

Homily of Cardinal Justin Rigali
Opening Mass CMSWR National Assembly
Basilica of St. Louis, King of France
St. Louis, Missouri
Thursday, September 20, 2018

Dear Sisters,

Once again the Church in St. Louis joyfully embraces the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, in this “Old Cathedral,” which over the years has played such a prominent role in the worship of God’s people here in St. Louis.

Once again you have come here in the context of your National Assembly, which is an assembly of worship, prayer and reflection on the charisms of consecrated religious life and on the ecclesial service that you are called to offer to the Church and to the world.

These are indeed “community days” and “inter-community days” when you are blessed to experience deeply the communion of the whole Church and the extensive solidarity based on religious life in its multiple expressions of apostolic charity.

It was four years ago that Pope Francis led the Church in the Year of Consecrated Life. That Year of Consecrated Life was an ongoing invitation for you to live your charisms with passion, listening carefully to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church, and to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of your consecrated life. This invitation involved very much the call to embrace the future with hope, indeed to embrace the one whom St. Paul calls and whom we all recognize as “Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim 1:1).

Embracing “Christ Jesus our hope” enables you to discover that perfect joy to which every religious has a right. In “Christ Jesus our hope” you are insulated against pessimism and fear. Instead, you constantly hear Jesus telling you: “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid” (Mt 14:27).

Yes, dear Sisters, these days together are meant first of all to reinforce your common understanding of your relationship with God in Christ. And from this renewed understanding comes new evangelizing zeal and new and deeper insights into the needed service that the Church asks you to perform in so many different places and circumstances. A great gift you have received is the word of God. Day after day the Scriptures tell you who you are and how close God is to you, and how close he wants you to be to him forever.

Just a couple of days ago in the Office of Readings we were blessed by words of Psalm 73. It seems that this Psalm abounds with deep insights into what is your identity, who you are and who you want to be. And knowing your identity enables you to give so much and serve so well. The Psalmist speaks so powerfully, saying: “...I was always in your presence; you were holding me by my right hand, you will guide me by your counsel and so you will lead me to glory. What also have I in heaven but you? Apart from you I want nothing on earth. My body

and my heart faint for joy. God is my possession for ever ... To be near God is my happiness. I have made the Lord God my refuge” (Ps 73: 23-26, 28). All of this is a very significant part of your life, your very being.

We know that the word of God belongs to everyone but we also see that it has a special power to express your consecrated relationship to God.

Pope Francis told us that he entrusted the Year of Consecrated Life to Mary, the “Virgin of listening and contemplation...the unsurpassed model for all those who follow Christ in love of God and service to their neighbor” (Apostolic Letter, November 21, 2014).

And, Sisters, how appropriately you have chosen as the theme of this National Assembly: “Leading with the Heart of Mary.” You have self-imposed a great challenge, choosing an unsurpassable model! Remember, St. Bernard has reassured you with these words: “With her for guide, you shall never go astray, while invoking her you shall never lose heart.”

The liturgical texts for the celebration of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary give us many insights into what it means “to lead with the Heart of Mary”. This heart is understood as the source and center of Mary’s interior life, of her mind and memory, of her will and love. This heart is recognized as the “House of God’s Word and the Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit.” This heart is a new heart. It is described as “Immaculate,” “wise,” “obedient,” gentle like that of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is undivided, free from duplicity, “pure,” “steadfast,” “watchful.” It is a heart to be understood and followed because it brings the Church tenderness and mercy. You have chosen well a theme that will not disappoint.

You, dear Sisters, know that Mary’s Heart is vigilant in supporting the Church by her prayers and maternal love in good times and bad, in crisis, pain and joy. You who have experienced the power of her undivided and pure heart are indeed called to offer leadership with this Heart—the Heart of Mary most holy, Mary Mother of the Church, Mary Mother of the Incarnate Word, Mary Mother of God.

Obviously, this type of leading will sooner or later associate you with so many other close companions of Jesus, above all, his Mother at the foot of the Cross. And you will also be associated with his Martyrs, including those we celebrate today, Saint Andrew Kim and Companions, who adorn the fabric of his holy Church as she faithfully transmits the kerygma of faith, which is the Death and Resurrection of the Lord. This kerygma, dear Sisters, you proclaim with Mary, in love and joy by your consecrated lives. The Heart of Mary was sustained by the Death and Resurrection of her Son. And now, with her, with Mary, you are called to transmit to the world this great treasure of salvation. Amen.