

BE HAPPY AS PRIESTS

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National Meeting of Priests of Ecuador

(Guayaquil, July 12, 2023)

Dear brother priests:

First of all, THANK YOU for your presence here, but much more for your service to the People of God, your dedication to the people who is entrusted, day after day and especially in the recent pandemic that it has been for us, ministers of God, a time that has put us to tough test for everyone.

I am happy to be able to meet you today and have this opportunity to look with you at my life and our life. I speak to you with an open heart, without formalities, and therefore I begin with first of all tell you something about myself and also after that, from time to time

when I will share with you something about my life.

An option that must always be renewed

When Pope Francis told me in April 2021 that he wanted calling me to Rome to become Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, I took a scare I would never have imagined working one day in the Vatican, far from my land and far from my people. In Korea I was a happy bishop, committed together with my diocese on a promising path after the footprints of our martyrs. Pope Francis had come to us in the diocese for Asian Youth Day and had emerged interesting initiatives. We had also held a diocesan Synod that brought together priests and lay people, and I was building a new Curia diocesan.

And this call came, this request from the Pope. I told him: "But I am a peasant, son of peasants." The Pope was not impressed by that.

He had found out about me and knew that I was in a relationship.

good and fraternal with the priests. That was what interested him.

I am honest with you: leave everything and even leave a certain standard of living - the car with the driver, the nuns who took care of the house, the collaborators and the collaborators at my disposal and also the appreciation of the people - was not easy . I arrived in Rome and there was no apartment for me. I lived for three months and a half in a room with a bathroom, surrounded by my suitcases. AND

then for another three months in Santa Marta, near the Pope, but without a own house. For me it was a healthy purification. helped me come back once more to the essentials of the Gospel. It was the occasion for a renewed election only from God. I ask for myself and for you the grace of knowing how to renew always this choice. When we are young - if everything goes well -

We started with great ideals, but over the years there is a risk of We settle, of no longer having that evangelical freshness, and then our Life is no longer a transparent testimony of God.

And it is then precisely at that moment! - the occasion of a second election of



God, deeper and truer than what we did with illusion and enthusiasm that we feel as young people.

Happy or discouraged priests?

I'm going to tell you something else that happened to me. When my appointment on June 11, 2021, a bishop friend called me and He said: "Now you are in charge of ensuring that all the priests of the world be happy." These words touched me as if they came from God Himself and they never abandoned me: make priests happy! It's not easy because, when I look around me, I see so many priests discouraged And I understand: there are many reasons to feel overwhelmed. and certainly you too would have a lot to say about this.

Let's try to remember some causes of this situation. I mention four that They stand out more, but there are also others.

1. The overload. In many parts of the world priests wear a load that is greater than its strength. They are often few in number and The parishes are large and even very large, with many communities to follow and sometimes very far away. People put a lot expectations of priests. To reach everyone, there are many masses that celebrate: maybe five or six on Sundays and two, three, four during the week. And then the catechism to do, the groups and associations to follow, the sacraments to prepare. You never reach the end: always in movement, always in action. With such a "super job", in a moment Because one feels empty, the enthusiasm fades and one passes into routine; the most enthusiastic, on the other hand, run the risk of exhaustion. AND internally one lives in a situation of aridity and even at night: one can no longer It feels nothing, it just works.

2. A second reason: loneliness and individualism. The Council Vatican II spoke of priests almost exclusively in the plural - the priests; and no: the priest - and left us at n. 8 of the Decree "Presbyterorum Ordinis" a wonderful page on communion presbyteral, encouraging priests to practice various ways of life common: from coexistence to the common table or, at least, the frequent meetings. But unfortunately the reality is different: almost always the priests find themselves living and working alone, and this often from the first years of ministry. They have chosen - we hope - life in celibacy thinking that in this way they can relive the experience of apostles with Jesus and with each other, but in reality they are alone. They live for others, they give themselves to people, but when they get home to late at night, no one is there. There is only the television. And one wants to say: "I spend myself for others, I run from morning to night, but who think of me? I have no one." In this situation it is easy to look for substitutes. And it is also easy to become individualistic, capable of having and direct many collaborators, who depend on us, but little capable and available to collaborate on an equal footing with other priests and also with the laity.

3. Our fragility. We have talked about overload and loneliness, but there is a third reason for discouragement that affects us all. The further we advance, the more we discover that we are not superheroes but full of limits; we are not superman but we have our fragilities. And then we feel that we are not living up to our task and our vocation. We discover - if we are realistic and sincere - our weakness and the fact of being sinners. Pope Francis speaks to us

often of this. Compared to Jesus and the Gospel of him, all
At some point we do the experience of Pedro who, seeing the infinite
distance between him and Jesus, he exclaims: "Lord, depart from me, for I am a
sinner" (Luke 5, 8). And, after having denied Jesus, he wept bitterly
(cf. Luke 22:62). If we are not superficial and have sensitivity, sooner or
early the feeling of our inadequacy runs the risk of
We discourage and sometimes even crush us.

