



Conference of Major Superiors of Men

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Media Release

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Catholic Men's Religious Superiors called to recommit themselves "to do all for the sake of the Gospel"

(St. Louis, MO). These were the words that more than 130 religious superiors heard from Archbishop Pietro Sambi, the Vatican's Apostolic Nuncio (Ambassador) to the United States at the conclusion of his keynote address at the 53rd annual assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men ([CMSM](#)) held in St. Louis, MO, August 5-8. Archbishop Sambi began his address by noting that "religious congregations had a leading role in the growth of the Church in this country. They made vibrant and shining two great values of the Gospel: *charity* toward the sick, the orphaned, the handicapped, the elderly, the poor, the marginalized; and *education* in great and human values".

Archbishop Sambi noted that the theme chosen for the assembly, *Called to Proclaim the Gospel*, coming at the close of the Pauline year and at the opening of the Year for Priests, "is needed by the Church in the United States just as rain is needed in the desert." The Archbishop said the he is "deeply convinced that the values and witness of religious life are extremely important for the renewal of the Church." In his remarks, the Archbishop reflected on the conversion experience of St. Paul, saying that "the day of Damascus became the most important moment in the life of Paul ... What happened there? Three things: A revelation, a vocation and a mission." Paul's faith "reached maturity and fullness with the revelation of Christ, the Son of God, our Savior and Lord," said the Archbishop. And about Paul's vocation, Archbishop Sambi noted that as Paul himself wrote to the Galatians, "he received from God not only the revelation of his Son, but also of the Gospel (Gal. 1:11-12)," which leads Paul to attribute to himself the titles of "apostle", teacher", and "herald" with the mission of preaching the Gospel to all. "Saint Paul, by Revelation, Vocation and Mission, was identified with proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. Everything he did was for the sake of that mission," the Archbishop concluded.

In his homily later in the day marking the Feast of the Transfiguration, Archbishop Sambi recalled the words of Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, and noted that these reflections "invite us, Religious men of America, through our configuration to Christ, to be *of the Lord*, to be those who journey up the Mount of the Transfiguration with him. We are likewise invited to be his witnesses *in the world*, coming down from Mount Tabor.

Abbot Jerome Kodell, OSB of Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas, provided spiritual reflections on the writings of St. Paul throughout the assembly. At the opening prayer service, he reminded the members of the CMSM that "as leaders, we have a special role in proclaiming the Gospel to our brothers and with them to the world. Like Paul, we did not call ourselves to this mission. It may be easier for us to feel the partnership of equal disciples than to accept the role of leadership in the midst of disciples, but both the partnership and the leadership are our call."

Other presenters at the assembly included John Allen of the *National Catholic Reporter*, who spoke about “*Ministry in a Changing Church – Four Key Forces Shaping the Catholic Future*”, the Very Rev. Ronald D. Witherup, p.s.s., Superior General of the Society of St. Sulpice and a former President of CMSM, who presented a biblical reflection entitled “*Charismatic Compulsion – St. Paul and the Renewal of Religious Life*” and finally Rocco Palmo, of *Whispers in the Loggia* fame, who spoke to the religious leaders about “*The World as Pulpit – Paul’s Vision, Our Reality*”.

In his Presidential Address, the Very Rev. Thomas Picton, CSsR, Provincial of the Denver Province of the Redemptorist Fathers and outgoing CMSM President, also used the conversion experience of St. Paul as his paradigm for reflection on the mission of religious leaders. In this Pauline experience, Father Picton noted the *Paradox*, “the spiritual principle that you have to experience blindness in order to see as God sees”; the *Path*, “the biblical and Pauline lesson that the surest path from darkness to light is through poverty”; and the *New Vision*, “how do we ‘put skin’ on these lessons and incarnate them in our own lives today”? Father Picton said that “in a time of uncertainty and diminishment, religious leaders must make sure that their Institutes continue to look outward while searching inward to understand their founding vision. They must not become preoccupied only with survival but continue to be bold and daring in their commitment to serving those most in need”.

More than 80 leaders in CMSM attended a Pre-Assembly Workshop the day before the assembly entitled “*Changing Face of the Catholic Church in America; Hispanics, Latinos and Latinas – Out of Diversity Building Unity*,” which focused on the multi-dimensional and multi-faceted aspects of the changing reality of the Catholic Church in America.

At the membership meeting of the assembly, CMSM members elected four new At-large Members of the National Board of Directors: the Very Rev. Arturo Aguilar, SSC, Regional Superior of the Missionary Society of St. Columban in the United States; the Very Rev. Justin A. Biase, OFM Conv., Minister Provincial of the Conventual Franciscan Immaculate Conception Province; the Very Rev. Brother Hugh O’Neill, CFC, Province Leader for the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers in North America; and Abbot Lawrence R. Staszysen, OSB, of St. Gregory Abbey in Shawnee, OK. At the concluding liturgy of the assembly, CMSM members installed the Very Rev. Thomas Cassidy, SCJ, major superior of the U.S. Province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart in Hales Corners, WI, to a two-year term as President. Father Cassidy had served as the CMSM President-elect from 2008 to 2009. Prior to that he had been a member of the General Council of the Priests of the Sacred Heart from 1997 to 2004 and from 2004 to 2007 he served as President-Rector of the Sacred Heart School of Theology in Hales Corners, WI.