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Audience with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Congregation of the Holy Spirit under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Spiritans).

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the superior general for the words he addressed to me; I greet the members of the Council and all of you.

I am pleased at this meeting, in which I share with you the joy for the one hundred and seventy-five years since your *refoundation*, with the merging of two religious institutes

I would like to take as a starting point, for a brief reflection, the passage from the prophet Isaiah whom you have chosen as a guide in your Congregation: "Behold, I am doing a new thing" (43:19). It is a very beautiful phrase, and forms part of a text that begins: "Fear not [Israel], for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (43:1). When I hear this, I think of the hand of God that caresses, that caresses the people, that caresses each one of you: the tender God who always caresses. I will dwell on these words because they seem to me to reflect very well some fundamental values of your charism: courage, openness and abandonment to the action of the Spirit so that he may *do a new thing*.

They are values already evident in the history of your foundation: a young deacon, with twelve seminary companions, driven by the Holy Spirit, courageously embarks on an unexpected adventure. He renounces the prospect of a calm future – he could have been a good priest from an affluent family – for a mission yet to be discovered, exposing himself to sacrifices, misunderstandings and opposition, with very fragile health that would

lead him to a premature death, before being able to see his dream come true. Many unforeseen events, which however his docility to the Spirit transforms into courageous “yesses”, thanks to which God begins *something new* in him every time, and through him, in others too.

Indeed, his example finds confirmation in the brethren who continue his work, ready to respond to the new signs of the times, embracing first the service to poor seminarians, then the popular missions and finally also the proclamation *ad gentes* in various parts of the world, without letting themselves be intimidated by the religious persecution unleashed by the French Revolution.

A beautiful and rich history, of which today however we recall a further special moment, in which once again everything comes into play. It is the *second foundation*, that of 1848, in which the Holy Spirit asks the community to share all the fruits of its past in a new scenario. It is the time to join with new companions, those of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Mary, also missionaries, but with a different history. To do so it is certainly necessary to overcome fears and jealousies, and the brethren of the two families accept the challenge, joining their forces and sharing what they have in a new beginning.

Today, after more than a century and a half, we see that Providence has rewarded their generous and courageous docility to the Spirit; you are present in sixty countries in five continents, with around two thousand six hundred religious and the involvement of many laypeople. Thanks to your willingness to change and your perseverance, you have remained faithful to the spirit of the origins: evangelizing the poor, accepting the missions where no-one wants to go, favouring service to the most abandoned, respecting peoples and cultures, forming local clergy and laypeople for an integral human development, all in fraternity and simplicity of life and in assiduity of prayer. Please, this last thing is important: pray, do not forget prayer. And not just formal prayer, no, pray! Pray seriously! You thus realize what the venerable Liberman called the “practical union” in service, fruit of a habitual docility to the Holy Spirit and the foundation of every mission.

Your charisma, open and respectful, is particularly precious today, in a world in which the challenge of interculturality and inclusion is living and urgent, within the Church and outside it. Therefore, I say to you: do not renounce your courage and your inner freedom; cultivate it and make it a living feature of your apostolate. There are many men and women who are still in need of the Gospel, not only in the so-called “mission lands”, but also in the old and tired continent. Look at every person with the eyes of Jesus, who wishes to meet everyone – everyone! Do not forget this: everyone – making himself close in particular to the poorest, touching them with his hands, fixing his gaze on them. And to take to each person the fresh and vital breath of his Spirit, who is the true “agent of mission” (cf. Saint John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, 30), let yourselves be guided by him, because “there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 280). Let him enlighten you, orient you, drive you where he wishes, without imposing conditions, without excluding anyone, because it is he who knows what is needed in every age and in every moment (cf. *ibid.*).

This was the great intuition of your founders, and the beautiful witness of so many brothers and sisters who have preceded you. And this is also the wish and the invitation I address to you today. May Our Lady accompany you. I bless you all from my heart, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!
