



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO FRENCH SEMINARIANS ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR MEETING
AT THE MARIAN SHRINE OF LOURDES [8-10 NOVEMBER 2014] [\[Multimedia\]](#)**

Dear Seminarian Friends,

I cordially greet each one of you, as well as your formators and Bishops, whom you joined at the conclusion of the work of the Plenary Assembly of the Episcopal Conference. I am very happy to know you are all gathered around Mary, Mother of the Lord, at this Shrine in Lourdes, which is so beloved throughout the world.

Pondering on your gathering at this important Marian site, what immediately comes to my mind and my heart is what the Word of God says of the disciples after the Risen Lord had asked them to wait for the Holy Spirit: “When they entered [the city], they went up to the Upper Room, where they were staying.... All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:13-14).

Contemplating this event, I would like you to remember three essential words for your life as seminarians: *fraternity, prayer, mission*.

The Book of the Acts tells us that the disciples were of one single heart. Your gathering is an example of this. Your time at the seminary corresponds to that basic experience that the Apostles had for many months, when Jesus constituted them: “And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach” the Good News (Mk 3:14). The fraternity of the disciples, which expresses the unity of hearts, is an integral part of the call that you have received. The presbyterial ministry can never be individual, much less individualistic.

In the seminary, you live together in order to learn to know each other, to appreciate each other, to sustain each other, and at times even to support each other, in order to live the mission together and render that witness of love thanks to which Jesus’ disciples are recognized. It is important to make this personal and definitive choice which is a true gift of yourselves to God and to others. I

thus invite you to accept this apprenticeship of fraternity, placing all your passion in it; you will grow in charity and you will build unity, taking the initiative that the Holy Spirit will inspire in you. You will therefore be able to invent more appropriate ways to truly live in priestly fraternity when you are ordained. *Fraternity* is the first word.

Prayer. Together, the disciples pray with Mary, as they await the Holy Spirit. You have been called by Jesus who wants you to participate in his priesthood for the life of the world. At the basis of your formation is the Word of God, which permeates you, nourishes you, enlightens you. Praying with it, all that you learn becomes vital in prayer.

Therefore, I exhort you to spend long moments in prayer every day, recalling that Jesus himself withdrew in silence or in solitude to immerse himself in the mystery of his Father. It is in prayer that you, too, will find the loving presence of the Lord and that you allow yourselves to be transformed by Him without fear of the hardship that it entails, of the night that usually constitutes it. Even Moses entered into the darkness of the cloud to speak to God in humility, as a friend speaks with his friend.

May your life of prayer be an appeal to the Spirit! It is He who builds up the Church, who guides the disciples and who instills pastoral charity. It is in the power of the Spirit that you will reach those to whom you will be sent, with the awareness that they expect you to be witnesses to Jesus, “Men of God”, so as to lead them to the Father.

This brings me to my third word: *Mission*. Through your Baptism you were rendered proclaimers of the Gospel. With the priestly ordination, you will be assigned to proclaim the Word, under the responsibility of your bishops. As you prepare for this mission, you will recall that it is the Lord’s final Commandment: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). All that you are doing during your formation has but one purpose: to become humble missionary-disciples in order to be disciples.

I encourage you to get to know the world you will be sent into and to make visible your effective self-emptying to encounter the other. The preference for people who are the farthest is a response to the call of the Risen One who precedes you and who awaits you in the Galilee of the Gentiles. By going to the peripheries one also reaches the centre.

The mission is inseparable from prayer for prayer opens you to the Spirit and the Spirit guides you in the mission. And the mission, the soul of which is charity, consists in leading those you meet to feel the tenderness with which the Lord embraces them, to receive Baptism, to praise God, to live by the Eucharist, to participate in the mission of the Church in their turn.

Mary accompanied Jesus in his mission. She was present at Pentecost, when the disciples

received the Holy Spirit. She accompanied as a mother the first steps of the Church. During these days in Lourdes, entrust yourselves to her, place your call back into her hands, ask her to make pastors of you according to God's heart. May she strengthen you in these three essential points that I have addressed: fraternity, prayer, mission.

I wholeheartedly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing and I ask you to pray for me. Thank you.

From the Vatican, 24 October 2014

FRANCIS