claivaz* (20) and *Raphael Toodle* (21), just back again.

And many others who continue to keep in touch with the mission in Ghana even after they had left for other assignments.

-We recall with deep sorrow, those brothers who in the course of their service to the people of Ghana, and in particular of the diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga, were called home by the Lord; we remember in particular, *Brs James Prud'homme, Thomas*

O'Connor, Joseph Wegru, Philip Tengan and Sebastian Dery. May they receive the reward for their dedicated service and sacrifice.

2. The Spirit of the Jubilee

Dear brothers of Presentation Family, at the launch of the Jubilee year last December, I invited you with the words of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, which he addressed to the consecrated men and women on the occasion of the Year of the Consecrated Life; I asked you;

*To Look to the past with **gratitude**, to live the present with **passion** and to embrace the future with **hope**.*

I believe this is what you have been doing in the course of the past year and as we conclude the jubilee year, it might be useful to remind you, once again, to keep in mind the key terms in the Pope's invitation to the consecrated men and women, namely **gratitude, passion and hope**.

GRATITUDE;

In invite you to look to the past with gratitude, in the spirit of our Mother Mary, whose Song of Praise you adopted as theme for the jubilee "*The Lord has done great things for me, Holy is His Name*" (Lk 1,49)".

Mary recognizes her poverty and her lowly state (**as Handmaid/servant**) and the overwhelming grace of God in her life.

If you don't feel empty you can never be filled by anything, and if you can never be filled, you can never be grateful. The proud, the arrogant, the self-sufficient person is never grateful to anyone.

As a province, you have every cause to be grateful to God and to recognize and acknowledge the great things he has done for you;

- from the **humble beginning of 3 brothers, 1** community, in a single diocese; the seed has grown into a mighty tree of **32** Brothers, **10** communities working in **7** dioceses in the span of 50 years.

-The numerical growth and visibility of the Congregation also meant **more lives**, especially, the young (special charism), the vulnerable and marginalized have been **touched** by you. Sometimes this is not easily quantifiable or readily visible but the **seed grows in secret**.

-A more **humbling experience** which calls for profound sentiments of gratitude by the West African Province, is the election last year, of the first ever non-Irish and first Ghanaian Congregational Leader, who is a member of this province.

Mercy and expression of Gratitude

Dear Brothers,

It is in this spirit of **gratitude** that we are invited to look to the past; However, the spirit of gratitude also requires the acknowledgment of **failure and betrayal**. In her song of praise, Mary draws attention to the **Mercy of God**, which is “from age to age on those who fear Him”. Mercy presupposes sin, failure and guilt.

In echoing Mary’s Song of praise and gratitude let us also, as a province **acknowledge the Mercy of the Lord** that we have enjoyed in the course of the past 50 years; especially

- for the moments we have resisted his Grace out of fear or out of cultural differences and prejudices,

-for the times our conduct as consecrated men has given rise to **scandal and a poor witness** to the Gospel.

-We are invited in the spirit of the **biblical concept** of the jubilee year to let go of **our past hurts**, to forgive wrongs suffered and to ask for pardon for offences committed against others in the course of our mission.

To celebrate a year of favour from the Lord, is to acknowledge his Mercy towards us and to ask for the grace to forgive and show mercy to all those who have offended us.

PASSION

I invite you to live the present with passion inspired by the theme of your General Chapter which called on you to be ***Pilgrim brothers with the compassionate Christ in an evolving world.***

Pilgrim Brothers

The image of the pilgrim evokes the picture of a man/woman on **the move**, on a journey in search of the face of God.

Secondly it evokes, the picture of a man /woman traveling light, **with little or no baggage** at all. He/she leaves behind the comfort and luxury of his home and travels with only the essential. *(Those of you who are familiar with the picture of the ancient pilgrims will recall that they are often depicted with just a walking stick and a drinking cup (a shell).*

Dear Brothers,

To be pilgrim brothers means to be on the move, with faces set resolutely on seeking one thing, **the Lord**. The pilgrim has no other goal than seeking the face of God. This requires a **PASSION** for GOD, a thirst to **know** Him better and, above all, a desire to be in **communion** with Him.

In a society where life is constantly **in a rush** and time never seems to be enough (24 hours), such a passion for God can be greatly **threatened and undermined** in a Brother who does not make time for Him

St John XIII use to say that because there so much to be done, we need to spend more time in prayer”.

