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Audience with participants in the General Chapter of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joan Antida Thouret

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience in the Vatican Apostolic Palace the participants in the 21st General Chapter of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joan Antida Thouret, taking place from 25 September to 15 October 2021.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear sisters!

I welcome you on the occasion of your 21st General Chapter, which you have finally been able to celebrate, after a year, as the Mother General said to me earlier. I thank the newly elected Superior General for her greeting: I wish her and the new Council a serene and fruitful service. And I join you in your gratitude for the outgoing Superior and Counsellors. This is good because... they are leaving... thank you very much... the same will happen to us. Life is such...

Sister Nunzia herself, when she wrote to ask for an audience, noted the coincidence of your Chapter with the opening of the Synod. She wrote: "We will be in communion with the entire Church and with you". I would like to pause for a moment on this. First of all, I thank you for your prayers, with which you accompany the beginning of the synodal journey. But I would also like to take advantage of this coincidence to highlight that the commitment we take on as a Church to grow in synodality is also a strong incentive for Institutes of Consecrated Life. In particular, you consecrated persons are an irreplaceable presence in the great community on the move that is the Church. The image of Jesus walking along the roads of Galilee, Samaria and Judea comes to mind: with him are his disciples, and among them many women; we even know the names of some of them (cf. *Lk* 8:1-3). I liked what the (former) Superior General said: "I am going back to the road": it is beautiful, beautiful, with the people. I like to think that you consecrated women are an extension of that feminine presence that walked with Jesus and

with the Twelve, sharing the mission and giving your own particular contribution.

And you, Sisters of Charity, in what specific way do you participate in this journey? What is your original contribution? I leave you with these questions, which naturally do not have ready-made, pre-formulated answers. And answers that are not pre-formulated are the best... But it seems to me that the theme of your Chapter contains an answer. In fact, the theme is: *Starting afresh from Bethany, with the solicitude of Martha and the listening of Mary.*

Firstly, here we have again the presence of two women, Martha and Mary, with their names and faces. Two disciples who had a very important place in the life of Jesus and the Twelve, as we can see in the Gospels. This confirms that first and foremost, *as women and as baptised persons*, that is, *disciples* of Jesus, you are a living presence in the Church, participating in communion and mission. We must never forget what lies at the root: Baptism. Because here lies the root of everything. From this root God has made the plant of the consecrated life grow in you, in accordance with the charism of Saint Joan Antida.

But the theme of your Chapter says even more, with those two words: "solicitude" and "listening". I am certain that if you truly succeed in living with solicitude and listening, following the example of the holy sisters Martha and Mary of Bethany, you will continue to make your contribution, a precious contribution to the journey of the whole Church. In particular, *solicitude for the poor and listening to the poor*. Here you are teachers. You are teachers not with words, but with deeds, with the history of so many of your sisters who have given their lives for this, in solicitude and listening to the elderly, the sick, the marginalised; close to the little ones, to the last among us, with the tenderness and compassion of God. This builds up the Church, and makes her walk in the way of Christ, which is the way of charity. I said that your witness is a witness to being close to the least, with tenderness and compassion. This is God's style: closeness, tenderness and compassion. God is always like this. To the extent that we do the same, we will be more like shepherds, like God. Do not forget this: always closeness, always compassion and always tenderness.

Therefore, dear sisters, I thank you from my heart on behalf of all the Church. May the Virgin Mary and Saint Joan Antida protect you always. I bless you and all your sisters around the world. And please, continue to pray for me: I am in need. Thank you!
