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Audience with participants in the International Meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, at the conclusion of its work, the participants in the International Meeting “The outbound Church. Reception and prospects of *Evangelii Gaudium*”, promoted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, held in the Vatican from 28 to 30 November 2019.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

In these days you there have been many of you, from many parts of the world, who have come to take *Evangelii gaudium* in your hands. I thank you for this, and I am grateful to Bishop Fisichella for his words and also for carrying out this work. I am sure that you will take home with enthusiasm the fruits of your encounter over these days.

I would like to say very simply: the joy of the Gospel springs from the encounter with Jesus. It is when we encounter the Lord that we are flooded with that love of which he alone is capable. Then, “when we let God bring us beyond ourselves”, life changes and we “attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 8). Because at that point the need to proclaim it arises spontaneously, it becomes irrepressible, even without words, with witness. This is how evangelization began, on Easter morning, with an apostle-woman, Mary Magdalene, who, after meeting the risen Jesus, the Living One, evangelized the Apostles. She was at the tomb of Jesus with many sad feelings in her heart: fear for the future and bewilderment at the apparent violation of the tomb were added to her pain for the loss of the Master. But her weeping transformed into joy, her loneliness into consolation after finding in Jesus the love that never disappoints, that never abandons even in the face of death, that gives the strength to find the

best of oneself. It is true for everyone: "our infinite sadness can only be cured by an infinite love" (*ibid.*, 265).

The experience of so many people today is not far from that of Mary of Magdalene. Nostalgia for God, for an infinite and true love, is rooted in the heart of every man. We need someone to help revive it. We need angels who, as it was for Mary Magdalene, bring good news: angels in the flesh who come together to dry tears, to say in the name of Jesus: "Do not be afraid!" (cf. *Mt* 28: 5). The evangelizers are like angels, like guardian angels, messengers of good who do not deliver ready answers, but share the question of life, the same that Jesus addressed to Mary calling her by name: "Whom are you seeking?" (*Jn* 20: 15). Whom you seek, not what you seek, because things are not enough to live; to live you need the God of love. And if with this love of His we were able to look into the hearts of people who, because of the indifference we breathe and the consumerism that flattens us, often pass before us as if nothing were wrong, we would be able to see first of all the need for this *Whom*, the search for a love that lasts forever, the question of the meaning of life, of pain, of betrayal, of loneliness. They are anxieties in the face of which recipes and precepts are not enough; it is necessary to walk, to walk together, to become travelling companions.

Those who evangelize, in fact, can never forget that they are always on the road, searching together with others. Therefore, they cannot leave anyone behind, they cannot afford to keep those who struggle at a distance, they cannot close themselves off in their small group of comfortable relationships. Those who proclaim do not seek to flee from the world, because their Lord so loved the world that He gave Himself, not to condemn but to save the world (cf. *Jn* 3: 16-17). Those who proclaim make their own the desire for God, Who suffers for those who are distant. He knows no enemies, only travel companions. He does not stand as a teacher, he knows that the search for God is common and must be shared, that the closeness of Jesus is never denied to anyone.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not hold back our fear of making mistakes and our fear of following new paths. In life we all make mistakes, all of us. It is normal. There are no priorities to be placed before the proclamation of the resurrection, before the *kerygma* of hope. Our poverties are not obstacles, but precious instruments, because God's grace loves to manifest itself in weakness (cf. *2 Cor* 12: 9). We need to confirm ourselves in an inner certainty, in the "conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks" (*ibid.*, 279). We need to truly believe that God is love and that therefore no work done with love, no sincere concern for others, no act of love for God, no generous effort, no painful patience is lost (cf. *ibid.*). In order to spread the message, we need to be simple and succinct as in the Easter Gospels: like Mary, who cannot wait to say to her disciples: "I have seen the Lord!" (*Jn* 20: 18); like the Apostles, who run to the tomb (cf. *Jn* 20: 4); like Peter, who dives from the boat to Jesus (cf. *Jn* 21:8). We need a free and simple Church, which does not think of returns in terms of image, of convenience and of income, but of being outbound. Someone said that the true Church of Jesus, to be faithful, must always have a budget deficit. This is good: deficit.

Think of the first Christians, who had everyone against them, who were persecuted and yet did not complain about the world. Reading the New Testament, one sees that they were not concerned to defend themselves from an empire that put them to death, but to proclaim Jesus, even at the cost of their lives. So let us not let ourselves be saddened by things that are not going well, by labours, by misunderstandings, by chatter, no: they are small things in the face of "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (cf. *Phil* 3: 8). Let us not allow ourselves to be infected by the defeatism according to which everything goes wrong: it is not God's way of thinking. And the sad are not Christians. The Christian suffers many times, but he does not fall into the deep sadness of the soul. Sadness is not a Christian virtue. Pain is. In order not to let ourselves be robbed of the enthusiasm of the Gospel, let us invoke its author every day, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of joy that keeps missionary ardour alive, that makes life a love story with God, that invites us to attract the world only with love, and to discover that life can only be possessed by giving it. One possesses in poverty to give it, to despoil oneself of oneself. And also with the surprise, the amazement of seeing that before we arrive, there is the Holy Spirit Who has already arrived and awaits us there.

I thank you from the heart for the good that you give. I bless you and ask you to pray for me. Thank you.