What gives quality to our work is not so much our talents and skills as the spirit of God that infuses what we do. Living the present with passion means, therefore, being ready to waste time, precious time with and for God.

In a society which celebrates **personal security** and independence, the pilgrim Brother is equally challenged when it comes to **travelling light**, with little or no baggage at all; indeed, with only his drinking cup and staff.

The spirit of **materialism, individualism**, the thirst for the **latest gadgets** and fashions, puts a burden on the pilgrim Brother, making it difficult for him to travel light and think of others.

The danger posed to a Congregation like yours, which was founded in response to the needs of the poor and the vulnerable is grave in a society which **promotes greed, personal security first, selfishness and competition**. The danger lies in members of the Congregation tending to think more and more about their personal needs, their personal security, before reaching out to those who are less privileged and in need.

Be Pilgrim Brothers whose goal and portion is God alone!

With the Compassionate Christ

The Chapter also invites you to make the compassionate Christ your **travelling companion**; This is another way to live the **present with passion**. To be compassionate means to bring **solace and joy** to others, especially to those who are distressed and who labour and are overburdened.

Pope Francis never tires of reminding you, **men and women in the Consecrated Life**, that your vocation is to bring joy to others. On the occasion of the Year of the Consecrated Life, he said’ “*wherever there are religious men and women there is joy*”. In his Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today’s World, *Gaudete et Exultate*, he made a similar invitation; “*Are you called to the consecrated life, be holy by living out your commitment with JOY*”

We seem to live today in a **despondent** (joyless) society, where people take delight in complaining about everything and about everyone except about themselves. When people complain a lot, they kill every flicker of joy around them. Pope Francis believes consecrated men and women have the antidote to this **kill-joy syndrome** in our world, by lighting up wherever they are.

Besides the lack of joy, our society is also witnessing a rising trend in **violent behaviour**, where the virtues of **compassion, forgiveness and mercy** are gradually giving way to **revenge and retribution**.

The capitular call to keep company with the compassionate Christ obliges us not only to be close to those **in need** but above all to imitate the compassionate Christ, by being ready to

forgive and show mercy to those who offend us. Our religious communities should be **oases of compassion, mercy and mutual** love.

I had occasion recently to point out in my Advent message that our presbyteries and religious houses are not **immune to Intimate Partner Violence** (the more technical term for what is commonly referred to as domestic violence) which is unfortunately on the rise in many catholic families.

Every faith community, that is rooted and planted in love (cf. Eph 3,14-15), is a form of Intimate Partnership and therefore susceptible to every form of Domestic Violence, not excluding physical violence.

Living the present with the **compassionate Christ** as a close companion, makes the pilgrim Brother an ambassador of peace and social harmony in an evolving world that is bent on inflicting so much pain and suffering on itself.

HOPE

Finally, I invite you to look to the future with Hope and with great expectation, especially in the light the blessings bestowed on you in the last 50 years.

As a Province, let me draw your attention to the **privilege and honour** that has been done you in the past 50 years;

-I have no doubt that the West Africa Province, is one of the provinces of the Congregation that has been blessed and endowed with very high calibre of brothers, both past and present, who have served the province so creditably and helped to make it what it is today;

-Secondly, you have been found worthy and **of age** to be called to offer for leadership at the Congregation Team level one of your members. This is indeed a great privilege and honour.

Therefore, look to the future with hope, but I dare say, also with some amount of **trepidation**, because privileges come with grave responsibility. The choice and the offer of one of you for service at the Congregation Team Leadership level, places a **grave responsibility on your shoulders as a Province**. In the words of the Congregation Leadership Team itself, the election of Br Francis “ *is evident of the confidence, trust and responsibility entrusted to the bothers of this part of the Congregation to shape its future and keep the spark of the Charism ablaze*”.

This is a grave responsibility that has been laid not only upon your brother, Br Francis, but also on the shoulder of every single brother of the province. Every single one of you is challenged to help shape the future of the Congregation and keep the charism alive by your commitment and exemplary witness to the **joy of the consecrated life**.

3. Conclusion

We are here to thank God with you, for the 50 years of grace and above all to pray for you as you look to the future with hope.

Our Local Church of Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese is grateful for your presence and contribution to her diocesan family life; We also look to the future with hope and with **great expectation from you**. We pledge to offer whatever support we can for you to achieve your mission among us.

We commend you to your beloved Mother and Patron, Our Lady of the Presentation. May she spread her mantel over you and walk with you into the next 50 years.

+Alfred Agyenta

Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese