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Audience with the adherents to the Service for the Parish Cells of Evangelisation

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father received in audience the adherents to the Service for the Parish Cells of Evangelisation, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of its founding.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am glad that you have chosen to return to Rome to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of your history. I thank Don Piergiorgio Perini for the tireless work of evangelisation he has carried out over these decades. Now you are able to admire some of the fruits that the Lord has granted you with His grace. And thank you for the witness of 65 years of the priesthood and 90 of age! I asked him for the recipe: what does he do to be like this?

The Lord Jesus left His disciples a challenging teaching when He told them: "I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (*Jn 15:16*). Go, bear fruit and abide. This is the call to which one cannot escape when meeting the Lord and being conquered by his Gospel. Of course, Jesus did not tell His disciples that they would see the fruits of their work. He only assured them that the fruits would abide. This promise also applies to us. It is human to think that after so much work we also want to see the fruit of our effort; yet, the Gospel pushes us in a different direction.

Jesus did not give make it easy for His disciples when He spoke of the radicality with which it was necessary to follow Him. He told them: "When you have done all you were commanded, say: 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (*Lc 17: 10*). Yet, if our efforts to proclaim the Gospel are total and we are always ready, then the perspective changes. Another parable reminds us of this, when Jesus says: "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them" (*Lk 12: 37*). Let us touch with our own

hands to feel how great and infinite God's love for us is! If we are faithful and vigilant, then He also allows us to see the fruits of our work.

Your history as Parish Cells of Evangelisation can easily be inscribed in this context. The fruitfulness of your commitment is reflected in the multiplication of Cells, which are now present in many parts of the world. Never tire of following the paths that the Spirit of the Risen Lord sets before you. Do not be afraid of the new, and do not let your pace be slowed by the difficulties that are inevitable on the path of evangelisation. When you are a missionary disciple, then enthusiasm must never be lacking! In your effort, support the prayer addressed to the Holy Spirit Who is the Comforter; in weakness, feel the strength of the community that never allows you to be left to your own devices.

Our parishes are invaded by many initiatives, where often, however, the life of the people is not deeply affected. You too are entrusted with the task of reviving, especially in this period, the life of our parish communities. This will be possible to the extent that they become, above all, a place to listen to the Word of God and celebrate the mystery of His death and resurrection. Only from here can one expect the work of evangelisation to become effective and fecund, capable of bearing fruit. Unfortunately, for many reasons, many have moved away from our parishes. It is urgent, therefore, that we recover the need for encounter so as to reach the people where they live and work. If we have encountered Christ in our lives, then we cannot keep Him only for ourselves. It is crucial that we share this experience with others as well; this is the main road of evangelisation.

Do not forget: every time you meet someone, you play out a real story that can change a person's life. And this is not proselytizing, it is bearing witness. It has always been like that. When Jesus saw Peter, Andrew, James and John working along the shore of the lake, He looked at them and transformed their lives (cf. *Lk 5: 1-11*). The same thing is repeated in our day, when the encounter is the fruit of Christian love; it changes life because it reaches people's hearts and touches them deeply. May your proclamation become a witness of mercy, with which to make it clear that every attention given to one of the least is given to Jesus Himself, Who identifies with them (cf. *Mt 25: 40*).

I accompany you with my blessing and ask you please not to forget to pray for me. Thank you.
