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Donald Senior to priests: 'We're living through a remarkable moment'

by Thomas C. Fox

NCR Today
AUSCP

Passionist Fr. Donald Senior on Tuesday addressed a gathering of the Association of U.S. Priests, highlighting "the rather remarkable moment" we are living through in the life of the church.

Senior spoke at the group's third annual gathering in St. Louis. The association is meeting through Thursday.

Pope Francis "has struck a deep chord in the life of the church. He has lifted our spirits," Senior said, going on to describe the pope's remarkable witnesses, including his refusal to live in the apostolic palace. To the pope, he noted, "an apostolic palace is an oxymoron."

Senior said the pope's actions "are accompanied by challenging words." Francis "warned priests and bishops about the scourge of clericalism." In Rio de Janeiro for World Youth Day, Francis told young Christians, "I want to see the church get closer to the people."

Senior said Francis' "spirit of openness is the fundamental spirit of Vatican II. This is a refreshing time for us."

Senior's topic at the AUSCP was, "From Jerusalem to the Ends of the Earth: Biblical Reflections on the Dynamic Legacy of *Dei Verbum* and the Essential Outreach of the Church's Mission."

He said the document *Dei Verbum*, approved in 1965 by the Second Vatican Council, drew in part on a document 20 years earlier by Pope Pius XII. Among more recent documents is Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*

, which Senior described as a kind of Magna Carta regarding revelation.

Senior noted the following points in summarizing the theology of *Dei Verbum*:

- "The ultimate origin of the Word of God is within the Trinity, a God who self-communicates, who is not self-contained, who wishes to reveal himself to the world. ... The impulse to create springs from this."
- Revelation is not an abstract revelation of truth, but about relationship and communion.
- "God as creator does not stay aloof."
- Revelation culminates in Jesus Christ, "the definitive revealer of God's word ... perfectly expressing God's being."
- The full articulation of God's word is now entrusted to the apostles and the people of God "to proclaim the word of God to the world, to be healers and witnesses to the word [and] to repair the world."

Senior described the ministry of Jesus as "something like the work of breathing, or also like an embrace, reaching out and drawing in."

Jesus was one who "reached out to the margins." His reach "was not confined to the boundaries of Israel."

Senior cited the many meals described in the Scriptures as occasions where Jesus drew in Levi, the "crowd on the hill," and the guests at the wedding feast.

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