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Audience with participants in the General Chapters of the Consolata Missionaries

At midday today, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Chapters of the Consolata Missionaries.

The following is the Holy Father's address to those present:

Holy Father's Address

Dear Consolata Missionaries,

I am glad to welcome both the male and female branches of the religious family founded by Blessed Giuseppe Allamano, on the occasion of your respective General Chapters. I greet you all with affection and I hope that your works in the Chapters will take place with serenity and obedience to the Spirit. I extend my affectionate greeting to your confreres and consœurs who work, often in difficult conditions, in various continents, and I encourage them to continue with generous fidelity in their commitment to the *missio ad gentes*. I wish now to offer you some suggestions so that these days may bear abundant fruits of good in your communities and in the missionary activity of the Church.

You are called to further your charism, to project yourselves with renewed zeal in the work of evangelization, in view of pastoral urgencies and new forms of poverty. While I joyfully thank the Lord for the good that you are doing in the world, I would like to urge you to carry out a *careful discernment on the situation of the peoples* among whom you perform your evangelizing work. Never tire of bringing comfort to the populations who are often marked by great poverty and acute suffering, as for example in many parts of Africa and Latin America. Let yourselves be continually challenged by the concrete realities with which you come into contact and seek to offer in appropriate ways the witness of charity that the Spirit infuses in your hearts (cf. *Rm* 5.5).

The history of your Institutes, made up – as in every family – of joys and sorrows, lights and shadows, has been marked and made fruitful even in these recent years by Christ's cross. How can we neglect to mention here your

confreres and consoeurs who loved the Gospel of charity more than themselves, and crowned their missionary service with the sacrifice of their lives? May their evangelical choice, without reserve, illuminate your missionary effort and be of encouragement for you all to continue with renewed generosity on your special mission in the Church.

To go ahead in this not easy mission, it is necessary to live *communion with God* with increasingly awareness of the Lord's mercy that we receive. It is much more important to be aware of how much we are loved by God, than of how we love Him ourselves! It is good for us to consider, first and foremost, this priority of the gratuitous and merciful love of God, and to feel our commitment and our effort as a response. To the extent to which we are persuaded by the Lord's love, our attachment to Him grows. We have a great need always to rediscover the love and mercy of the Lord to develop our familiarity with God. Consecrated persons, inasmuch as they make an effort to conform more perfectly to Christ, are most of all, familiar with God, intimate with Him, those who interact with the Lord with full freedom, and with spontaneity, but also with astonishment at the wonders He performs.

From this perspective, religious life can become a journey of the progressive rediscovery of divine mercy, facilitating the imitation of the virtues of Christ and His attitudes, rich in humanity, to then bear witness to them to all those you encounter in your pastoral service. Know also how to receive with joy the continuous stimuli to renewal and effort that come from real contact with the Lord Jesus, present and working in the mission through the Holy Spirit. This enable you to be actively present in the new arenas of evangelization, favouring – even if this may lead to sacrifices – openness towards situations that, with their particular needs, reveal themselves to be emblematic for our time.

Following the example of your Blessed Founder, never tire of giving a new impetus to missionary animation. It will be above all your apostolic fervour that will sustain the Christian communities entrusted to you, especially those that have been recently founded. In the effort of the requalification of the style of missionary service, it will be necessary to favour certain significant elements, such as sensitivity to inculturation of the Gospel, and the choice of simple and poor forms of presence among the people. Special attention is due to dialogue with Islam, commitment to the promotion of the dignity of women and family values, and sensitivity to the themes of justice and peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, continue your journey with hope. May your missionary consecration always be a source for the life-giving and sanctifying encounter with Jesus and with His love, wellspring of consolation, peace and salvation for all humanity.

I hope that the guidelines drawn up by the respective Chapters will guide your Institutes to continue with generosity on the way traced by your Founder and followed with heroic courage by many confreres and consoeurs. I invoke the heavenly protection of Mary, Queen of Missions, and of Blessed Giuseppe Allamano, and I wholeheartedly impart to you all my blessing, extending it to the entire Family of the Consolata.
