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Audience with the members of the Synod of the Chaldean Church

At 11.40 this morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Synod of the Chaldean Church, taking place in Rome from 4 to 8 October, led by the Patriarch His Beatitude Louis Raphaël Sako.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Beatitude,
Dear brothers in the episcopate,

I welcome you with joy in these days in which you are gathered in Synod, as you prepare to consider questions of primary importance for the Chaldean Church, including the forced migration of Christians, the reconstruction of villages, the return of displaced persons, the particular right of the Church, the liturgical question and the pastoral care of vocations. I thank His Beatitude, the Patriarch Louis Raphaël, for the greeting he addressed to me also on your behalf. I would like to take the opportunity to greet, through you, the faithful of the beloved Iraqi land, who are harshly tried, sharing hope following the recent news of a resumption of life and activity in regions and cities until now subjected to painful and violent oppression. May God's mercy heal the wounds of war that plague the heart of your communities, so that they may finally be able to rise again.

If indeed a tragic page has turned for some regions of your country, it is to be noted that much remains to be done. I urge you to act tirelessly as builders of unity, especially between you as pastors of the Chaldean Church, and with the pastors of other Churches, and in addition to promote dialogue and collaboration with all the other agents of public life, to contribute to facilitating the return of displaced persons and to healing divisions and conflicts between brothers. This commitment is more necessary than ever in the current Iraqi context, faced with new uncertainties for the future. There is a need for a process of national reconciliation and a joint effort by all members of society, to reach shared solutions for the good of the entire country. My hope is that the strength of heart, the hope and the gifts of industriousness that distinguish you, will not fail you. May you be steadfast in

your intention not to give in to discouragement when faced with difficulties which remain despite what has been done in the work of reconstruction, especially on the Nineveh Plain.

Since antiquity, that land, evangelised according to tradition by the apostle Thomas, has appeared to the world as a land of civilisation, a land of encounter and dialogue. Therefore it is of great importance that Christians, pastors and faithful, strong in their roots, be united in promoting respectful relations and interreligious dialogue between all components of the country.

I would like to encourage you also with regard to new aspirants to priestly ministry or religious life: faced with the decline in vocations that the Church suffers, we must avoid receiving in the seminaries people who are not called by the Lord; it is necessary to examine well the vocation of young people and to verify its authenticity.

May priests and seminarians be aware of your closeness, which is a true blessing! For candidates to the priesthood, may formation be integral, capable of including the various aspects of life, responding harmoniously to the four dimensions, human spiritual, pastoral and intellectual; a journey that naturally continues in the permanent formation of priests, and forming with this a single entity.

It is also incumbent on me to invite you, and together, the pastors of the Latin Church, to rethink the theme of the Diaspora, taking into account the concrete situations in which ecclesial communities find themselves, as well as that of religious freedom.

Everything possible must be done to ensure that the recommendations of Vatican Council II be realised, facilitating pastoral care both in your own territories and where the oriental communities have for some time been settled, at the same time promoting communion and fraternity with the communities of Latin rite to offer good witness to the faithful without protracting divisions and disagreements. Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue should always proceed from our Catholic unity and communion. In this, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches will be of support to you.

Beatitude, dear bishops, finally I invite you to be paternal towards priests, who are your primary collaborators, and to be merciful like the Father with all.

May this Synod *in Urbe*, under the gaze of Christ the Good Shepherd, be a fruitful moment of exchange and fraternal reflection for the good of the beloved Chaldean Church. I invoke upon you the abundance of the Lord's blessings and the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And I ask you, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
