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Apostolic Trip of the Holy Father Francis to Chile and Peru (15-22 January 2018) – Prayer of the Third Hour with the Contemplative Sisters of the Shrine of the “Señor de los Milagros” of Lima

Prayer of the Third Hour with the Contemplative Sisters of the Shrine of the “Señor de los Milagros” of Lima

This morning, after taking leave of the apostolic nunciature, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to the Shrine of the Señor de los Milagros in Lima where, at 9.00 local time (15.00 in Rome) he led the mid-morning prayer with around five hundred Peruvian contemplative sisters.

Upon arrival, the Pope was greeted at the main entrance by the Chaplain of the Confraternity of the Señor de los Milagros in Lima. He then passed along the central nave before pausing in silent prayer before the Venerated Image.

After the greetings address from the Mother Superior of the Descalced Carmelites of the Shrine, and the prayer of the Third Hour, the Pope pronounced his homily.

At the end, the Holy Father individually greeted some of the Priory Mothers and Abbesses and, after a tour by popemobile among the faithful, he proceeded to the Cathedral.

The following is the homily that the Pope pronounced during the prayer of the Third Hour:

Homily of the Holy Father

Dear Sisters from different monasteries of contemplative life:

How good it is to be here in this Shrine of the Lord of Miracles, visited so often by Peruvians, to ask His grace so that He will show us His closeness and mercy! He is “the light that guides, that illumines us with His divine love”. Seeing you here, I have a bad thought: that you took advantage of this visit to get out for some fresh air!

[Applause] Mother Soledad, I thank you for your words of welcome, and I thank all of you, who “from the silence of the cloister walk ever by my side”. Also – this you will allow me to say as it touches my heart – from this place I send a greeting to my four Carmels in Buenos Aires. I want to also put them before the Lord of Miracles, because they accompanied me in my ministry in that Diocese, and I want them to be here to receive the Lord’s blessing. You are not jealous? [They reply: “No”]

We have listened to the words of Saint Paul and been reminded that we have received the Spirit of filial adoption that makes us children of God (cf. *Rom* 8:15-16). Those few words sum up the richness of every Christian vocation: the joy of knowing we are God’s children. This is the experience that nourishes our lives, that seeks always to be a pleasing response to God’s love. How important it is to renew this joy day by day! Above all, during those moments when joy seems to have gone or the soul is burdened under a cloud or there are things we don’t understand; from there ask the Lord again to renew the gift: “I am a daughter, a daughter of God”.

A privileged path that you have for renewing this conviction is the life of prayer, both communal and individual. Prayer is the heart of your consecrated life, your contemplative life, and the means of cultivating the experience of love that sustains our faith and, indeed as Mother Soledad rightly said, it is always a missionary prayer. It is not a prayer that bounces off the walls of the convent and comes back. No, it is a prayer that goes forth and up and up...

Missionary prayer makes us one with our brothers and sisters in whatever situations they find themselves, and asks that love and hope will never fail them. This is what Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus said: “I understood that it is love alone which prompts the members of the Church to act and, if there is no love, neither would the Apostles proclaim the Gospel, nor would the martyrs spill their blood. I recognized clearly and I was certain that love subsumes in itself all vocations, that love is everything, encompassing all times and places, in a word, that love is eternal... in the heart of the Church, who is my Mother, I will be love”.^[1] Oh that each of you could say this. If any of you are weary and the small flame of love seems to have been extinguished, ask him, ask him! To love is a gift of God.

To be love! This means being able to stand alongside the suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters, and to say with the Psalmist: “In my distress I called upon the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free” (*P*s 117:5). In this way, your cloistered life can attain a missionary and universal outreach and play “a fundamental role in the life of the Church. You pray and intercede for our many brothers and sisters who are prisoners, migrants, refugees and victims of persecution. Your prayers of intercession embrace the many families experiencing difficulties, the unemployed, the poor, the sick, and those struggling with addiction, to mention just a few of the more urgent situations. You are like those who brought the paralytic to the Lord for healing (cf. *Mk* 2: 1-12)”. They were not ashamed, they were “without shame”, and well said. There were not ashamed to make a hole in the roof to lower down the paralytic. Be “not ashamed” to bring before the power of God, through your prayers, the miseries of mankind. That is your prayer. “Through your prayer, night and day, you bring before God the lives of so many of our brothers and sisters who for various reasons cannot come to Him to experience His healing mercy, even as He patiently waits for them. By your prayers, you can heal the wounds of many”.^[2]

