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To the Mercedarians on their eighth centenary: generous response to the needs of the world and the Church, and fidelity to your heritage

Vatican City, 2 May 2016 – The Mercedarians, members of the Order of Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy which is about to celebrate the eighth centenary since its foundation, are gathered in these days in the general Chapter, during which they will elect their new governing body and will decide on their projects for the next six years. The theme of the Chapter is "Mercy: memory and prophecy in the peripheries of freedom", and the Pope referred to this as he received the participants in audience this morning, observing that it is a "memory which evokes the great gestures performed in these eight centuries: the work of redemption of prisoners, its bold mission in the new world, as well as the many illustrious members known for their holiness and the letters that adorn its history. Certainly, there is much to remember, and it is good for us to remember."

"However, this memory must not be limited to an exposition of the past", said Francis, "but should instead be a serene and conscious act that enables us to assess our achievements, without forgetting our limits and, above all, to face the challenges that humanity presents to us. ... The true life of the Order must be sought in the constant effort to adapt and renew, so as to be able to respond generously to the real needs of the world and the Church, while remaining faithful to the perennial heritage of which it is a depository."

"With this spirit, we can truly speak about prophecy; we cannot do so in another way. ... The prophet is an envoy, an anointed one who has received the gift of the Spirit for the service of the holy faithful People of God. You have also received a gift, and have been consecrated for a mission that is a work of mercy: following Christ, bringing the good news of the Gospel to the poor, and the liberation of captives. Dear brothers, our religious profession is a gift and a great responsibility, as we safeguard it in earthen vessels. We do not rely on our own strength, but instead we always entrust ourselves to divine mercy. ... If God is present in your lives, the joy of bringing His Gospel will be your strength and your joy. God has also called us to serve within the Church and in the Community. Let us keep to this common path."

"The prophet knows how to reach out to the peripheries, which must be approached with little baggage. The Spirit is a light breeze that drives us forward, evoking what moved your Fathers and where it guided them, compelling them to follow. They were able to stay like hostages, close to the poor, the marginalised, society's outcasts, to bring them consolation, to suffer with them, completing in their own flesh what was lacking from the passion of Christ. And this, day by day, in perseverance, in the silence of a life freely and generously given. To

follow is to assume that, in order to liberate, we must make ourselves small, unite ourselves with the prisoner, in the certainty that in this way we fulfil not only our purpose of redeeming, but also encounter true freedom, as in the poor and the captive we recognise the presence of our Redeemer."

"In the eighth centenary of the Order, do not neglect to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord to all those who are sent to you: to those who are persecuted for their faith and those who are deprived of their freedom, to victims of human trafficking and the young in schools, to those you tend to in your works of mercy and the faithful of the parishes and the missions entrusted to you by the Church," concluded the Holy Father. I offer my blessing to each one of you and for the entire Mercedarian family, and I beg you not to forget to pray for me."
