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Vatican News



Pope Francis shares a moment with members of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary during a meeting at the Vatican Aug. 12, 2024, with members of four religious orders holding their general chapter meetings in Rome. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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God will not judge people by how many university degrees they earned, but by how well they cared for the poor, Pope Francis told a group of priests and religious women.

"The Lord won't ask us, 'What did you study?' 'How many degrees do you have?' 'How many works did you accomplish?' No, no. The Lord will say, 'Come with me because I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was persecuted and you protected me,'" the pope said.

"That is the theme of the final exam on which we will be judged," the pope said Aug. 12 as he met members of the general chapters of the Dominican Missionary Sisters of St. Sixtus, the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary and the Vocationist Fathers.

Francis joked that it was "efficient" of the Vatican to group all the general chapter members together in one audience since it is chapter "season" in Rome.

All four religious orders, he said, were founded to support and educate young people from poor families who would not otherwise receive the education they needed and the guidance necessary to discover their vocations.

The founders of the four orders "saw in them a sign from God for their mission," the pope said. "In the same way, it will also be good for you, especially in these days of community discernment, to keep constantly before your eyes the face of the poor."

"Jesus speaks to us in our neediest brothers and sisters," Francis said, "and in every gift given to them there is a reflection of God's love."

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And while the art of spiritual discernment is a specialty of the Vocationist Fathers, the pope told the religious that learning to make decisions by listening to God, to others and to one's own heart is essential for all Christians.

Discernment, he said, involves "prayer, meditation, patient waiting, and then courage and sacrifice" to put into practice that which God, "without ever imposing his will on us, suggests to our hearts."

Having choices is a sign of the freedom God gives to each person, the pope said.

"Our world is in such need of rediscovering the taste and beauty of making a decision, especially regarding definitive choices, which cause a decisive turning point in life, such as the vocational one," he said. Young people need spiritual fathers and mothers to help them understand that "to be free is not to remain eternally at a crossroads, making little 'escapes' to the right and left, without ever really taking a road."

"Being free means betting — betting! — on a path, with intelligence and prudence, certainly, but also with boldness and a spirit of renunciation, in order to grow and progress in the dynamic of giving and to be happy and loving according to God's plan," the pope told them.