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Audience with the participants in the General Chapter of the Order of Discalced Carmelites

The following is the Holy Father Francis' address to the participants in the General Chapter of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, whom he received in audience this morning in the Vatican Apostolic Palace:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers,

I am pleased to welcome you, gathered for the General Chapter from different regions of the world, as representatives of the approximately four thousand brothers who form part of your Order. My greeting is also extended to them, as well as to the Discalced Carmelite nuns and all the members of the Carmelite family, who are following your work in prayer during these days. I thank the new Prior General for his words, and the outgoing Prior General for his service. Thank you.

You began the Chapter guided by three very significant biblical texts. First: listen to what the Spirit says (cf. *Rev* 2:7); second: discern the signs of the times (cf. *Mt* 16:3); third: become witnesses unto the ends of the earth (cf. *Acts* 1:8).

Listening is the fundamental attitude of the disciple, of those who place themselves in the school of Jesus and want to respond to what He asks of us in this time that is difficult but always beautiful, because it is God's time. Listening to the Spirit, in order to be able to *discern* what comes from the Lord and what is contrary to Him and, in this way, to respond, starting from the Gospel, to respond to the signs of the times through which the Lord of history speaks to us and reveals Himself. Listening and discernment, in view of the witness, of the mission carried out by the proclamation of the Gospel, both with words and, above all, with the example of life.

In this time, in which the pandemic has confronted us all with so many questions and which has seen the collapse of so many certainties, you are called, as children of Saint Teresa, to safeguard your fidelity to the perennial elements of your charism. This crisis, if it has anything good - and it certainly does - is precisely to

bring us back to the essential, not to live distracted by false certainties. This is also a favourable context in which to examine the state of health of your Order and nurture the flame of your origins.

At times there are those who wonder what the future of consecrated life is; and some prophets of doom say that its future is short, that consecrated life is coming to an end. But, dear brothers and sisters, these pessimistic views are destined to be disproved, as are those about the Church herself, because the consecrated life is an integral part of the Church, of her eschatological character, of her evangelical genuineness. The consecrated life is part of the Church just as Jesus wanted it to be, and as the Spirit continually generates it. Therefore, the temptation to worry about surviving, rather than living to the full by welcoming the grace of the present, even with the risks it entails, must be removed.

In the school of Christ, it is a question of being faithful to the present and at the same time free and open to the horizon of God, immersed in His mystery of love. The Carmelite life is a contemplative life. This is the gift that the Spirit has given to the Church with Saint Theresa of Jesus and Saint John of the Cross, and then with the Carmelite saints: they are many of them. Faithful to this gift, Carmelite life is a response to the thirst of contemporary humanity, which deep down is thirsting for God, thirsting for the eternal: contemporary humanity often does not understand this, and looks for it everywhere. Carmelite life is sheltered from psychologism, spiritualism, or false novelties that conceal a spirit of worldliness. You know well the temptation of psychologism, spiritualism and worldly novelties: the spirit of worldliness. And here I ask you, please: beware of spiritual worldliness, which is the worst evil that can happen to the Church. When I read this in the last pages of Father de Lubac's meditation on the Church - read the last four pages - I couldn't believe it: but how is it, I was still in Buenos Aires, how is it that this happens? What is this spiritual worldliness? It is very subtle, it is very subtle: it enters and we do not notice it. The text quotes a Benedictine spiritual father: de Lubac takes that text and says: "It is the worst of the evils to beset the Church, indeed, worse than that at the time of the concubine Popes". I also said this to the Claretians the other day: one can see that *L'Osservatore Romano* was frightened by this text, which is not mine, it is de Lubac's, and put, "worse than the concubine *fathers*": it was afraid of the truth. I hope *L'Osservatore* will correct it well.

