

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HOLY MASS FOR THE CONRAD N. HILTON
CATHOLIC SISTERS INITIATIVE 2024 U.S. CONVENING
HILTON WASHINGTON D.C./ROCKVILLE – ROCKVILLE, MD
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Dear Sisters, and all who are partners in this initiative,

Good evening! As the representative of Pope Francis, I offer you his spiritual closeness. Last month, in an audience with some religious women and men, he said:

“As disciples, you are called to listen to the voice of Jesus, to contemplate more deeply and to be capable of living and proclaiming the love of God incarnate in Him, particularly through service to those most in need, and through Eucharistic and reparatory prayer.”¹

Two things he mentions: service to those in need, and the Eucharist. For every missionary disciple, but especially for Sisters and people in Catholic organizations, these are always the pillars of your proclamation of the love of God. You share in the Eucharistic celebration through worship, adoration, and communion. And then, by the strength of your connection with the Lord through the Eucharist, you go out to share his risen life with the people whom you serve.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch, whom we celebrate today, was committed to this mystery of Eucharistic service. He was under arrest for proclaiming the crucified and risen Christ. And while he was being taken to Rome to receive capital punishment, he wanted even his death to be a proclamation of the death and the life of Jesus. As he famously said: “I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ.”²

This is what our service means when it is united with the Eucharist. Many people can do social work, and this is good. But only the disciple who has had an encounter with Christ can offer that same encounter to the ones we serve. This is

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the General Chapters of the Brothers and Sisters of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Picpus) and the Sisters of the Divine Savior, 19 September 2024.

² St. Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 4.

what makes our service more than just social work. We see Christ living in the person whom we are serving, and they encounter Christ as the one who is loving them through us. In this way, we give them more than help; we give them hope. Dear friends, this points us to the meaning of the coming Jubilee Year of Hope. When we offer to someone an encounter with Jesus Christ – who has risen from the dead, who is alive, and who wants to have a personal relationship with them – we are giving that person the one hope that will sustain them in their present lives and lead them to a life that is eternal.

How grateful we are that Mr. Conrad Hilton, who had experienced great success in his business, saw charity as “a supreme virtue and the great channel through which the mercy of God is passed on to mankind.” In his last will, he left nearly his entire fortune to his Foundation in order to “relieve the suffering, the distressed and destitute”.³ It is precisely service to those in need that Mr. Hilton saw Catholic Sisters being able to do in a particular way. This prompted him to establish a partnership with them to encourage and give resources to their work. This was already a “synodal” work, being a collaboration between a man with strong Christian faith and Catholic Sisters.

Dear Sisters, I encourage you to remain true to the charisms of your religious life, and to trust the power of service as a an encounter with Christ. As Pope Francis said in that address to religious last month:

“I assure you of my closeness and my prayer, so that you may be renewed through inspired discernment and supported by Gospel values, and so that the desire to live joined with Christ and stay faithful to the foundational charism may be intensified in your hearts.”⁴

After all, as Paul says in today’s reading, you are adopted by God in Jesus Christ. As children of God, you announce to others that God desires to claim them as his children too. And this is what gives people a reason to hope.

³ <https://www.hiltonfoundation.org/about/history>

⁴ *Ibid.*