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Remember the joy of your vocation, Vatican officials tell religious

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — Preparing for the Year for Consecrated Life, members of religious orders, secular institutes and consecrated virgins are asked to spend a considerable amount of time remembering the joy they felt when they first realized God was calling them.

"Pope Francis has asked us to let our hearts dwell on a freeze-frame of the joy of 'the moment when Jesus looked at me,'" said Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz and Archbishop Jose Rodriguez Carballo, respectively prefect and secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

In a letter titled "Rejoice" -- released Feb. 26 only in Italian -- the two drew on the teaching of Pope Francis to propose ways consecrated men and women could prepare for the Year for Consecrated Life, which will begin Nov. 30.

Scheduled to close just over 14 months later, on Feb. 2, 2016, the year will include an ecumenical meeting with religious orders of other Christian churches, as well as special gatherings for young religious men and women and for consecrated virgins.

By remembering the joy of being loved by God and rekindling the joy of following him, Aviz and Rodriguez Carballo said, consecrated men and women also will be better evangelizers and better promoters of new vocations.

"Joy isn't a useless ornament, but a necessity and foundation of human life," the letter said. "The world often has a deficit of joy. We are not called to make epic gestures nor to proclaim pompous words, but rather to witness to the joy that comes from the certainty of feeling loved and the confidence of being

saved."

To be an effective missionary, one must be humble and one must remember how God reached out to him or her personally, they said. God's call is always personal.

The crisis of vocations and the crisis many religious are experiencing today, they said, represent a crisis of memory that renders even many consecrated men and women incapable of experiencing true joy in being faithful.

"A daily personal and fraternal journey marked by discontent, bitterness that closes us up in regret and an almost permanent state of longing for unexplored paths and unfulfilled dreams becomes a solitary journey," the letter said.

No one is pretending the Christian journey is one only of sweetness and light, they said. In fact, the goal is to follow Jesus as closely as possible, even on the road to Calvary.

But a Christian's witness becomes strongest in the midst of difficulty, they said.

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"In a world that lives not trusting, discouraged and depressed, in a culture in which men and women let themselves be overcome by their fragility and weakness, by individualism and self-interest, we are asked to introduce trust in the possibility of true happiness and a hope that isn't based only on one's talents, qualities and knowledge, but on God," they said.

Even for consecrated people who are not part of religious communities, they said, the path of fidelity to Christ passes through community life and one's relationship with others.

In a world where relationships seem increasingly fragile and conflict reigns, the letter said, consecrated people are called to be witnesses of "the communion of spirits and hearts" of those who gather around Jesus to follow and be nourished by him.

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