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## **Visit to the Pontifical Oriental Institute and Eucharistic Concelebration in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major**

### **Homily of the Holy Father**

**Message of the Holy Father to His Eminence Cardinal Leonardo Sandri for the centenary of the founding of the Pontifical Oriental Institute and the Congregation for the Oriental Churches**

This morning the Holy Father Francis left the Vatican to visit the Pontifical Oriental Institute, in Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore, for the centenary of its institution and the founding of the Congregation of the Oriental Churches.

Upon arrival, the Pope greeted the superiors of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, the Patriarchs and the major archbishops. Then, in the garden of the Pontifical Institute, he blessed a cypress in the presence of students and, finally, in the great Hall, he met and greeted the benefactors of the Jesuit Community.

At the end of the visit, the Holy Father Francis proceeded to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major where, at 10.15, he presided at the Eucharistic Concelebration for thanksgiving on the occasion of the centenary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and the Pontifical Oriental Institute.

The following is the homily the Pope pronounced during the celebration.

### **Homily of the Holy Father**

Today we thank the Lord for the founding of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and the Pontifical Oriental Institute, the work of Pope Benedict XV one hundred years ago, in 1917. The First World War was

raging at the time; today, as I have already had the occasion to say, we are living in another world war, if piecemeal. And we see many of our Christian brothers and sisters of the Oriental Churches who experience dramatic persecutions and an increasingly troubling diaspora. This poses many questions, many “Whys”, that resemble those of the first Letter today, from the book of Malachi (3: 13-20a).

The Lord laments with His people and says: “Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’ You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evil-doers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape” (v.13-15).

How many times we too have this experience, and how often we hear it in the confidences and confessions of the people who open their heart to us. We see the wicked, those who unscrupulously serve their own interests, crushing others, and it seems that things go well for them; they obtain what they want and think only of enjoying life. From this there comes the question, “Why, Lord?

These “Whys”, which recur also in the sacred Scripture, we all ask. And to these, the same Word of God replies. Precisely in this passage from the prophet Malachi we read, “The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed His name” (v. 16). So, God does not forget His children, His memory is for the righteous, for those who suffer, who are oppressed and who ask themselves, “Why?”, yet do not cease to confide in the Lord.

How often the Virgin Mary, along her path, asked herself, “Why?”; but in her heart, which meditated all things, the grace of God made faith and hope shine.

And there is a way to enter into God’s memory: our *prayer*, as we are taught in the passage from the Gospel we have listened to (cf. *Lk* 11: 5-13).

When we pray it takes the *courage of faith*: to trust that the Lord listens to us, the courage to knock on the door. The Lord says: “For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (v. 10). And this takes courage.

But, I wonder, is our prayer truly like this? Does it truly involve us, does it involve our heart and our life? Do we know how to knock on the heart of God? At the end of the Gospel passage (cf. v. 11-13), Jesus says: what father among you, if his son asks him for a fish, will give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you are fathers, you will act for the good of your children. And then it goes on: if you, then, who are wicked, know how to give good things to your children, more so your Father in heaven... And we expect it to continue, saying: he will give good things to you. Instead no, He does not say this! He says: the Holy Spirit will give to those who ask. It is precisely this that is the gift, this is the “more” that God gives. That which the Lord, the Father gives, is the Spirit: here is the true gift of the Father. Man knocks with prayer on God’s door to ask for a grace. And He, Who is the Father, gives me that, and more: the gift, the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, let us learn to knock on the heart of God! And let us learn to do so courageously. May this courageous prayer inspire and nurture also your service in the Church. In this way your effort will yield “fruit in its season” and you will be like trees whose “leaf does not wither” (cf. *Psalms* 1: 3).

