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Audience with the Community of the International College of Jesus of Rome

At 11.50 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Community of the International College of Jesus of Rome, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the College.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, good morning!

Thank you for your visit, I am glad. This year you celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the College of Jesus, opened as an initiative of Fr. Arrupe in 1968. On the fiftieth year, that of the Jubilee, the Scripture says that “each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan” (*Lev 25: 10*). But no-one needs to pack his suitcase! All of you, however, are called to return to the “place” that is yours, to “desire what is essential and originary” (Saint Peter Faber, *Memorial*, 63), to revisit that family in which God regenerated you, where you professed your belonging to Him. God founded you as Jesuits: this Jubilee is a moment of grace for remembering and feeling you are with the Church, in a Company and with a belonging that have a name: Jesus. This means replying with a clear “no” to the temptation to live for oneself; to reaffirm that, like Jesus, we exist for the Father (cf. *Jn 6: 57*); that, like Jesus, we must live to serve, not to be served (cf. *Mk 10: 45*). To remember is to repeat with intelligence and will that the Pasch of the Lord is enough for the life of the Jesuit. There is no need for anything else. It is good to repeat the second week of the *Exercises*, to reground oneself on the life of Jesus, on the journey to the Passover. Because forming oneself is, first and foremost, basing oneself. In this regard, if I may I would like to advise you to return to the discussion on service to be like Jesus, to imitate Jesus, Who emptied Himself, Who annihilated Himself and obeyed unto death; the discussion that leads you up to the moment of asking with insistence calumnies, persecutions, humiliations. This is the criterion, brothers! If one of you is not able to do this, speak about it with the spiritual father. Imitate Jesus. Like Him, on that road that Paul tells us about in *Philippians 2, 7*, and do not be afraid to ask for this, as it is a Beatitude: “Blessed you will be

when they say bad things about you, they slander you, they persecute you". This is your path: if you are not able to have that discussion with the heart and give all your life, convinced, and ask for that, then you will not be well rooted.

To base oneself is therefore the first verb I would like to leave you with. Saint Francis Xavier, whom we celebrate today, wrote it: "I beg you, in all your matters, to base yourselves totally in God" (*Letter 90 from Kagoshima*). In this way, he added, there is no adversity for which one cannot be prepared. You inhabit the house where Saint Ignatius lived, wrote the Constitutions and sent the first companions in mission around the world. Base yourselves on the origins. It is the grace of these years in Rome: the grace of foundation, the grace of the origins. And you are a hothouse that brings the world to Rome and Rome to the world, the Society in the heart of the Church and the Church in the heart of the Society.

The second verb is *to grow*. You are called in these years to grow, sinking your roots. The plant grows from the roots, which are not seen but which support the whole. And it stops giving fruit not when it has few branches, but when the roots are dry. To have roots is to have a well-grafted heart, which in God is able to expand. To God, *semper maior*, we respond with the *magis* of life, with a clear and irrepressible enthusiasm, with the fire that blazes inside, with that positive tension, always growing, that says "no" to any compromise. It is the "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" of the Apostle Paul (1 *Cor* 9:16), it is the "I did not stop a moment" of St. Francis Xavier (*Letter 20 to Saint Ignatius*), it is what urged Saint Albert Hurtado to be a sharp arrow in the sleeping limbs of the Church. The heart, if it is not open, atrophies. Do not forget this. If it does not grow, it wilts.

There is no growth without crisis – do not be afraid of crises, do not be afraid – as there is no fruit without pruning or victory without struggle. To grow up, to take root means to struggle relentlessly against every spiritual worldliness, which is the worst evil that can happen to us, as Father de Lubac said. If the worldliness affects the roots, goodbye fruit and goodbye plant. And for me, this is the greatest danger in this time: spiritual worldliness, which leads you to clericalism and so on. If instead growth is a constant action against one's ego, there will be much fruit. And while the enemy spirit will never cease to try to find your "consolations", insinuating that you will live better if you have what you want, the friendly Spirit will gently encourage you in goodness, to grow in humble docility, going forward, without wrenching and without dissatisfaction, with that serenity that comes from God alone. Someone with bad thoughts might say, "But this is Pelagianism! No, this is the comparison with the crucified Christ, with whom you will have this discussion, the one I mentioned above, because only with the Lord's grace can you take this path.