4. A rapidly changing Church and society. There is
a fourth thing that easily produces discouragement in us and not a little.
We live in a rapidly changing society. And it's not a change
linear and gradual, but a radical change, so much so that Pope Francis
It speaks of a change of era. Many things that were useful and valid until
yesterday they are no longer today. Let's think about the typewriter, yesteryear
indispensable. Today it is a museum piece. Many young people no longer even
They know what it is. The same thing also happens in the pastoral sphere: certain
ways of doing things that until yesterday bore fruit, in the world
Today's digital and globalized no longer have an impact. and we meet
displaced. In this situation the Church is called to undertake new
roads. Among them is synodality, which establishes a different way in
the relationship between priests and laity, more participatory and more egalitarian, and
It tries to activate and put the entire People of God on mission. But we
We are not used to this. So we start to do
many questions about our role and our identity and we run the
risk of being blocked, discouraged.

Happy priests, in the spirit of the Beatitudes
I told you that I was very impressed by that friend's words.
bishop who told me: "Now you are responsible for everyone being happy."
the priests of the world." That word made me look with different eyes at the
priests that I meet when I cross St. Peter's Square to go
home to the office or vice versa: Are they happy? Are they in the light? Have
happiness? Or are they sad, tired, discouraged? Not infrequently I
I stop and talk to one or the other. They are surprised when they discover that
I am the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy and I am interested in them as a
brother. In reality, I also emerge enriched from those moments,
because I understand better what priests live and what they hope for in
the various stages of life and in the various existential situations. AND
I am happy when at the end we can say goodbye with joy.

But this is just a first response to my friend's request
bishop that I feel like a request that has come to me from God. We have
said and we always repeat it in our Dicastery that we must work and
work so that priests in the world can live their vocation with
greater courage and more joy.

But what can make a priest happy? I have observed myself
yourself and I invite you to ask yourself the question with me: what makes me
happy? Happy not in any way, fleeting and superficial and perhaps selfish;
but happy in a true, deep and evangelical sense? I share with you
three situations that caught my attention, but surely you
Could you add others.

1. We are happy when we feel looked at with confidence,
esteem and benevolence. Here, indeed, arises a great responsibility

reciprocal between us priests: How do we look at each other? And How do we feel looked at by each other? There is the terrible expression that speaks of "invidia clericalis": of envy among priests. Who among us has not experienced it? How much damage we we do each other with this! And there is another phenomenon, that the Pope Francis does not hesitate to call "cancer": gossip, speaking badly of each other about each other and complain about each other: about the neighboring priest, the bishop, the vicar general... Speaking ill of others, instead of blessing them: instead of speak well of them and create in the presbytery a climate of trust, of esteem and benevolence! If this does not exist, it is easy for us to start look for affection elsewhere.

But we must be realistic: we will never find a presbytery! optimal or not a perfect bishop, a perfect vicar general! He Prophet Jeremiah warns: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and "he rests his heart on the flesh, turning his heart away from the Lord" (Jer 17:5). true anchor of salvation of our life and the only source of esteem and of benevolence that never fails is the Lord! We need expose ourselves daily to the rays of that divine Sun that is his Love. And This happens especially in prayer. Someone said: "Prayer is the house of the virgin." Of course, not just any superficial prayer made only with words, but rather prayer lived with the heart when we put ourselves before him and we listen to him, poor and rm, open interiorly and silent.

Since I live in the Vatican, every morning I get up a shortly before 5 and I set off from my house to the Grotto of Lourdes in the Vatican Gardens. As I walk I pray Rosary and meditate: I walk in the company of the Virgin, listening to Jesus. I look at my life and my day with Him, I speak to Him and listen to Him, I entrust Him people and things, I put worries and knots to untie in your hands. I return home with new light and with new spirits, more aware that I am a son of God, loved by Him, and that only in this way can I be a brother and father of all those I meet. And so I am a Cardinal and a Prefect happy, despite the hard work and the many problems I have to face each day.

2. A second experience that may surprise you: I am happy, evangelically happy, when I have nothing to hide. But how We can do it, if we all have weaknesses and inevitably Do we make mistakes and mistakes? Who among us could say that in his life everything's fine? We would be like that Pharisee who goes up to the temple, stands front row and says: "Oh God, I thank you that I am not like the others" (Luke 18:11). On the other hand, we all need to resort to humbly to the great gift of the sacrament of reconciliation. It's true, to Sometimes we approach this sacrament with fear and shame, but Then we are whole again, whole, and feel a new freedom: we have nothing to hide; There is nothing that would not be entrusted to mercy and forgiveness of God For me, when I arrived in Rome, it was a priority to find a stable confessor and visit him regularly. But confession alone is not enough. We who are called to be parents of souls and we come into contact with so many personal situations, even intimate and delicate ones, we need also to be accompanied; That is, we need to resort to a mature person and let him look at us like an open book. We are very

