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Audience with the Association of Priests of Prado

At 11.15 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Association of Priests of Prado.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your pilgrimage to Rome, as members of the Prado family, committed every day to giving life to the following and to the example of Father Antoine Chevrier, in the service of the poorest. This meeting offers me the opportunity to thank the Lord with you for the journey made since the time when your Blessed founder, struck by the need of the most disinherited of his time, decided to become close to them so that they could know and love Jesus Christ. Since then the plant has been wonderfully developed: you are now a beautiful family of priests, nuns and consecrated lay women, distributed in various countries, inhabited by the same love of Jesus who became poor among the poor, and by the same keenness to evangelize.

Our age also knows its poverty, old and new, material and spiritual, and there are many around us who experience suffering, wounds, miseries and anguishes of every kind. They are very often far from the Church, and completely ignore the joy and consolation that come from the Gospel. The mission to accomplish among them is immense and the Mother Church is happy to be able to count on the support of the disciples of Father Chevrier. In fact, I cannot but approve and encourage the pastoral action that you carry forward according to the charism proper to your institutes, a charism that touches me personally and that is at the heart of the missionary renewal to which the whole Church is called; because there exists a "profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and developed in every work of evangelization" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 178).

The Saint Pope John Paul II, on the occasion of the beatification of Father Chevrier, in 1986 in Lyon, had proposed different orientations, which you know well, to strengthen your dynamism, and for my part I can only renew them. To refer to only one, he asked: "Talk about Jesus Christ with the same intensity of faith as Father Chevrier. [...] The poor have the right to speak to them about Jesus Christ. They have the right to the Gospel and to the totality of the Gospel" (*Address to the Prado Institute, 7 October 1986*). I like to recall, in fact, that the immense majority of the poor have a particular openness to faith; they need God, and the lack of spiritual attention towards them constitutes the worst discrimination: "Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care" (*Evangelii Gaudium, 200*).

Dear brothers and sisters, I invite you to continually return to the magnificent figure of your founder, to meditate on his life, to ask for his intercession. The spiritual experience that he experienced intensely – an immense compassion for the poor, understanding and sharing of their suffering and, at the same time, contemplation of the despoliation of Christ who became one of them – was the source of his apostolic ardour. And it will also be that of your missionary dynamism.

May the Holy Spirit enlighten you on the paths you are called to walk; comfort you in the face of challenges and difficulties. By entrusting your Institutes and all their members to the intercession of Blessed Antoine Chevrier, I pray the Virgin Mary to keep them under her maternal protection, and I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.