#### **Message of the Holy Father to His Eminence Cardinal Leonardo Sandri for the centenary of the founding of the Pontifical Oriental Institute and the Congregation for the Oriental Churches**

The following is the Message the Holy Father handed to His Eminence Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, for the centenary of the founding of the Pontifical Oriental Institute and the Congregation for the Oriental Churches:

To the venerable Brother  
Cardinal LEONARDO SANDRI  
Grand Chancellor of the  
Pontifical Oriental Institute

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, a few months after the centenary of the establishment of the Congregation for the Oriental Church (see Benedict XV, *Motu Proprio Dei Providentis*, 1 May 1917), it is my pleasure to address a cordial greeting to you, venerable brother, and to the entire academic community.

Preceding by almost half a century the conciliar decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, my venerable Predecessor wished to draw attention to the extraordinary richness of the Eastern Churches, by founding here in Rome on 15 October 1917 the Pontifical Oriental Institute. Even in the midst of the turbulent first world conflict, the Pontiff knew to reserve special attention to the Churches of the Orient.

For this foundation, Benedict XV recalled that opening to the Orient that had begun in the Eucharistic Congress of Jerusalem of 1893, with the hope of creating a study centre, which should have been - as affirmed in the founding document - "a fitting headquarters of higher education on oriental issues", destined to form "also Latin priests who wish to exercise their sacred ministry with the Orientals". From the outset, it was intended for this "study centre [to be] open to the Orientals, both united and so-called Orthodox", so that "the exposure of Catholic and, at the same time Orthodox doctrine could proceed simultaneously" (Benedict XV, *Motu Proprio Orientis catholici*, 15 October 1917: AAS 9 [1917], 532). With this latter clarification, the founder placed the new institution on a horizon that we can describe today as eminently ecumenical.

To solve the initial problems of the Institute, Pius XI, accepting the suggestion of the first president, Blessed Ildefonso Schuster in 1922 decided to entrust it to the Society of Jesus (Letter *Decessor Noster*, 14 September 1922: AAS 14 [1922], 545 -546), and later assigned the Institute, at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, its own seat, which opened its doors on 14 November 1926.

In 1928, with the Encyclical *Rerum Orientalium* on the promotion of Oriental studies, the Pope warmly invited the bishops to send students to the Oriental Institute, to ensure in each seminar the presence of a teacher capable of transmitting at least some elements of Oriental studies (cf. AAS 20 [1928], 283-284). The Encyclical was followed by the *Motu Proprio Quod maxime*, by which the Gregorian University was associated with the Biblical and Oriental Institutes (see AAS 20 [1928], 310). The following year, Pius XI went on to establish, near the Oriental Institute, the *Russicum* College, whose direction was also entrusted to the Society of Jesus (cf. *Quam curam*, 15 August 1929: AAS 22 [1930], 146 -148).

Since then, the most important new element was in 1971 the founding of the Faculty of Oriental Canon Law, to date the only one in existence (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, Decree *Canonicae Orientalium*, 7 July 1971: AAS 63 [1971], 791-792), alongside what was identified with the Institute and which, at that time, began to be designated as the Faculty of Oriental Ecclesiastical Sciences, divided into three sections: theological-patristic, liturgical and historical.

Another important novelty was the transfer - which took place in 1993 - of the title of Grand Chancellor of the Oriental Institute from the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education to the Prefect of the Congregation for Oriental Churches. Thus, while maintaining the proper academic competence of the Institute exercised by the Congregation for Catholic Education, the two "Oriental" institutions, established in the same year, were called to "promote closer co-operation and unity of intent" in their service to the Christian Orient (Rescriptum of the Secretariat of State, 31 May 1993).

This look at history leads us to question the *missio* that this Institute will be called to undertake in the future.

If in the beginning there was some confusion between study and pastoral work, today we must recognise that such antinomy does not exist. It is not a question of "*aut ... aut*", but "*et ... et*". I therefore call upon the professors

to place their scientific commitments first among their commitments, following the example of the predecessors who distinguished themselves in the production of prestigious contributions, erudite monographs, accurate editions of liturgical, spiritual, archaeological and canonical sources, and even bold collective works, such as the publication of the Acts of the *Concilium Florentinum* and the critical edition of *Anaphorae Syriacae*. The Institute's teachers have made well-known contributions first to the preparation of the conciliar documents *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and *Unitatis redintegratio* (1964), and then to the preparation of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (1990).