I would like to mention two positive signs of growth, freedom and obedience: two virtues that advance if they walk together. Freedom is essential, because "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 *Cor* 3:17). The Spirit of God freely speaks to everyone through feelings and thoughts; it can not be enclosed in tables, but must be received with the heart, journeying, by free sons, not by servants. I wish you to be free sons who, united in diversity, struggle every day to conquer the greatest freedom: that of yourselves. Prayer will be of great help, prayer is never to be neglected: it is the legacy that Fr. Arrupe left us at the end, the "swansong" of Fr. Arrupe. Read that appeal, that conference that he gave to the Jesuits at the refugee camp in Thailand. He then took the aeroplane and landed in Rome, where he had his stroke. And obedience: as for Jesus, for us too the food of life is to do the will of the Father (cf. *Jn* 4: 34), and of the fathers that the Church gives. Free and obedient, following the example of Saint Ignatius, when he waited at Villa d'Este and, meek and determined at the same time, in complete freedom presented to the Pope the total obedience of the Society, in a Church that certainly did not shine with Gospel customs. There we have a snapshot of the mature adult Jesuit. Freedom and obedience give life to that creative way of acting with the Superior. Once I said to a group of Jesuits who were preparing, I think, to become superiors, that the General of the Society was a shepherd to a "flock of toads", because the freedom of the Jesuit, with initiative, leads to many initiatives and the poor Superior must go from one side to another... Making unity not with meek sheep, but with toads! And this is true, it is important. But where is the guarantee of this bond with the Superior, of this unity? In the statement of the conscience. Please, never leave this, because it is what ensures to the Superior the possibility of maintaining this "flock of toads", of leading it to a different harmony, because he knows you and tomorrow it will be you who receives the statement from him, because we are all brothers who know each other well. Freedom, obedience, the statement of the conscience as a method, as a path.

To base oneself, to grow and finally *to mature*. It is the third verb. One does not mature in the roots and in the trunk, but by putting out the fruits, which fertilize the earth with new seeds. Here the mission comes into play, putting yourself face to face with today's situations, taking care of the world that God loves. Saint Paul VI said: "Everywhere in the Church, even in the most difficult and pioneering fields, at the crossroads of ideologies, in the social trenches, there has been and there is a confrontation between the burning needs of man and the perennial message of the Gospel, there, there have been and there are the Jesuits" (Address of the occasion of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, 3 December 1974). These words are the message that I think was the most profound of the Pope to the Society. At the most intricate junctures, in the border lands, in the deserts of humanity: here the Jesuit is called to be present. He may be found as a lamb among wolves, but he must not fight wolves – he must only remain a lamb. In this way the Shepherd will reach him there, where his lamb is (cf. Saint John Chrysostom, *Homily 33 on the Gospel of Matthew*).

Passion and discipline in studies contribute to this mission. And it will always be good to accompany the *ministry of the Word* with the *ministry of consolation*. There you touch the flesh that the Word has assumed: by caressing the suffering members of Christ, you increase your familiarity with the incarnate Word. The sufferings you see do not frighten you. Bring them before the Crucified. They are brought there and in the Eucharist, where patient love is drawn, which knows how to embrace the crucified of every age. Thus patience matures, together with hope, because they are twins: they grow together. Do not be afraid to cry in contact with harsh situations: they are drops that irrigate life, they make it docile. Tears of compassion purify the heart and the affections.

Looking at you, I see an international community, called to grow and mature together. The College of Jesus is, and may it be, an active "gymnasium" in the art of living, including others. It is not merely a question of understanding and wishing well to each other, maybe at times tolerating each other, but of bearing each other's burdens (cf. *Gal* 6. 2). And not only the burdens of mutual frailties, but of different histories, cultures, the memories of peoples. It will be very good for you to share and discover the joys and the real problems of the world through the presence of the brother who is next to you; to embrace in him not only what interests or appeals to him, but also the anguish and hopes of a Church and a people: to extend boundaries, always moving the horizon, always a little farther. May the blessing I give you also reach your countries and be of help to you in basing yourselves, growing and maturing to the greater glory of God. I thank you, and I ask you to pray for me. Thank you.
