



## Greeting of His Eminence, Leonardo Cardinal Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, during the meeting with Chaldean Women Religious, Eparchy of Detroit, Thursday 20 June 2019 A.D.

Dear Sisters,

1. I am happy to be able to share with you this special moment of listening and dialog, after an analogous time with the priests before yesterday's celebration.

The decision to keep these moments distinct corresponds to my desire to devote greater attention to each particular path, valuing both the personal history and the charism of each member of the Church, conscious of St. Paul's teaching that the Spirit gives every gift and charism for the common good.

Diversity, therefore, does not become a motive of contention for supremacy, but rather enables each one to walk their own road of love and service, personally following the footsteps of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

This visit allows me to complete my encounter with the Chaldean community in the United States, after the visit some years ago to San Diego, where I was able also to visit the convent founded by the Sisters there. I have been able, during my two visits to Iraq, in December 2012 and May 2015, to visit also the General House of the Chaldean Sisters. Here in Detroit, where the funeral of Cardinal Delly was celebrated, I remember the sister who looked after him with exemplary dedication during the last years of his patriarchal service and earthly life.

2. I believe that almost all of you come from Iraq, and I can certainly imagine that arriving in the United States, made possible by the hospitality this great country has manifested for many years, would also have meant an encounter with a different reality in the living of feminine religious life. Perhaps you have perceived differences in formation, in the approach to wearing or not wearing the religious habit, in the way of the understanding the presence of consecrated women in the Church and in various services. Each one of you would probably have some observations to share about this subject. In any case, I believe that these dynamics could constitute a challenge in the positive sense. I think, in particular, of the section in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* on the dignity and role of women, "*The first creation account shows the essential equality of men and women. This equality was damaged by the effects of sin. ... I want to assure all women that the Catholic Church, in fidelity to God's plan, works to advance women's personal dignity and equality with men in response to the wide variety of forms of discrimination which they experience simply because they are women...*" (n. 60). In the Middle East, including Iraq, consecrated religious women are often the first face of the Church: in schools, in caring for children, the elderly and the ill, as well as collaborating in various parish ministries. Some of these deeds are downright heroic, such as caring for people with disabilities, who are otherwise often hidden away or even abandoned by society: I think of the work I saw being done by the sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in Bagdad, near the Latin Cathedral. In the family and in consecrated life, woman's dignity renders her a protagonist who lives a daily love and profound dedication. Service does not mean servility, and woe to those men, even priests or bishops, who understand the way of life of women religious in the Middle East as a form of being subordinate, lower in dignity, because "the head is the man, even in the Church". Without its maternal quality, the Church would in fact fall short of the gift and mission that Christ her Bridegroom has given her.

3. The way of living service and motherhood in the Church that I witnessed in Iraq and in many parts of the Middle East by so many religious sisters, heroic for their great gestures but much more for their daily and patient dedication, becomes a strong testimony for our West, including the United States. In the Middle East so many dimensions of living the religious charism are a sign of authentic emancipation in the face of often closed societies in which the woman must be confined to a certain enclosure, of thought or even physical. In the West, however, these same dimensions of service and dedication could be interpreted as servility and belittling, according to

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a mentality infected by a worldly logic of self-affirmation or the pursuit of power and visibility, even in the ecclesial context. It is not a matter of arguments, but of living a joyful and free witness starting every day from our abandonment to Christ, even when this gift of ourselves can pass through an apparent insignificance. In this way, leadership is seen as living every day as a form of service and charity, and never as a quest for particular positions or roles. I am therefore thinking of how much good you can continue to do within the Christian community by remaining yourselves; what a testimony you can offer even for those faithful in the West who are a bit infected by a secularized vision; how precious your intelligent involvement would be in priestly formation and ecclesial discernment regarding admission to orders. Adequate training is certainly needed, but above all the cultivation of the awareness of being bearers of a singular gift of which only you are custodians and not others, just as others in the Church are called to recognize and share their gift for the common good.

These are just a few ideas that stem from the desire to interpret together with you the encounter and the contrast between the East and the West, even within the Church, in Iraq as in the United States.

Thank you for attention and also for the lively discussion, which I hope we will now have together.