



My first and only love

At the origin of every call to religious life is a deep desire for God and a fascination with the person of Jesus and his liberating message. The way God's Spirit touches us can be very different for every individual. The cares of daily life, the power of habit, failures and disappointments can sometimes turn that first fire of love into ashes. Pope Francis invites us to rekindle in ourselves the fervour of the time of our first love.

✿ For the various founders and foundresses, the Gospel was the absolute rule, whereas every other rule was meant merely to be an expression of the Gospel and a means of **living the Gospel to the full**. For them, the ideal was Christ; they sought to be interiorly united to him and thus to be able to say with Saint Paul: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21)... I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day

✿ Joy is born from the gratuitousness of an encounter! And the joy of the encounter with him and with his call does not lead to shutting oneself in but to opening oneself; it leads to service in the Church.... Service in the Church arises out of the **joy of meeting the Lord** and from his call. This mission is to bring to the men and women of our time the consolation of God, to bear witness to his mercy ... "Where there are religious, there is joy". We are called to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness; that we need not seek our happiness elsewhere.

✿ We have to ask ourselves: **Is Jesus really our first and only love**, as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? Only if he is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path. For we will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will be able to love because we have his own heart.

✿ Look into the depths of your heart, look into your own inner depths and ask yourself: do you have a heart that desires something great, or a heart that has been lulled to sleep by things? Has your heart preserved **the restlessness of seeking** or have you let it be suffocated by things that end by hardening it? God awaits you, he seeks you; how do you respond to him? Are you aware of the state of your soul? Or have you nodded off? Do you believe God is waiting for you or does this truth consist only of "words"?

✿ There is a temptation to seek God in the past or in a possible future. God is certainly in the past because we can see the footprints. And God is also in the future as a promise. But **the 'concrete' God**, so to speak, **is today**.

Sources: [Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated people](#); [Vatican Congregation for institutes of consecrated life](#): *Rejoice!*

- Take a quiet moment and recall the times in your life when God touched you in a special way!
- What in me tends to diminish my enthusiasm and my fervour? How can I give expression to my love at this period of my life?

