

June 15, 2015



MESSAGES - Baghdad (AsiaNews) – Baghdad's consecrated community held a prayer vigil on June 11 in St George's Cathedral to mark the Year of Consecrated Life, convoked by Pope Francis in November 2013. The event was attended by bishops, priests and the nunciature's first officer.

Addressing the gathering, Mar Sako recalled the "ever decreasing" number of priests and consecrated persons in the country, while others leave parishes and monasteries "because tired" of working in Iraq or because they want to seek "safety, comfort and money" abroad. His Beatitude called for greater "spiritual formation" and for the consecrated to follow Mary, who by relying on the Lord safeguarded her vocation, nourishing it with prayer.

Here, below, the Chaldean Patriarch Mar Louis Raphael I Sako's intervention, sent to AsiaNews:

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you and thank you with all my heart for your presence. As you know the number of priests and consecrated men and women in Iraq continues to decline. However, the greatest danger is that some leave the parish or the monastery because they are tired of working in Iraq, because they seek safety and comfort - and perhaps even more money! - Abroad.

And the few remaining need an adequate and profound spiritual formation, in order to bring the joy of the Gospel, to become a living sign, a sign of love, freedom, joy and service. This is what our people need today and what God wants us to witness to today. It is a far cry from what the world is used to living today. I therefore propose to devote the rest the rest of the Year of Consecrated Life to promoting an intense and timely spiritual formation to.

My brothers, dear sisters,
listen to what the Psalm 44 says: "Listen, O daughter, give ear: Forget your people and your father's house; The king has fallen in love with your beauty. He is your lord render homage unto him "(Ps 44 / 11-12). These are strong words and you have to read the message it contains between the lines, do not just stop at a superficial readings. If we fail to ponder them, we lose the opportunity of understanding their meaning.

The text reveals a divine presence full of love and appeals to us to listen carefully to find the message of God, in spite of what is happening around us.

These words are prophetic and mystic, they carry the flavor of love and eternity because uttered by one who is "immortal", dedicated to hearing and to listening carefully, knowing that listening requires silence, until it reaches the heart and strengthens our bonds to the One who calls us. Although probably we are not used to listening!

Is not it true that sometimes you say to someone we love: I miss you, I miss hearing your voice? Do we say this to the Lord?

The content of the text is a "Magna Charta" for our entire life. In light of what we hear, we practice love and service, and we live in unity and communion with enthusiasm and generosity. This is like listening to Mary, who "had kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 02.19). Just as Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who was sitting at his feet "to hear his words" (Lk 10/40), is the symbol of the disciple who listens avidly the words of the master ... Listen combining both prayer and meditation. A personal and collective prayer, ritual and not monotonous practices. Prayers lead us into the world of God and allow us to penetrate its mystery with humility and hope.

Giving ourselves to the Lord, entrusting our life to His heart is our source of happiness, because we live in the Lord and He watches over us day after day so we can grow more united in Him.

It is unfortunate that today's world does not feel the strong presence of this spirit, which is a source of enthusiasm and joy! We always find excuses, that circumstances have changed and our nature is weak, but the Lord gives us the grace and strength to face our weaknesses. Jesus said to St. Paul, My grace is sufficient for you; that's why we must hold onto our vocation and nourish it with prayer and through our service, our obedient chastity, our poverty. And we also have to appreciate it, to be able to say with Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Dear brothers and sisters,
we are all taking the same path, with courage, and the Lord will bless us. I propose that the at the next meeting we invite our people to gather with us, speak of themselves and what they want to be.

* *Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and president of the Episcopal Conference of Iraq*

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