For this very reason, we can state that cloistered life neither closes nor shrinks our hearts, but rather widens them. Woe to the nun that has a closed heart. Please find the remedy – you cannot be a contemplative nun with a closed heart – so that you can breathe again, that you may once more have a great heart. Moreover, nuns with closed hearts are nuns who have lost fruitfulness and are not mothers. They complain about everything, I’d say they are bitter, always looking for “scrupulous details” to moan about. The holy Mother used to say: “Woe to the nun who says ‘they harmed me without reason’, ‘they have acted unjustly against me’”. In the convent there is no room for collectors of injustices rather there is room for those who open their hearts and know how to carry the cross that bears fruit, the cross of love, the cross which brings life. Love expands the heart and thus we can move forwards with the Lord because he makes it possible to feel in a new way the pain, the suffering, the frustration and the misfortune of so many of our brothers and sisters who are victims of today’s “throwaway culture”. May intercession for those in need be the hallmark of your prayer. With your arms outstretched, like Moses, with the heart open in this way, imploring. And whenever possible, help them not only by prayer, but also by concrete service. How many of your convents, without infringing the cloistered element, and respectful of silence, are able to do so much good during those moments in the visiting room.

The prayer of supplication that takes place in your monasteries is attuned to the Heart of Jesus, which pleads to the Father that we may all be one, so that the world will believe (cf. *Jn 17:21*). How much we need unity in the Church! May all be one. How much we need the baptized to be one, consecrated persons to be one, priests to be one, bishops to be one! Today and always! United in faith. United by hope. United by love. In the unity that wells up from our communion with Christ, who unites us to the Father in the Spirit, and, in the Eucharist, unites us with one another in that great mystery which is the Church. I ask you, please, to pray constantly for unity in this beloved Church in Peru because it is experiencing the temptation against unity. I entrust this unity to you, the unity of the Church, the unity of pastoral workers, of consecrated men and women, of the clergy and of bishops. The devil is a liar and, what is more, he is a gossip, he loves going from one place to the other, seeking to divide, and he wants members of a community to speak badly of each other. I have said this many times, and will repeat it here: Do you know what a gossiping nun is like? She is a terrorist, worse than those of Ayacucho years ago, worse, because gossip is like a bomb. The terrorist just like the devil goes in whispering and murmuring, throws the bomb, destroys and calmly walks off. No to terrorist nuns, no to gossip. You know the best remedy against gossip? Bite your tongue. The infirmity sister will have a lot of work because there will be swollen tongues but at least bombs will not be thrown. In other words, there must not be gossiping in the convent, because this is instigated by the devil, for he is a gossip by nature and a liar. And remember the terrorists of Ayacucho when you feel like passing on a piece of gossip. Strive to grow in the fraternal life, so that every monastery can be a beacon of light in the midst of disunity and division. Help bear prophetic witness that this is possible. May all who draw near to you have a foretaste of the blessedness of the fraternal charity so essential to the consecrated life and so necessary in today's world and in our communities.

When we live our vocation faithfully, our life becomes a proclamation of God's love. I ask you never to stop giving that witness. In this Church of the Discalced Carmelite Nazarenes, I readily recall the words of the great spiritual teacher, Saint Teresa of Jesus: "If you lose your guide, who is the good Jesus, you will not get the journey right...". Always behind Him: and yet you might say to me, 'but father sometimes Jesus ends up on Calvary'. Well, I answer, you go there too, for He waits for you there also because He loves you, "for the same Lord says He is the way; the Lord also says He is the light, and that no one can come to the Father except through Him".[3]

Dear sisters, know one thing, the Church does not tolerate you, she needs you. The Church needs you, with your lives of fidelity be beacons, and keep pointing to the One who is the way, and the truth and the life, to the one Lord who brings us fulfilment and grants us life in abundance.[4]

Pray for the Church, pray for priests and bishops, for consecrated men and women, for families, for those who suffer, for those who harm others and destroy the lives of many people, for those who exploit their brothers and sisters. And please, following the list of sinners, do not forget to pray for me.

[1] *Autobiographical manuscripts: Letter to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart* (8 September 1896), Ms. B [3v.].

[2] Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere* on women's contemplative life (29 June 2016), 16.

[3] *The Interior Castle*, VI, ch. 7, no. 6.

[4] Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere* on women's contemplative life (29 June 2016), 6.
