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## Audience with participants in the 12th General Chapter of the Little Sisters of Jesus

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 12th General Chapter of the Little Sisters of Jesus, to whom he delivered the following address:

### Address of the Holy Father

Dear sisters, good morning!

I welcome you all and I address a special greeting to Sister Eugeniya-Kubwimana of Jesus, newly-elected Superior General, and her assistants, who are beginning their service at the helm of the Fraternity. And a warm thank you to Sister Dolores Francesca of Jesus, the outgoing Superior General, and her assistants, for the work they carried out during their term of office, which has come to an end. I do not like referring to “responsibles” very much, because if one person is the “responsible”, it seems as if the others are irresponsible, and this will not do!

You are holding your twelfth General Chapter which, besides being elective, is an important occasion for reflecting together and making significant decisions. At your origin there is the charismatic experience of Saint Charles de Foucauld, revisited some twenty years after his death by Magdeleine Hutin and Anne Cadoret: a strong experience of the *search for God*, of *witness of the Gospel* and of *love for the hidden life*. These seem to me to be three useful guidelines to reflect upon briefly, also in the light of the Gospel passage you have chosen to guide the path of the Chapter: Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn 4:5-42*).

The first guideline is the *search for God*. It is the most important. The Master awaits you at the wellspring of His Word, living water that quenches the thirst of our desires. It is good to cultivate listening by remaining at his feet in adoration, like *Frère Charles*, who knew of nothing sweeter than the hours spent in front of the Tabernacle, and who said “the more you drink of this sweetness, the greater your thirst for it” (*Thoughts and Maxims*). In this way, hearts open up to the ways of God, who does not do violence to people, but inspires creative thoughts and feelings of adherence, availability and service. As with the Samaritan woman, Jesus offers you his love, and it is

up to you to accept the challenge, by laying aside the cumbersome amphorae of self-referentiality and habit, of predictable solutions and even of a certain pessimism that the enemy of God and man always tries to insinuate, especially in those who have made a gift of their lives. But in the light of His Word, you will be able to discern the desires of Jesus, and then set out again, for the villages and towns to which you will be sent, freer and lighter, emptied of yourselves and filled of Him, as in the artistic “logo” of the Chapter that one of you has created.

So,” we come to the second guideline, which has characterized you ever since the beginning: *witness of the Gospel*, making a gift of it to others with words, with works of charity and with fraternal, prayerful and adoring presence in your small international communities. Saint Charles de Foucauld used to say: “Our entire existence, our whole being must shout the Gospel from the rooftops. Our entire person must breathe Jesus... Our whole life must cry out that we belong to Jesus, reflect a Gospel way of living” (*Meditations on the Holy Gospels*). woman of Samaria, who went to share the joy of having encountered Christ with her fellow citizens, saying to them, “Come, see”. Saint Charles wrote: “Think much of others, pray much for others. Devote yourself to the salvation of your neighbour by the means in your power, prayer, kindness, example, is the best means of showing the divine Spouse that you love him”. He added: “It is not enough to give to those who ask: you must give to those in need” (*Spiritual Writings*). Taking care of others, giving to those in need without waiting for them to ask: these are the signs of love for the Spouse, characteristic traits of your caring proximity to the least, in whom He is present. A proximity that is so precious in a society such as ours where, despite the abundance of means, instead of good works multiplying, hearts seem to harden and close. Proximity is spontaneous, that is what counts, it comes from the spontaneity of the heart. Proximity, proximity. May your gentle proximity be a meek challenge to indifference - today we are in a culture of indifference -, a testimony of fraternity, a gentle cry reminding the world, as the “Universal Brother” wrote, that “everyone ... the poorest, the foulest, an infant, a decrepit old man, the least intelligent human being, the most abject, an idiot, a fool, a sinner, the greatest sinner... is a child of God, a child of the Most High” (*Spiritual Works*). Here then is the heart of his witness: “to be charitable, meek, humble with all men: this is what we have learnt from Jesus. Do not be militant with anyone” (*Letter to Joseph Hours*, 3 May 1912).

And so we reach the third guideline: *love for the hidden life*. It is the way of the Incarnation, the way of Nazareth, the one indicated by God with his despoiling himself and making himself small to share in the life of the small. “I want”, said the father, “to pass unknown on the earth like a traveller in the night, poorly, laboriously, humbly, sweetly... imitating Jesus in everything, in his life in Nazareth and, when the time came, on the Via Crucis and in his death” (*Spiritual Works*). *The way of hiddenness is the way of God*. This is beautiful, this is important. You are not nuns for publicity. The more hidden, the more divine. Continue to cultivate this way; it is a powerful prophecy for our time, which is polluted by appearances and appearances. It seems that because of this preoccupation with appearances and appearances we live a “cosmetic” culture: everyone wears make-up, it is normal for women to do so, but everyone, everyone makes themselves up, to appear better than we are, and this is not of the Lord.

Dear sisters, it is true, there are difficult moments and serious problems to face, such as the lack of vocations, the closure of some houses, the rising average age of religious sisters; but it is equally true that, faithful to the inspiration of Brother Charles, you are for God precious tools for sowing little pearls of Gospel tenderness in the world, which is your specialty: Gospel tenderness. And the Lord will continue to do so, to the extent to which you remain simple and generous, enamoured of Christ and of the poor. Which in time will bear fruit: be in no doubt.

I would also like to thank you for the silent work you do in the diocese of Rome, thank you! And then in every General Audience there is your presence, in the person of the *enfant terrible*, Sister Geneviève, who always brings someone to bring them close to the Pope, and that is good! Presence with the most marginalised. Thank you!

I thank you and bless you; and please, continue to pray for me, really, because this work is not easy, in fact it is a bit “annoying”!

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