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# BOLLETTINO

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## **Audience with the participants in the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary**

At 11.30 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 37th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary.

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

### **Address of the Holy Father**

Dear sisters,

I greet you with joy at the celebration of your thirty-seventh General Chapter, and together with you I wish to extend this greeting to the sisters who work throughout the world and to all the members of the Jesus-Mary Family. I also want to remember the little ones, the children of your schools and colleges. The theme you have chosen for this Chapter is: "Journeying in hope, as one apostolic family", with the Visitation of Mary as its biblical icon (cf. *Lk* 1: 39-56).

Saint Claudine Thévenet began this apostolic work on poverty. In these 200 years it has spread fruitfully all over the world, and today it is present in 28 countries on four continents. This history speaks to us of a journey without rest. Always on the road, like Mary in the Visitation, attentive to needs. Walking in haste, but not anxious. Always on the road, with joy and hope, in order to be able to communicate God's goodness and love to all. In this sense I would like to suggest you three paths to continue walking; and I take them from the prayer that served you for the Congregation of the General Chapter.

The first path is to *be witnesses to God's merciful goodness*. God's name is mercy. This was the founding experience of Saint Claudine, the knowledge of God's goodness, merciful forgiving. From that day when she herself witnessed the shooting of her own brothers and the message they entrusted to her: "Claudine, forgive as we forgive", your founder knew how to look at reality from the viewpoint of God Who is good and Who loves

people with unconditional love. Once when I spoke about this, a person came along who had heard this message of mercy and said to me: God is always a loser, always a loser. And yes, it seems that yes, He is not interested in winning, He is interested in *us* winning. That is His mercy. God looks at us and we experience His mercy; with His goodness He changes reality by loving it. It would be good at this time of the Chapter if you would review and remember your life, your vocation, mission in the light of this gaze, in order to continue to be touched by God, to be present in the miseries of our time. Only with this gaze can all things become new; only by allowing ourselves to be looked upon by the Lord, like the Virgin Mary did (cf. *Lk* 1: 48), will we be able to look at reality with God's eyes and be His witnesses, for God's gaze changes, changes us, educates, educates our outlook.

We need to look at our world with sympathy, without fear, without prejudice, with courage, as God looks at it, feeling our pains, our joys, the hopes of our brothers; and then to announce with life and word, and to make "Jesus and Mary known and loved", with the creativity of the diaconate and works of the apostolate. "How good God is!" were Claudine's last words. May these words also be yours, on your journeys, every day.

The second path to walk is the *life of fraternity and solidarity*. You are an apostolic body living in fraternal community. In this way you encourage one another to follow Jesus and awaken new vocations. It is necessary to deepen community with ever more evangelical relationships, so that you become increasingly apostolic fraternities, sisters in mission, able to "infect" other young women so that they can follow this form of consecration. Through your witness of life they will be able to see in you something different that the world cannot offer them: the joy of following Christ. But joy as one of the keynotes of your life, right? I feel sorry, I confess, when I see sad men and women religious, sad, with a glum face, a funeral face. And I feel like saying: Tell me, what did you have for breakfast today, coffee with milk, or oil? Or vinegar?

Joy, please, that gaze of peace, with a smile, that comes from within, and comes from spirituality: "yes, but". The "yes, but". The "but", that is always a path to sadness.

Fraternal life in community is a prophecy for the world. (*Positio*, p. 231) so that this great desire may open in you fraternal relationships of communion that can be a sign of the Gospel. This same path opens us up to solidarity with the rest of our brethren, sharing what they are and what they have. In collaboration with the Family of Jesus-Mary and its collaborators in mission, continue to build networks of communion and solidarity. As it says in the prayer for the chapter, it is a question of loving and serving unconditionally.

The last path I would like to point out is to *discern and have the courage to go further*. Always beyond. There is a very beautiful song that young people usually sing which is: "Beyond Borders". Do you know it? And young people sing that, don't they? Always beyond. The Church is missionary, because God is the first missionary. God opens out, enters the world and assumes that which is human. You participate in this mission with your life and your apostolate, because witness is primordial in evangelization (cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 69). But since love is shown in works, do not tire of making God's goodness known through the apostolic works you carry out. It should be remembered that it began when Saint Claudine welcomed two abandoned orphans into the porch of the parish church of Saint Nizier, but new situations also demand of you creative new ways of evangelizing and carrying out the mission, and of making Jesus and Mary known. Do not be afraid: you go as a community, you have the support of the fraternity, and if you know how to discern, there is no need to be afraid. Because a beautiful thing about us is that when we make a mistake, we have the possibility of going back. When we go with the community, with the Lord and with good discernment.

It is necessary to go "outside the gate" (*Acts* 16: 13), as did your founder: not to make a moving memory, but to rediscover the charism *in statu nascenti*. That is, the charism just born. Discernment is required to know how to go further and to ask ourselves if our apostolates and our works, our presences and our ministries respond, or not, to what the Holy Spirit asked of Saint Claudine and the Congregation throughout these two hundred years of history. I encourage you to discern, evaluate and choose in order to be able to respond ever better to what God wants of you today. Our time also asks us to discover new means of evangelization and mission, but always as an apostolic body; because solitary commitments and efforts have no future. It may be that one of you has a special vocation to open a breach in a certain area. And she alone has it. Let her go that way, physically alone,

but with the whole community behind her. Do not leave anyone alone.

Dear sisters, I thank you for all the good you do in the Church and in the world, and also for this fraternal encounter. May the Virgin Mother accompany you on this journey so that you may continue to encounter our brothers and sisters, as Saint Claudine did. And, please, don't forget to pray for me. Thank you very much.

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