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Audience of the Holy Father with participants in the Congress of the International Forum of Catholic Action

At 11.00 this morning, in the Synod Hall, the Holy Father received in audience the participants in the Congress of the International Forum of Catholic Action, on the theme “Catholic Action is mission, with all and for all”.

The following is the full text of the Pope’s address.

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you at the celebration of this International Congress of Catholic Action, which has as its theme: “Catholic Action is mission, with all and for all”. I would like to share some concerns and considerations with you.

Charism - recreation in the light of *Evangelii gaudium*

- Historically, Catholic Action has had the mission of forming lay people who assume their responsibility in the world. Today, in concrete terms, *it is the formation of missionary disciples*. Thank you for taking *Evangelii gaudium* as your charter.
- The charism of Catholic Action is the charism of the same Church, deeply embedded in the present and in every diocesan Church that discerns, in contemplation and looking attentively at the life of her people, and seeks new paths of evangelization and mission starting out from the different parish realities.
- Catholic Action traditionally has four pillars or feet: *prayer, formation, sacrifice, and apostolate*. Depending on the specific time in its history, it has put first one foot forward, then another. So, in a certain moment, it may be that prayer was stronger, or doctrinal formation. Given the characteristics of this moment, the apostolate must be the distinctive trait and the foot that rests first. This does not detract from other realities, but, on the contrary, is what causes them. The missionary apostolate needs prayer, formation, and sacrifice. This was clearly apparent

in Aparecida and in *Evangelii gaudium*. *There is an integrative dynamism in mission.*

- *Form*: Offering a process of growth in faith, a catechetical itinerary permanently oriented towards mission, adapted to every reality, based on the Word of God, to inspire a happy friendship with Jesus and the experience of fraternal love.
- *Pray*: in that holy extroversion that places the heart in the needs of the people, in their sufferings and in their joys. A prayer that journeys, that takes you far. In this way you will avoid looking constantly at yourselves.
- *Sacrifice*: but not to feel “cleaner”: generous sacrifice is what is good for others. Offer your time in the search of how to make others grow, offer what is in your pockets, sharing it with those who have less, generously offer the gift of your personal vocation to beautify and grow your nurture home.

Renew commitment to evangelizing - dioceses - parishes

- Mission is not a task among many for Catholic Action, it is *the* task. Catholic Action has the charisma of carrying forward the pastoral care of the Church. If the mission is not its distinctive strength, it distorts the essence of Catholic Action, which loses its reason for being.
- It is vital to renew and update the commitment of Catholic Action to evangelization, reaching everyone, in all places, on all occasions, in all existential peripheries, truly, not as a mere formulation of principles.
- This involves *rethinking your formation plans, your forms of apostolate, and even your prayer itself to be essentially, and not occasionally, missionaries. Abandon the old criterion: because we have always done things this way.* There are things that have been truly good and meritorious, but which today would be out of context if we want to repeat them.
- Catholic Action must take on *the full mission of the Church in generous membership of the diocesan Church, starting from the Parish.*
- The mission of the universal Church is updated in every particular Church in its own way; Similarly, Catholic Action acquires authentic life by responding and assuming as its own *the pastoral ministry of each diocesan church in its concrete integration* starting from the parishes.
- Catholic Action must offer to the diocesan Church a mature laity that willingly serves to the pastoral projects of every place as a way of fulfilling its vocation. You have to incarnate it concretely.
- You can not be like those groups, *so universal* that they do not have a base anywhere, that respond to no-one and are looking for what they like most in each place.

Agents – Everyone, without exception

- All members of the Catholic Action are *dynamically missionaries*. Children evangelize children, young people evangelize the young, adults evangelize adults, and so on. There is nothing better than a peer to show that it is possible to live the joy of faith.
- Avoid falling prey to the *perfectionist temptation of eternal preparation* for mission and *eternal analyses*, which, once they are finished, are already outdated or obsolete. The example is Jesus with the apostles: He sent them with what they had. Then He gathered them together and helped them to discern what they had experienced.
- Let it be reality that dictates the time, and that you allow the Holy Spirit to guide you. He is the inner teacher Who illuminates our work when we are free of preconceptions and preconditions. One learns to evangelize by

evangelizing, just as one learns to pray by praying, if our heart is well disposed.

You can all go out in mission, even though not everyone can go out into the streets or into the countryside. The place you give to the elderly who have been members for a long time, or who join, is very important. One might say: they are the *contemplative or intercessional section* within the various parts of Catholic Action. They are able to create the patrimony of prayer and grace for the mission, like the sick. God hears this prayer with special tenderness. May they all feel that they participate, and discover that they are active and necessary.

