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BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 191114e

Thursday 14.11.2019

Audience with teaching staff and students of the Libera Università Maria Santissima Assunta (LUMSA)

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the teaching staff and students of the Libera Università Maria Santissima Assunta (LUMSA) on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of its founding.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to celebrate with you the eightieth anniversary of the Libera Università Maria Santissima Assunta. I cordially greet the rector, Professor Francesco Bonini, and I thank him for his kind words. I greet the cardinals and bishops, in particular Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo, Chair of the Board of Directors of the University. I extend my greeting to the academic authorities, to the teachers, the technical and administrative staff, the families and the friends of this institution. And I greet you, dear students, who constitute the centre of academic activity. Thank you for your warm welcome!

You have been convened today to celebrate together a significant milestone, we might say a milestone of maturity in the development of the Athenaeum. Eighty years ago it was established to respond to a need that was then urgent, and still is: that of training educators and in particular female educators, opening up the world of higher education to women. First of all, the aim was to prepare teachers for middle and high schools, and then, by increasing the number of degree courses, to train professionals in the various fields. A "service enterprise", as it was intended to be by your founder, the venerable Luigia Tincani, who was in turn inspired by Saint Catherine of Siena, an indomitable and impassioned woman of the Church.

Today I wish to return this commitment to you, placing it in the context of the epoch change we are experiencing.

We are inspired by two saints whom I have had the joy of proclaiming in recent years: Paul VI and John Henry Newman, two pastors who lived the University and who have proposed with their own pastoral and cultural commitment, respectively, a “university conscience” (cf. *University Conscience: Notes for Students*, Rome), and “an idea of a University” (cf. *The Idea of a University*, Westminster).

Indeed the very term “university” designates a community, but also an idea of the convergence of knowledge, in a research that provides truth and meaning to the dialogue between all the men and women of the world. It is a high task, to be aware of and to be worthy of. In this regard, I intend to offer to you what I said to your colleagues in another Roman university: you must commit yourselves, “also as a university, to projects of sharing and service to the neediest, to favour the growth in our city of Rome, of a sense of belonging to a ‘common homeland’. ... By working on projects, even small ones which favour encounter and solidarity, together we can recover a sense of trust in life” (*Address to “Roma Tre” University*, 17 February 2017).

In fact, the university involves not only a formative but also an educational commitment, which starts from the person and reaches the person. A commitment that cannot but qualify a Catholic university, where the adjective “Catholic” does not introduce a distinction, but rather a surplus of exemplariness: “We need to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 64), in particular “about human dignity and the common good” (*ibid*, 65). Hence the need to renew the assumption of responsibility in the face of the commitments that qualify the university institution in this age in which the processes of communication, technology and global interconnection are accelerated.

1) First of all, a responsibility for coherence, that is, for fidelity and community. The university community always works for the future, but does so with a strong awareness of its roots and a realistic perception of the present. For this reason, I look with confidence to the new generations that are being formed in universities. Actors aware of that change that comes from vision and coherence, starting from a community perspective: in this sense the quality and style of the relationships that you live in the university is fundamental.

2) The result is a cultural and, I would say, missionary responsibility before the world. “What is a university? What is its task?” – Pope Benedict XVI asked himself by addressing the oldest university in the Capital. And he replied as follows: “I think it can be said that the true, intimate origin of the university lies in the desire for knowledge that is proper to man. He wants to know what everything around him is. He wants truth” (*Teachings*, IV, 1 [2008], 81). We should not be afraid to use this word in a spirit of sincere dialogue. Truth, freedom, goodness: in this direction I hope that your university will be able to offer a formation in which, transversally to the curricular knowledge, there is room for the integral formation of the person.

3) Here, then, is the social responsibility of the University. Activating virtuous circuits of integral development with the living forces of society. We need the courage to get involved. To open the sites – in Palermo, Taranto, and Rome – to poverties old and new.

4) Finally, there is an *inter-university* responsibility. Europe has been the cradle of the universities, but it must find its meaning again. Your University should continue to work in the university system at all levels, and in particular with Catholic universities, so that a fruitful climate of cooperation, exchange and mutual help may be created in building innovative teaching and research projects, oriented towards that intellectual charity which does not discount the truth and which is not content with mediocrity.

All of you, students, teachers, and leaders of the university community, I encourage you to open your hearts and minds. Not to be content - you students first of all - with current scores, with apparently hegemonic thinking, with a world in which diversity is conflict. May you feel the healthy ambition to add something original, which is also concrete and useful. You young people, do not be afraid to be demanding with your teachers, who to be teachers must also be witnesses. And you, teachers, do not fear to be demanding with your students, so that they may express the best of themselves.

I reiterate to you, dear brothers and sisters, the motto of the University: *In fide et humanitate*. That “*et*” means

integral education, in a globalized and fragmented world, full of contradictions, which requires so much work together. A serious, creative, artisanal work that passes through the mind, the heart, and the hands.

May Mary, Assumed into Heaven, continue to be the reference and guide for your journey that is renewed today. I thank you for this welcome encounter and from my heart I bless every one of you, and your work. And you, please, do not forget to pray for me.