On the one hand, the times in which we live and the challenges that war and hatred pose to the very roots of peaceful co-existence in the devastated lands of the East, place the Institute once again, just as it was a hundred years ago, at the centre of a providential crossroads.

Maintaining intact the attention and application to traditional research, I invite you all to offer to those Churches and to the entire ecclesial community the capacity for listening to life and for theological reflection to help support their existence and their progress. Many students and professors are aware of this important moment in history. This Institute, thanks to research, teaching and witness, has the task of helping these brothers and sisters of ours to strengthen and consolidate their faith before the tremendous challenges they find themselves facing. It is called upon to be the privileged place to promote the formation of men and women, seminarians, priests and laypersons, able to give reason to the hope that inspires and supports them (cf. *Pf* 3: 15), and capable of collaborating in the reconciliatory mission of Christ (cf. *2 Cor* 5: 18).

I urge teachers to remain open to all the Oriental Churches, considered not only in terms of their ancient configuration, but also in their current diffusion and at times troubled geographical spread. In relation then to the venerable Oriental Churches, with whom we are still journeying towards full communion and which continue autonomously on their path, the Pontifical Oriental Institute has an ecumenical mission to pursue, through care for fraternal relations, detailed study of the issues that still appear to divide us, and active collaboration on themes of first importance, awaiting the moment, when the Lord wills and in the manner that only He knows, "they may all be one" (*John* 17: 21). In this respect, the growing presence of students belonging to the non-Catholic Oriental Churches confirms the trust they place in the Oriental Institute.

On the other hand, the task of the Institute is also to make known the treasures of the rich traditions of the Oriental Churches to the western world, in order for them to be comprehensible and assimilated.

Noting that many students of the various oriental colleges in Rome attend institutions in which they receive a formation that is not always consistent with their traditions, I invite reflection on what could be done to address this shortcoming.

With the collapse of the totalitarian regimes and of various dictatorships, which in some countries has unfortunately created conditions favourable to the spread of international terrorism, the Christians of the Oriental Churches are experiencing the tragedy of persecutions and an increasingly worrying diaspora. We cannot close our eyes to these situations. As a part of the "outbound Church" (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 20-24), the Oriental Institute is called to listen prayerfully, to perceive what the Lord wants at this precise moment and, consistently with the Ignatian *magis*, to seek new roads to travel. It means, for example, stimulating future pastors to instil in their oriental faithful, wherever they may be, a profound love for their original traditions and rite; and, at the same time, to make the bishops of Latin dioceses aware of the need to take responsibility for the geographically dislocated oriental faithful without their own hierarchy, ensuring to individuals and families an adequate spiritual and human assistance.

I address a warm invitation to the Society of Jesus to implement, with the provisions required today, what Pius XI had already prescribed in 1928 regarding the Gregorian Consortium, with the purpose of promoting, along with a notable saving in men and means, a greater unity of intentions. Alongside the *missio* carried out by, respectively, the Gregorian University and the Biblical Institute, there exists that, no less important, of the Oriental Institute. It is therefore urgent to guarantee to this institution a stable core of Jesuit formators, to whom others may commendably associate. Inspired by Ignatian pedagogy and using a fruitful community discernment, the

members of the community, both religious and academic, will be able to find the most suitable forms for initiation in the austere discipline of research and the needs of pastoral care that the Churches may wish to entrust to them.

In joining me in giving thanks to God for the work carried out in these one hundred years, I hope that the Pontifical Oriental Institute may pursue its mission with renewed zeal, studying and disseminating with love and intellectual honesty, with scientific rigour and a pastoral outlook, the traditions of the Oriental Churches in their liturgical, theological, artistic and canonistic variety, responding ever better to the expectations of today's world to create a future of reconciliation and peace. With these hopes I impart to you, venerable Brother, and to the entire community of this Institute, a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 12 October 2017

FRANCIS

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