

Talk by František Hylmar SJ, April 16, 2024

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This present moment in the life of the Church and in the religious life is a time of confusion, uncertainty and doubts for many people and we wonder what we should do.

(1) Let me start with something that struck me in the Gospel Readings of these Easter Days. Ten days ago, on the Second Sunday of Easter we heard in the Gospel:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19)

and further on: *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (John 20:21).*

And so, we too have to stay and keep together as the disciples of Jesus did after the violent death of their Master. For the disciples it was a time of greatest confusion but they kept staying together in the place where they last experienced something intense with their Lord. And here something unexpected happened, a reality so new that it was hard to believe.

And the last Sunday we heard from the Gospel according to Luke 24:34-45 another account of the encounter of the Risen Lord with his disciples:

Then they (the two disciples) told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"

But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...

I think what it means for us is that we should also share our experience of the Risen Lord and trust that He is really present among us. In such moments we allow the Lord to enter among us and tell us what we need to hear and to do. We cannot act on our own behalf. We can only do what the Lord asks us to do. We have to learn to live the new life the Risen Lord has given us and wants to teach us.

(2) And after this scriptural introduction I would like to share several concrete and practical things with you.

I am convinced that *we have to trust (believe in) our religious way of life*. It is a kind of a charismatic life. Our life is a gift of Jesus to each of us personally and to the People of God. But it means that *we have to trust Jesus*, because our way of life springs from him. He and no one else is and can be the source and motivation of our life.

It seems to me that in the past religious orders served and responded to specific social demands or to the demands of specific social groups such as nobility and mostly conservative political and social groupings. They supported religious orders both socially and materially. *Nowadays, we can only trust in Jesus himself and in individuals who support us because of Jesus.* And that's a big change.

Mere faith in God isn't enough. Without a faith and trust in Jesus who is at once human and divine there is no religious life. Only our sincere trust in Jesus as the Son of the living God and the Son of man will lead us forward as religious sisters and brothers.

That is why we need to practise *meditative prayer over the Gospel*. Through such prayer we enter into past events with Jesus that make Jesus present for us here and now.

Quiet contemplative prayer is also necessary in order to learn to stay with Jesus without doing anything special, in an intimate relationship with him.

We also need *examen prayer*, absolutely necessary. Examen prayer connects life and prayer, helps us to seek and find God in all things and to seek and find God's ways and respond to God's call.

Gratefulness for concrete moments of grace every day is indispensable. We could start every day with a sigh: "I wonder, dear Lord, how you are going to do today. How you are going to handle all the tasks that I have ahead of me." ... and then watch what happens during the day and feel the joy of what the Lord is doing around us, in us and through us.

We cannot remain in our heads. *We need to pray, deal with and act through our feelings and body, too.* We have to learn to detect spiritual movements and distinguish them from merely natural ones. *We have to watch and guard our thoughts, feelings, words and actions. We have to discern them and take an active attitude towards them,* which means to refuse the negative ones which lead us away from God (bad spirit) and to accept the positive ones which lead us towards God (good spirit).

We have to create safe and lifegiving *space in our communities for both simple and more complicated people and for both emotionally robust and very sensitive individuals.* I think that nowadays more and more religious are people rather sensitive and complicated. The traditional simple answers to their questions have to be really spiritually deep, otherwise they will not suffice and may even cause unintended harm.

It is an unpleasant fact that even *among the religious there are individuals who are toxic, destructive and manipulative.* We should find ways how to discover them and how to deal with them so that they do not cause much harm.

And last but not least, *we need a regular and natural practice of synodal sharing and conversation* in our communities that would complement the role of the superior.