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Audience with participants in the Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies

At 11.00 today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

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

Holy Father's Address

Dear Cardinal,

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you with joy at the end of your General Assembly and I thank Cardinal Fernando Filoni for his words. With him I greet all the Superiors, the General Secretaries, the National Director and all of you present here.

You well know my concern about the Pontifical Mission Societies, very often reduced to an organization that collects and distributes, on behalf of the Pope, economic aid for the neediest Churches. I know that you are seeking new ways, more suitable and more ecclesial methods to carry out your service to the universal mission of the Church. Let us allow ourselves to be sustained, in this process of urgent reform, also by the intercession of the Saints Charles Lwanga and companions, martyrs of Uganda, whose liturgical memory we celebrate today.

To renew ardour and passion, the spiritual motor of the apostolic action of countless missionary saints and martyrs, I have very favourably received your proposal, formulated together with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, to announce an extraordinary time for prayer and reflection on the *missio ad gentes*. I will ask all the Church to dedicate the month of October of the year 2019 to this aim, as in that year we will celebrate the centenary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud*, of Pope Benedict XV. In this very important document of his Magisterium on the mission, the Pope recalls how necessary the holiness of life is to the

efficacy of the apostolate, he recommends, therefore, an ever stronger union with Christ and a more convinced and joyful involvement in his divine passion for announcing the Gospel to all, loving and employing mercy towards everyone. Men and women, “distinguished by zeal and holiness”, are increasingly necessary to the Church and to the mission. “May he who preaches God be a man of God”, exhorted Benedict XV (cf. Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud*, 30 November 1919; *AAS* XI [1919], 449).

Renewing oneself requires conversion, and it requires living mission as an ongoing opportunity to proclaim Christ, to let Him be encountered by bearing witness and making others participants in our personal encounter with Him. I hope that your spiritual and material assistance to the Church makes it increasingly based upon the Gospel and the baptismal involvement of all the faithful, lay and clerical, in the single mission of the Church: bringing God’s love to every man, especially those most in need of His mercy. The extraordinary month of prayer and reflection on the mission as first evangelization will serve for this renewal of ecclesial faith, so that the Easter of Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, Lord and bridegroom of His Church, always be and remain in her heart.

May the preparation for this extraordinary time dedicated to the first proclamation of the Gospel help us always to be a Church increasingly in mission, following the words of Blessed Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi, magna carta* of the post-Conciliar missionary effort. Pope Montini wrote: “The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love, and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the ‘mighty works of God’ [41] which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh by Him and reunited. In brief, this means that she has a constant need of being evangelized, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel”.

In the spirit of the teaching of Blessed Paul VI, it is my wish that the celebration of the centenary of *Maximum illud*, in the month of October 2019, be a favourable time for prayer, the witness of many saints and martyrs of the mission, biblical and theological reflection, catechesis and missionary charity to contribute to evangelizing, first and foremost, the Church, so that having rediscovered the freshness and zeal of the first love for the crucified and risen Lord, she may evangelize the world with credibility and evangelical efficacy.

I bless you all in this day before the Solemnity of Pentecost. I ask the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Church, always to inspire us with the testimony of her faith and the reassuring guarantee of her motherly intercession. May the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, the holy martyrs Carlo Lwanga and his companions, and Blessed Paolo Manna never cease to pray to God for all of us, His missionaries.