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Audience with participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Committee for the International Eucharistic Congresses

At 11.50 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Committee for the International Eucharistic Congresses.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminences,
Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to meet you at the conclusion of the work of your Assembly, and I thank Archbishop Piero Marini for his kind words. I greet the National Delegates designated by the Episcopal Conferences, and especially the Delegation of the Hungarian Committee led by Cardinal Peter Erdő, Archbishop of Budapest, where the next International Eucharistic Congress will be held in 2020. This event will be celebrated against the backdrop of a great European city, in which Christian communities await a new evangelization capable of meeting the challenges of secularized modernity and a globalization that risks eliminating the unique features of a rich and variegated history.

This raises a fundamental question. What does it mean to celebrate a Eucharistic Congress in the modern and multicultural city, where the Gospel and the forms of religious affiliation have become marginal? It means cooperating with God's grace in order to spread, through prayer and activity, a "Eucharistic culture" – in other words a way of thinking and working grounded in the Sacrament yet perceptible also beyond the limits of the Church community. In a Europe afflicted by indifference and swept by divisions and forms of rejection, Christians renew before everyone, Sunday after Sunday, the simple and powerful gesture of their faith: they gather in the Lord's name and acknowledge that they are brothers and sisters. And the miracle is repeated: in the hearing of

the word and in the sign of the broken bread, even the smallest and lowliest assembly of believers becomes the body of the Lord, his tabernacle in the world. The celebration of the Eucharist thus becomes a cradle of attitudes that generate a Eucharistic culture, for it impels us to express in our way of life and our thinking the grace of Christ who gave of himself to the full.

The first of these attitudes is *communion*. At the Last Supper Jesus chose, as the sign of his gift, bread and the cup of fellowship. It follows that the celebration of the memorial of the Lord, in which we are nourished by his body and blood, requires and establishes our communion with him, as well as the communion of the faithful with one another. Communion with Christ is the real challenge facing Eucharistic pastoral activity, since it entails helping the faithful to communicate with Jesus present in the Sacrament in order to live in him and with him in charity and mission. A powerful contribution to this is also made by Eucharistic worship outside of Mass, which has always been an important moment in these ecclesial gatherings. Prayer of adoration teaches us not to separate Christ the Head from his Body, our sacramental communion with him from our communion with his members and from the missionary commitment that follows from this.

The second attitude is that of *service*. The Eucharistic community, by sharing in the lot of Jesus the Servant, becomes itself “servant”: by eating the “body that is given”, it becomes the “body given up for many”. By constantly returning to the “upper room” (cf. *Acts* 1:13), the womb of the Church, where Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, Christians serve the cause of the Gospel by being present in places of frailty, under the shadow of the cross, in order to share and to bring healing. How many situations there are in the Church and in society on which the balm of mercy can be poured through spiritual and corporal works! We think of families in difficulty, young people and adults without work, the sick and the elderly who are abandoned, migrants experiencing hardship and acts of violence – and rejected, and also many other forms of poverty. In these places of wounded humanity, Christians celebrate the memorial of the Cross and make living and present the Gospel of Jesus the Servant, who gave himself up for us out of love. The baptized thus spread the seeds of a Eucharistic culture by becoming servants of the poor, not in the name of an ideology but of the Gospel itself, which becomes a rule of life for individuals and communities. We see this in the constant witness borne by so many saints of charity, men and women alike.

Finally, each Mass nourishes the Eucharistic life by bringing to the fore those words of the Gospel that our cities have often forgotten. We need think only of the word *mercy*, almost removed from the dictionary of contemporary culture. Everyone laments the corrosive river of misery flowing through our society. It is made up of different kinds of fear, oppression, arrogance, cruelty, hatred, forms of rejection and lack of concern for the environment, not to mention others. And yet, Christians realize every Sunday that this swollen river is powerless against the ocean of mercy that inundates our world. The Eucharist is the wellspring of this ocean of mercy, for in it the Lamb of God, slain yet standing, makes flow from his pierced side streams of living water; he pours out his Spirit for a new creation and he offers himself as food at the table of the new Passover (cf. Apostolic Letter *Misericordiae Vultus*, 7). Mercy thus enters the veins of this world and helps to form the image and structure of the People of God suited to our modern age.

The forthcoming International Eucharistic Congress, continuing a more than century-old tradition, is called to point to this path of newness and conversion, and to remind everyone that the Eucharist stands at the very heart of the Church’s life. It is a paschal mystery that can enhance the baptized as individuals, but also the earthly city in which they live and work. May the Budapest Eucharistic Congress foster processes of renewal in Christian communities, so that the salvation whose source is in the Eucharist will find expression in a Eucharistic culture capable of inspiring men and women of good will in the fields of charity, solidarity, peace, family life and care for creation.

I now entrust the forthcoming International Eucharistic Congress to the Virgin Mary. May Our Lady watch over and accompany each of you and your communities, and enable your efforts, for which I am deeply grateful, to bear abundant fruit. I ask you please to pray for me, and to all of you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.