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Audience with the participants in the International Convention for Consecrated Widows

At 12.15 today, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the International Convention for Consecrated Widows.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

I welcome you with joy on the occasion of your pilgrimage to Rome. I thank you for your presentation and I express my cordial greeting to the members of the *Fraternité Notre Dame de la Résurrection* and of the *Communauté Anne la Prophétesse*, present today in different countries, as well as to the priests who accompany you, and, through you, to all those who suffer the death of their spouse.

"Losing one's spouse is particularly difficult... some display an ability to concentrate their energies in a greater dedication to their children and grandchildren, finding in this experience of love a renewed sense of mission in raising their children" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 254). If this is true of most of you, the death of your spouse has also led you to recognize a particular call of the Lord and to respond to it by consecrating yourselves to Him out of love and with love. Together with you I give thanks to God for the fidelity of His love that unites each of you, beyond death, to her spouse and who has called and consecrated you to live today the following of Christ in chastity, obedience and poverty. "At times life presents great challenges. Through them, the Lord calls us anew to a conversion that can make His grace more evident in our lives 'in order that we may share His holiness'" (*Heb 12: 10*)» (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, 17). Thus, with your consecration, you attest that it is possible, with the grace of God and the support and accompaniment of ministers and other members of the Church, to live the evangelical counsels by exercising their family, professional and social responsibilities.

Your consecration in widowhood is a gift that the Lord gives to His Church to remind all the baptized that the power of His merciful love is a path of life and holiness, which allows us to overcome trials and be reborn to hope and to the joy of the Gospel. I invite you therefore to keep your gaze fixed on Jesus Christ and to cultivate the particular bond that unites you to Him. Because it is there, in the heart to heart with the Lord, listening to His word, that we draw the courage and perseverance to give ourselves, body and soul, to offer the best of ourselves through our consecration and our efforts (see *ibid.*, 25).

May you, through your sacramental life, bear witness to this love of God which is for every man a call to recognize the beauty and happiness of being loved by Him. United to Jesus Christ, be leaven for this world, light for those who walk in darkness and in the shadow of death. With the quality of your fraternal life, within your communities, take care, through the experience of your own frailty, to be close to the little ones and to the poor, to show them God's tenderness and His closeness in love. In this perspective, I encourage you to live your consecration in daily life with simplicity and humility, invoking the Holy Spirit to help you to witness, within the Church and the world, that "God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks" and that "all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 279).

With this hope, I entrust you to the Lord and, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to those who are part of the *Fraternité Notre Dame de la Résurrection* and of the *Communauté Anne la Prophetesse*. And please, pray for me as I pray for you. Thank you!