Spiritual worldliness is terrible, it gets inside you. It is in the Gospel, as Jesus said, when he speaks of "educated demons", of "educated devils", because Jesus says this: when the unclean spirit has been driven out of a person's soul he begins to wander around deserted places and then "he gets bored", "he has nothing to do", and he says: "I will come back and see what my house was like". He comes back and sees that everything is clean, everything is in order and, Jesus says, "He goes and takes seven devils worse than himself and enters. And the end of that man is worse than the beginning". But how do these seven devils enter? Not like thieves, no: they ring the bell, say good morning and enter little by little, they go in little by little and you don't notice that they have taken possession of your house. This is the spirit of worldliness. It enters little by little, it enters even in prayer, it gets in. Be careful of this. It is the worst evil that can happen to the Church and, if you don't believe me, read the last four pages of Father de Lubac's Meditation on the Church. Beware of spiritual worldliness.

Let us remember that evangelical fidelity is not stability of place, but stability of heart; that it does not consist in refusing change, but in making the necessary changes to meet what the Lord asks of us, here and now. And so fidelity demands a steadfast commitment to the values of the Gospel and to one's own charism, and the renunciation of that which prevents one from giving the best of oneself to the Lord and to others.

From this perspective, I encourage you to maintain the link between friendship with God, fraternal life in community, and mission, as we read in the preparatory documents for your Chapter. Friendship with the Lord is, for Saint Teresa, living in communion with Him; it is not just praying, but making a prayer of life; it is walking - as your Rule says - "*in obsequio Iesu Christi*", and doing so in joy. Another thing I would like to stress: joy. It is ugly to see consecrated men and women with a long face. It is ugly, it is ugly. Joy must come from within: that joy that is peace, an expression of friendship. Another thing I put in the Exhortation on holiness: a sense of humour. Please do not lose your sense of humour. In *Gaudete et exsultate* I have included, in that chapter, a prayer by Saint Thomas More asking for a sense of humour. Recite it, it will do you good. Always with that joy of the humble, who accept the normal, everyday things of life, so as to live in joy. With this in mind, I encourage you to keep friendship with God, fraternal life in community and the mission connected, as I have said.

Friendship with God ripens in silence, in recollection, in listening to the Word of God; it is a flame that must be nurtured and protected day by day.

The warmth of this inner fire also helps to practise fraternal life in community. It is not an accessory element, but rather a substantial one. You are reminded of this by your very name: “barefoot brothers”. Rooted in your relationship with God, the Trinity of Love, you are called to cultivate relationships in the Spirit, in a healthy tension between being alone and being with others, against the tide of individualism and the standardisation of the world. Individualism and standardization. Community life. Saint Mother Teresa exhorts us to the “style of fraternity”, “*el estilo de hermandad*”. It is an art that is learned day by day: to be a family united in Christ, “barefoot brothers of Mary”, taking the Holy Family of Nazareth and the apostolic community as models. The holy Family of Nazareth: thank you for mentioning Saint Joseph, do not forget him! One of you once gave me an image of Saint Joseph with a prayer, a humble prayer that says: “Accept me, as I accepted Jesus”. It is a beautiful prayer, that I pray every day. It asks Saint Joseph to accept us and to help us progress in the spiritual life, to be our spiritual father, as he was a father to Jesus and to the Holy Family.

Starting from friendship with God and fraternal style of life, you are also called to rethink your mission, with creativity and decisive apostolic zeal, paying great attention to today’s world. I would like to insist on what I have already mentioned above: this renewal of your mission is inseparably linked to fidelity to the contemplative vocation: you will find out how to do it, but it is linked. You must not imitate the mission of other charisms, but be faithful to your own, to give to the world what the Lord has given you for the good of all, that is, the living water of contemplation. Contemplation is not an escape from reality, enclosure in a protected oasis, but an opening of the heart and life to the power that truly transforms the world, that is, God's love. It was in prolonged solitary prayer that Jesus received the impetus to “break” his life every day among the people. And so do the saints: the generosity and courage of their apostolate are the fruit of their profound union with God.

Dear brothers, harmony between these three elements: friendship with God, fraternal life, and mission, is a fascinating goal, capable of motivating your present and future choices. May the Holy Spirit – it is He who creates harmony - enlighten and guide your steps on this path. May the Holy Virgin keep you and accompany you. I bless you from the bottom of my heart. And remember, do not forget to pray for me - I need it. Thank you!
