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Inauguration of the 91st Judicial Year of Vatican City State Tribunal

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis presided at the inauguration of the 91st Judicial Year of Vatican City State Tribunal, in the presence of the President of Justice, Promoter of Justice, the officials, the attorneys and the collaborators of the Tribunal.

After the address of homage from the Promoter of Justice, Professor Gian Piero Milano, the Pope addressed the following address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Distinguished gentlemen,

I am delighted to meet so many of you at the opening ceremony of the Judicial Year.

I know that many of you are involved in the institutions responsible for the administration of justice and the safeguarding of law and order. For precisely this reason your work has precious value, because it is a guarantee not only of order, but above all of responsibility in the quality of the interpersonal relations experienced in our territory.

I ask you to pursue, with ever greater conviction, the path of justice, as the path that makes possible an authentic fraternity in which everyone is protected, especially the weakest and most fragile.

The first point I would like to emphasize in this meeting is the Gospel. It teaches us a deeper view of the worldly mentality, and shows us that the justice proposed by Jesus is not a simple set of rules applied technically, but a disposition of the heart that guides those who hold responsibility.

The great exhortation of the Gospel is to establish justice first of all within ourselves, struggling forcefully to tame

the discord within us. For Jesus it is naïve to think that we can remove every root of evil within us without also damaging the good grain (cf. *Mt* 13:24-30). But vigilance over ourselves, with the consequent inner struggle, helps us to ensure that evil does not overcome good.

In the face of this situation, no legal system would be able to save us. In this sense I invite you all to feel you are engaged not only in an external commitment regarding others, but also in a personal task within each of us: our personal conversion. This is the only justice that generates justice!

It must be said, however, that justice alone is not enough, it needs to be accompanied also by the other virtues, especially the cardinal virtues, those that act as hinges: prudence, fortitude and temperance.

Indeed, prudence gives us the ability to distinguish the true from the false and allows us to attribute to each his own.

Temperance as an element of moderation and balance in the evaluation of facts and situations makes us free to decide according to our conscience.

Fortitude allows us to overcome the difficulties we encounter, resisting pressures and passions. It can be especially helpful to you in the solitude that you often experience when making complex and delicate decisions.

Please do not forget that in your daily effort you are often faced with people who hunger and thirst for justice, suffering people, sometimes in existential anguish and despair.

At the moment of judging, delving into the complexity of human affairs, you must give the right answers, combining the correctness of the laws with even more mercy, as taught to us by Jesus. Indeed, mercy is not the suspension of justice, but its fulfilment (cf. *Rm* 13:8-10), since it restores everything to a higher order, where even those condemned to the severest punishments find the redemption of hope.

The task of judging requires not only preparation and balance, but also passion for justice and awareness of the great and dutiful responsibilities of judgment.

Your task cannot neglect the constant commitment to understanding the causes of error, and the fragility of those who have broken the law.

A second point of our reflection on justice is constituted of the laws that regulate interpersonal relationships and therefore their legality, as well as the ethical values that form the background.

In this regard, Vatican legislation has undergone significant reforms compared to the past, especially in the last decade, and particularly in the penal sector.

Underlying these important changes there was not only a natural need for modernization, but also and above all the need to respect the international commitments that the Holy See has also undertaken on behalf of the Vatican State. These commitments concern above all the protection of the human person, threatened in his very dignity, and the protection of social groups, often victims of new, odious, forms of illegality.

The main purpose of these reforms must, therefore, be part of the Church’s mission; indeed it is an integral and essential part of her ministerial activity. This explains the fact that the Holy See is working to share the efforts of the international community to build a just and honest coexistence, and above all attentive to the conditions of the most disadvantaged and excluded, deprived of essential goods, often trampled on in their human dignity and considered invisible and discarded.

In order to give concrete form to this commitment, the Holy See has begun a process of conforming its

legislation to the norms of international law and, on the operational level, has made a particular commitment to combat illegality in the field of finance at international level.

To this end, it has nurtured relations of cooperation and sharing of policies and initiatives of law enforcement, creating internal surveillance and intervention bodies capable of carrying out strict and effective controls.

These actions have recently brought to light suspicious financial situations, which aside from their possible unlawfulness, are not in keeping with the nature and purpose of the Church, and have generated disorientation and anxiety in the community of the faithful.

These events have been brought to the attention of the judiciary, and have yet to be clarified in the profiles of criminal relevance. It is therefore not possible to comment on them at this stage.

In any case, given the full confidence in the work of the judicial and investigative bodies, and without prejudice to the principle of the presumption of innocence of the persons under investigation, a positive fact is that precisely in this case, the first reports were made by internal Vatican Authorities, active, albeit with different competences, in the economic and financial sectors. This demonstrates the effectiveness and efficiency of law enforcement actions, as required by international standards.

The Holy See is firmly resolved to continue along the path undertaken, not only in terms of legislative reforms, which have contributed to a substantial consolidation of the system, but also by initiating new forms of judicial cooperation both at the level of investigative bodies and investigative bodies, in the forms provided for by international norms and practice.

In this field, the Gendarmerie Corps has also distinguished itself for its investigative activity in support of the Office of the Promoter of Justice.

It must be noted that the appreciable reforms introduced over time and which are giving concrete results, remain, however, anchored and dependent on the work of man.

And, in fact, beyond the specifics of the normative materials available to them, those who are called upon to judge, must in any case operate according to human criteria, even before legal ones, because justice, as I mentioned before, does not flow so much from the formal perfection of the system and the rules, but from the quality and rectitude of people, first and foremost judges.

We need, therefore, a particular attitude on the part of the operators, not only intellectually, but also morally and deontologically. In this sense, the promotion of justice requires the contribution of the right people.

The demanding and strong words of Jesus can help us here: “For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (cf. *Mt* 7:2). The Gospel reminds us that our attempts at earthly justice always have as their ultimate horizon the encounter with divine justice, that of the Lord Who awaits us. These words should not frighten us, but rather spur us to do our duty with seriousness and humility.

I would like to conclude by exhorting you to continue in the fulfilment of your vocation and mission essential in the daily effort to establish justice.

Commit yourselves to the awareness of your important responsibilities.

Open up spaces and new paths for the implementation of justice for the promotion of human dignity, of freedom, ultimately, of peace.

I am sure that you will honour this commitment, and I pray that the Lord will accompany you on this journey. And I ask you to pray for me too. Thank you.

And let us ask together, before the blessing, for the protection of Our Lady: that as Mother she may help us in this commitment to justice.

Hail Mary, ...

[Blessing]