aware that a car needs to be taken to the shop from time to time for the review if we do not want to get unpleasant surprises. So We also need to allow ourselves to be looked at from time to time by an expert person without hiding our shadow areas and our inconsistencies, to understand how to deal with them and remedy them. Of what Otherwise, we run the risk of being blind guides (cf. Mt 23, 16,24) and of linking people to us instead of Jesus, entangling us in unclear situations. And we do not experience the happiness of the "clean from the heart" (cf. Mt 5, 8): of those who have the courage to allow themselves to be purified always anew the heart.

3. A third experience that I think we all do: we are happy when we are with good friends or family and we do things together a good meal or a good dinner, a walk or a vacation. Who Of us don't remember moments like these? moments when all worries disappear and we can simply be ourselves, without masks and without defenses; moments in which We also welcome others as they are, we give ourselves generously to them and they do the same. Then we feel in home, no longer alone and in danger, but protected. "A priest needs a home - the priest needs a home," often repeated the priest who took care of of much of my training in ministry and to whom I owe very much. Now this house should not be a refuge that we find somewhere - in one's own family of origin or in a circle of friends or elsewhere - but it should be the presbytery. For me this one It is a priority issue: we care about many people, but do we take care of each other? How close are we to someone who, as a priest, goes through a moment of uncertainty, of doubt, at night? To whom he finds difficulties in pastoral care and perhaps is attacked by people? To whom he has a poor parish and has almost nothing necessary to live? And how close we are also to the bishop who He often has a more complicated life than ours. Yes to us as parish priests, joys and sorrows come to us, the bishop often above all, problems come. In short, how much do we do to our brothers and also the bishop can be happy and to be happy us along with them? Only in this way will our life be attractive and they will be able to new vocations are also born! And only then - only if we priests are a true community among us - we will be authentic builders of community where we carry out our ministerial service. Therefore, it has always been a priority for me to remember the birthday of my brothers, pick up the phone and call them to ask them feel my closeness. Just as it is a priority for me today, to reach the Dicastery in the morning at the same time as everyone else and not sit down immediately at the desk, but stop at the entrance to exchange a few words with one or the other and then go to the office in office to greet others too. It is not time wasted, but that makes our service real and authentic: "By this everyone will know that "You are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). And Did you know that bishops also, when they come to us on their ad visit limina, are you happy to be welcomed with a coffee or a juice and some sweets? Because, really, even bishops need a home!

Built on rock.

Dear brother priests: We have done many considerations about what may discourage us in our ministry and about what can make us happy. True happiness - makes us understand Jesus in the Beatitudes with which he opens the Sermon of the Mountain - is Easter happiness: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who cry, because they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth..." (Mt 5, 3-5). In the end, to summarize all that Discourse, Jesus states: "Therefore, whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the rivers overflowed, the winds blew and struck against that house, but it did not fall, because it was founded on rock" (Mt 7, 24-25). Our happiness can be firm and lasting only if it is based on the Word of God, life and putting the Word into practice of God".

That is why the motto that guided the entire second part of my formation for the ministry and about which I will speak to the seminarians this afternoon:

a single book: the Gospel; one law: the new commandment; a single Teacher: Jesus.

But then my ordination came. Strangely, I woke up that morning with the impression that I was going to die that day. When later, during mass, he was prostrate on the floor, I felt like a grain of salt, wheat that falls to the ground and dies: dies with Christ for the good of the siblings. That day I understood that being a priest means dying to live with Jesus for my brothers and I was deeply united to Jesus crucified: Yes, that day I married Jesus crucified and abandoned. It has been more than 40 years and I can say two things: first, it is this union with Jesus abandoned on the cross, it is this "marriage" with him, which has made me always kept standing; Secondly, it is this union with Jesus abandoned the one that has always made me go, again and again, from the Cross to the Resurrection, from problems to hope, from conflicts to charity, from the negative and the darkness to the light and the positive.

I was recently asked to ordain 25 deacons of the Prelature of Opus Dei. A few days before I met them and we spent a moment of deep communion. I had the courage to talk to him open heart and told them bluntly: becoming a priest means getting married with Jesus Abandoned, because he went there on the Cross and in the blackest abandonment that generated the Church, the new humanity. They all stayed impressed by these words of mine. I was very happy when, after of the ordination celebration, one of them approached me and said: «Today I married Jesús Abandonado». I thought: this priest has truly grasped the secret of happiness and fertility priestly. His life is built on rock.

In conclusion

Allow me to say, in conclusion, one last word that sums up a little of everything I have shared with you: the challenges of priestly life and ministerial today there are many; I think we must move from acting like priests to being priests, like Jesus.