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Homily of the Substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State for the opening of the Apostolic Nunciature in the United Arab Emirates

The following is the homily delivered today by Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, Substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State, on the occasion of the opening of the Apostolic Nunciature in the United Arab Emirates:

Homily of Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am pleased to be with you for the celebration of the Holy Mass during my visit to Abu Dhabi in order to open the new Apostolic Nunciature in the United Arab Emirates. I gladly convey to you the cordial greetings and spiritual closeness of His Holiness Pope Francis. The physical presence of an Apostolic Nunciature is a further sign of the Holy Father's pastoral solicitude for the people of this country, especially the Catholic community, since it is rightly called the Pope's House. In this regard, I acknowledge the presence of your shepherd, Bishop Paul Hinder, Apostolic Vicar for Southern Arabia, and Monsignor Kryspin Dubiel, Chargé d'Affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature.

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life. This yearly celebration offers us a beautiful opportunity to pray for those who have already responded to the Lord's invitation to serve him in this vocation, as well as to ask the Lord of the harvest to send even more labourers into the field. In offering our prayers, we also reflect on the important role played by consecrated life in the mission of the Church. This land has been blessed by the service of many men and women religious throughout the years, including Bishop Hinder, who is a member of the Franciscan Order.

Consecrated life is a reminder of the goodness and love of God our Father. As he has done throughout history and continues to do today, the Lord sees what his children need and he accordingly calls men and women to serve the Church and society by inspiring them to embrace different charisms. No one charism is the same, but each one is a gift from God.

Responding to the Lord's call to follow him and serve his Church is not without its challenges. One such challenge that applies to all vocations in the Church is falling into discouragement. As Pope Francis remarked during last year's celebration of this Feast, "At times, our hard work fails to achieve the desired results, the seeds we sow seem not to bear sufficient fruit, the ardour of our prayer cools and we are not always immune to spiritual aridity" (*Homily*, 2 February 2021). As a result, we run the risk of losing hope and asking ourselves if it is even worth the effort.

We know from history, however, that this has always been the case. Just think of the Lord himself who came to offer us salvation but was met often with rejection and misunderstanding, not to mention betrayal and death. Despite it all, the Lord patiently endured and won for us the crown of victory. We must look to his example since it offers us hope and encouragement. "Fear not, little flock," Jesus reminds us, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (*Lk* 12:32). In today's Gospel, we find as well the examples of Simeon and Anna.

I dare say that the Catholic community of Abu Dhabi and the Arabian Peninsula as a whole is also an example of hope-filled patience and Christian living. In this regard, I recall the words of gratitude expressed to you by the Holy Father during his visit in 2019 for the way in which you put the written Gospel into practice (*Cf. Homily*, 5 February 2019). You too may be a "little flock" but each part of Christ's Body the Church has a role to play. No one part is better or more important than the other.

Today's celebration is an opportunity, then, for all of us, especially those in consecrated life, to reflect with gratitude on the call from the Lord to follow him and to be a member of his Body, the Church. Let us pray for the blessings of perseverance, patience and hope so that we will not be discouraged even when our efforts do not seem to bear fruit. Let us go forth, brothers and sisters, as one body to bear witness to the saving message that God offers to the world: a message of glad tidings, peace and hope; a message of liberty to those in spiritual captivity or blindness; a message that offers truth and authentic unity. Let us go forth and may Christ our light be our guide!
