

## **A Synthesis: Renewed in the Spirit—Changing Realities in Religious Life**

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### **Introduction**

I would like to facilitate this synthesis in the form of a theological reflection. There seems to be as many ways to do theological reflection as there are groups who do it. But what I mean by a theological reflection is to invite you to reflect on what you have heard over the last few days by drawing parallels with your experience, Scripture and tradition.

The theme for this assembly is “Renewed in the Spirit: Changing Realities in Religious Life. It suggests that the Spirit is present in these changes that are being experienced, in fact it is the Spirit moving your communities to a new reality grounded in your charism, shaped by your particular history and as Archbishop Hartmayer shared, essential to the life of the local churches in which your communities serve.

Are you able to understand these changing realities as leading you toward a new thing? When we speak of a new thing in the spiritual life or in the life of the church, we are speaking to the movement and action of the Holy Spirit. As Abbot Owens, Fr. Ezama, and Fr. Vasquez shared --you will change and adapt only by the grace of the Spirit.

### **Context**

We have looked at these changing realities from sociological studies, case studies related to particular experiences, best practices from seasoned professionals and in prayer. I suggest two questions:

- Are you ready to recognize and welcome “a new thing?”
- Is it time to bring the members of your community and the people you serve into a new thing?

One fruit of these days that is evident is that change is happening. If the Paulist Fathers, an American congregation founded to serve the church in the U.S., is welcoming men who come from outside the U.S. then multicultural communities are the norm!

We looked at intergenerational realities and as Fr. Tom Gaunt, SJ pointed out, the studies suggest that when considering the spread of ages within most communities, in this room today, the proportion of young men would be represented by just one table in this room.

Archbishop Hartmayer, OFM Conv. spoke to how essential and welcomed religious communities are in the local church. You are a sign of hope. The mutual relationship of superior and bishop need to be nurtured and strengthened.

How do we see the Holy Spirit drawing us toward the new thing in all of this? I would like to suggest two dispositions to consider that make room for the Spirit to be at work.

## **Toward Reflection**

The first is the gift of age. Fr. Ezama mentioned he finds so much wisdom present in the senior members of his community. Pope Francis suggests that you lean into the reality of aging communities. In his homily at a Mass for members of Societies of Apostolic Life on the Feast of the Presentation, he looked at Simeon and Anna and noted that they are “two elders with young hearts, who were fixed in expectation on the infant Jesus.” Francis preached that they had not “retired hope” (28th World Day for Consecrated Life, 2024). Paul echoes this disposition when he writes “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Archbishop Hatmayer’s mention of *Spes Salvi* reminded me that the theme of Benedict’s visit to Washington DC and the Catholic University of America was “people with hope live differently.” The Archbishop suggested that in your founders, you most likely will find a model of what it looks like to live in hope. He reminded us that your founders are most likely models of hope in whom we can find inspiration. In Pope Francis’s homily, he drew on a reflection of the Jesuit, Carlo Maria Martini, Archbishop of Milan for many years. Martini reflected “In Jesus the past opens up to the future, the old in us opens us to the new that Jesus awakens” (C.M. Martini, *Something Personal. Meditations on Prayer*).

### **What of the old do you and your communities need to” leave to go of, to see the Spirit at work drawing you toward the new?**

The second disposition is that of patience. Again, Paul has something to say to this. When he contrasts life in the flesh with life in the Spirit, he writes ...in contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such there is no law. Surely, you aspire as superiors to be described in this way!

Last week in the *Wall Street Journal* an opinion spot caught my eye, written by a clinical psychologist about the way in which impatience is our modern curse, driven by the immediacy of google, and technology. I think, as Paul suggests, it has been a part of the human condition for a long time.

The author writes that learning to wait is good for us in a number of ways. It builds “psychological flexibility--tolerating uncomfortable thoughts and feelings in the face of setbacks.” She continues, “patience is key to good mental health because it teaches us to wait and accept uncertainty and enables us to pursue larger incentives.” She concludes and we know that there is certainly abundant proof of this in the spiritual life that cultivating patience begins by waiting-. In the spiritual life we would say waiting on the Spirit to work, to remain calm in the face of what may be unknown because we know it is indeed part “of pursuing the important things in life” (“Impatience is our Modern Curse but there are ways to beat it,” WSJ, Review, July 27-28, 2024)

On what do you need to wait-- as the Spirit does its work --in your community? Is there something for which you need to help your community to practice patience, to remain calm as something unfolds. How might you model this for them?

I invite you to take these questions, these pieces from Scripture and the tradition and share how they help you better see the Holy Spirit at work making all things new.