Recipients – all mankind and all peripheries

- It is necessary for Catholic Action to be present in the *political, business and professional worlds* – not because they believe themselves to be perfect Christians, but to serve better.
- It is essential for Catholic Action to be present in *prisons, hospitals, on the streets, in slums, and in factories*. If this is not the case, it will be an institution of elitists with nothing to say to anyone, not even to the Church herself.
- I want Catholic Action to be among the people, in the parish, in the diocese, in the country, in the neighbourhood, in the family, in study and in work, in the countryside, in all spheres of life. It is these new forums that decisions are made and culture is built.
- *Streamline methods of integration*. Do not be border police. You cannot be more restrictive than the Church herself, nor more Papist than the Pope. Open the doors, do not carry out examinations of Christian perfection because in so doing you will promote a hypocritical phariseism. There is a need for active mercy.
- *The commitment made by laypeople who join Catholic Action must look ahead*. It is the decision to work for the construction of the kingdom. There is no need to “bureaucratize” this particular grace, because the Lord’s invitation comes when least we expect it; we cannot “sacramentalize” formalization with prerequisites that respond to another area of the life of faith, and not to that of evangelizing effort. Everyone has the right to be an evangelizer.
- May Catholic Action offer the space for welcome and for Christian experience to those who feel, for personal reasons, that they are “second class Christians”.

Method – among the people

- The method depends on the recipients. As the Council told us, and as we often pray in Mass: attentive towards and sharing the struggles and hopes of men to show them the path of salvation. Catholic Action *cannot keep away from the people*, but rather comes from the people and must stay in their midst. You must popularize Catholic Action more. It is not a question of image but of truthfulness and charism. It is not demagoguery either, but rather following the steps of the Master who ever experienced disgust.
- To be able to follow this path, it is good to receive a popular quarter. Sharing the life of the people and discovering their interests and their searches, their yearnings and their deepest wounds, and what they need from us. This is fundamental so as not to fall prey to the *sterility of giving answers to questions that nobody asks*. Their ways of evangelizing can be thought up at a desk, but only after being in the midst of the people, and not the reverse.
- A more popular, more incarnate Catholic Action will cause you problems, because people will want to join the institution who apparently are not in a condition to do so: families in which parents are not married in Church, men and women with a difficult past or present but who struggle, disoriented and troubled youths. It is a challenge to the ecclesial maternity of Catholic Action: receiving all and accompanying them on the path of life with the crosses they bear on their shoulders.

- Everyone can join in, *starting from what they have and with what they can offer*.
- *For this real people, it is necessary to form. With and for this real people, it is necessary to pray.*
- Focus more sharply to see the signs of God present in reality, especially in expressions of popular religiosity. From this you can understand better the heart of men and discover the surprising ways in which God acts, beyond our concepts.

Project – Catholic Action outbound – Passion for Christ, passion for our people

- An outbound Catholic Action is proposed to you, and this is a good thing because it situates you on your own axis. Being outbound means openness, generosity, encounter with reality beyond the four walls of the institution and of the parishes. This means giving up trying to control things too much and to plan results. And this freedom, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, will help you grow.
- The evangelizing plan of Catholic Action must fulfil the following steps: *primerear*, that is, take the initiative, participate, accompany, fructify, and celebrate. A step ahead, outbound, incarnate and walking together. This is already a result to celebrate. Spread the joy of faith, so that one sees the joy of evangelizing at any occasion, opportune or otherwise.
- Do not fall prey to the temptation of *structuralism*. Be bold, you are no longer faithful to the Church if you wait at each step for them to tell you what to do.
- Encourage your members to appreciate the *casual face to face mission*, or to start with the missionary action of the community.
- Do not clericalize the laity. May the aspiration of your members be not to become part of the Sanhedrin of parishes that surround the pastor, but rather passion for the kingdom. Do not forget, though, to pose the vocational theme seriously. The school of holiness that passes necessarily by way of the discovery of one's own vocation is that of being not a manager or a diplomat priest, but rather, first and foremost, an evangelizer.
- You must be the *locus of encounter* for the other institutional charisms and institutions in the Church, without fear of losing your identity. Furthermore, your members must include evangelizers, catechists, missionaries, and social workers, who will continue to make the Church grow.
- Very often it has been said that Catholic Action is the long arm of the hierarchy and this, far from being a prerogative that makes others look down from above, is a very great responsibility that implies faithfulness and consistency with what the Church shows in every moment of history, without seeking to stay anchored in past forms as if they were the only options. Fidelity to mission demands this "good flexibility" of those who turn one ear to the people and the other to God.
- In the publication "La Acción Católica a luz de la teología Tomista" (1937), we read, "Perhaps *Catholic Action* should be translated into Catholic Passion?" Catholic passion, the passion of the Church, is to live the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing. This is what we need of Catholic Action.

Thank you.
