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Audience with the men and women religious of the Camillian Charismatic Family

At 11.30 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the men and women religious of the Camillian Charismatic Family.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear sisters and dear brothers,

It is with joy that I welcome you all, representatives of the different expressions of the *Camillian family*! I greet you with affection and I thank Father Pessini for his words. And I ask the Lord to conserve his sense of humour: you will never have a gastric ulcer! You are constantly engaged in loving and generous donation to the sick, carrying out a precious mission, in the Church and in society, alongside the suffering. When disease disturbs and at times upturns our lives, then we feel the strong need to have a compassionate and competent brother or sister beside us, who consoles us, supports us and helps us to recover the precious good of health, or who accompanies us until the end of our final meeting with the Lord!

All the Church as a whole has received from her Master and Lord the task of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and of healing the sick (cf. *Lk 9: 2*), in imitation of Him, the Good Shepherd, the Good Samaritan, who passed through this earth "benefiting and healing all those who were prisoners of evil" (Common Preface VIII). But God has bestowed in particular to Saint Camillus de Lellis, and to all those who follow his example, the gift of reliving and witnessing the merciful love of Christ for the sick. The Church has recognized it as an authentic charism of the Spirit. You live it in an exemplary way, translating it into life on the dual path of directly assisting the sick, especially the poorest, in their bodily and spiritual needs, and teaching others the best way to serve them, for the benefit of the Church and humanity.

All the charisms "are gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us ... Gifts given not to be hidden but to be shared with

others. They are not given for the benefit of the one who receives them, but for the use of the People of God. If a charism ... serves instead as self-affirmation, then it is doubtful that we are dealing with an authentic charism or one faithfully lived out. The charisms are special graces, given to some for the good of many others” (Catechesis, 6 November 2013). They always have a transitive character: they are orientated towards others. Over the years, you have made efforts to incarnate your charism faithfully, translating it into a multitude of apostolic works and in pastoral service to the benefit of suffering humanity throughout the world.

In line with this mission, which some members of your religious families have lived heroically in becoming models of holiness, you are called to continue your service in a prophetic way. It is a question of looking to the future, open to new forms of apostolate which the Spirit inspires in you and which the signs of the times and the needs of the world and of the Church require. The great gift you have received is still current and necessary also for this age of ours, because it is founded on charity that will never end (see *1 Cor* 13: 8). As a living part of the Church, sent to spread the Gospel so that people “have life and have it abundantly” (*Jn* 10: 10), you have the wonderful opportunity to do it precisely through the gestures of caring for life and integral health, so necessary even in our time.

From the charism initially inspired in Saint Camillus of Lellis, various ecclesial bodies have gradually been constituted, forming today a single constellation, that is, a “charismatic family” composed of men and women religious, secular consecrated persons and lay faithful. None of these realities is the sole custodian or single holder of the charism, but each receives it as a gift and interprets it and updates it according to his or her specific vocation, in different historical and geographical contexts. At the centre there remains the original charism, as a perennial source of light and inspiration, which is understood and embodied dynamically in the various forms. Each of them is offered to others in a reciprocal exchange of gifts that enriches everyone, for the common utility and in view of the implementation of the same mission. What is it? To witness in every time and place Christ’s merciful love towards the sick.

St. Camillus de Lellis, whom you all recognize as “Father”, lived in an age in which there had not yet ripened the possibility of active consecrated life for women had not yet matured, but only that of the contemplative and monastic type. He therefore constituted an Order of men only. However, he had clearly understood that care for the sick had to be practised also with attitudes typical of the female soul, so much so as to ask her religious to serve the sick “with that affection that a loving mother usually has for her only sick child” (*Rules of the Company of the Servants of the Sick*, 1584, XXVII). The two women’s congregations established in the nineteenth century and secular institutes born in the last century have given completeness to the expression of the charism of mercy towards the sick, enriching it with the distinctly feminine qualities of love and of care. In this, may the Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick and Mother of God, accompany you and guide you, consecrated women. From her we learn how to be close to those who suffer with the tenderness and dedication of a mother. I would like to pause a moment on this word “tenderness”. It is a word that today risks being dropped from the dictionary! We must take it up again and put it into practice anew. Christianity without tenderness does not work. Tenderness is a properly Christian attitude: it is also the very marrow of our encounter with people who suffer.

Dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you always to cultivate communion among you, in that synodal style that I have proposed to all the Church, listening to each other and everyone listening to the Holy Spirit, to value the contribution that every single situation offers to the single Family, so as to express more fully the multiple potentialities that the charisma includes. Always be aware that “it is in communion, even when this proves painful, that a charism is seen to be authentic and mysteriously fruitful” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 130). In fidelity to the initial inspiration of the Founder and the Founders, and in listening to the many forms of suffering and poverty of humanity today, you will know how to make light shine, always new, on the gift received; and many young people the world over will be able to feel attracted by and to join with you, to continue to bear witness to God’s tenderness.

Dear brothers and sisters, I ask the Holy Spirit to support this new phase of your journey as *Camillian charismatic family*. I heartily bless you all, your communities and the people you serve. And please, continue to pray for me. Thank you.

