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Audience with the Delegation of the Catholic Action Movement of France

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of the Catholic Action Movement of France, on the occasion of their pilgrimage to Rome.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you all affectionately, and I thank Msgr. Fonlupt for his kind words. I am glad to welcome you on the occasion of your pilgrimage to Rome. I would also like to greet, through you, all the members of the équipes of Catholic Action in France, and I ask you to assure them of my prayer and my closeness.

Coming to meet the Pope is a long-standing habit of your movements. Already in 1929, Pope Pius XI had received some representatives of Catholic Action, and at that time welcomed in the movement "the renewal and continuation of what was in the early days of Christianity, for the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, [...] in the cooperation of the laity with the Apostles" (12 June 1929). You have chosen "Apostles today" as the theme of your pilgrimage. I would like to reflect with you on our call to be, effectively, apostles of today, starting out from the intuition that is left to you by one of the great figures of Catholic Action, Abbé Cardijn: namely, the "revision of life". When the disciples walk with Jesus on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24, 18-35), they begin by *remembering* the events they have experienced; then they recognize the presence of God in those events; and finally, they act by returning to Jerusalem to proclaim Christ's resurrection. To *see*, to *judge* and to *act*: you know these three words well! Let us look at them again together.

To *see*. This first stage is basic: it consists of pausing to observe the events that form our life, that is, that constitute our history, our familiar, cultural, and Christian roots. The pedagogy of Catholic Action always begins with a moment of remembering, in the strongest sense of the word: an "anamnesis", which means retrospectively understanding the meaning of what is and what has been experienced, and of perceiving how God was present at every moment. The finesse and delicacy of the Lord's action in our life at time prevents us

from understanding it at the time, and it takes this distance to grasp the whole. The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, which your groups have studied, begins with an overview of the situation, at times troubling, of our world. It may seem somewhat pessimistic, but it is necessary to go ahead: “We can never move forward without remembering the past; we do not progress without an honest and unclouded memory” (249).

The second stage is to *judge*, or one might say, to *discern*. It is the moment in which we let ourselves be questioned and placed in discussion. The key to this stage is reference to the Sacred Scripture. It means accepting that one’s own life has crossed the threshold of the Word of God, which, as the Letter to the Hebrews says, “is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword … and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”. In *Fratelli Tutti*, I chose the parable of the Good Samaritan to question our relationship with the world, with others, and in particular with the poorest. In the encounter between the events of the world and of our life, on the one hand, and the Word of God, on the other, we can discern the appeals the Lord addresses to us. Your Catholic Action Movements have developed truly synodal practices throughout their history, especially in group life, which constitutes the basis of your experience. The Church too, in her entirety, has undertaken a synodal process, and counts on your contribution. Let us recall, in this regard, that synodality is not a simple discussion. Nor is it an “adjective”. Never adjективize the substantiality of life. Nor is synodality the search for the consensus of the majority; this is what a parliament does, this is what is done in politics. It is not a plan, a programme to be implemented. No. It is a style to be assumed, in which the main protagonist is the Holy Spirit, who is expressed first and foremost in the Word of God, read, meditated upon and shared together. Let us take the concrete image of the cross: it has a vertical arm and a horizontal arm. The horizontal arm is our life, our history, our humanity. The vertical arm is the Lord who comes to visit us with his Word and his Spirit, to give meaning to what we are living. To focus on Jesus’ cross, as Saint Paul says (cf. *Gal* 2:19), means accepting to place my life under his gaze, to accept this encounter between my poor humanity and his transforming divinity. Please, always leave an important place for the Word of God in the life of your groups. And likewise, leave space for prayer, for the inner life, for worship.

And so we come to the third stage: to *act*. The Gospel teaches us that action – which is the very name of your movement – should always have God’s initiative. After the resurrection, Saint Mark refers that “the Lord worked with [the Apostles] and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it” (16:20). Thus, “acting belongs to the Lord: he has the exclusive right to it, walking “incognito” in the history we inhabit” (Address to Italian Catholic Action, April 2021). Our role therefore consists of supporting and promoting God’s action in hearts, adapting it to reality which evolves continuously. The people whom your movement reaches – I think in particular of the young – are not the same as a few years ago. Today, especially in Europe, those who belong to Christian movements are more skeptical with regard to institutions, and they seek less demanding, more ephemeral relationships. They are more sensitive to the affections, and therefore more vulnerable, more fragile than previous generations, less rooted in faith, but nonetheless in search of meaning, of truth, and no less generous. It is your mission, as Catholic Action, to go to them as they are, to enable them to grow in love of Christ and of neighbour, and to lead them to greater concrete commitment, so they may be protagonists of their life and of the life of the Church, so as to change the world.

Thank you, dear friends, heartfelt thanks for your generous service, which the Church needs more than ever, in this time when I hope so much that everyone will find or rediscover the joy of knowing the friendship of Christ and proclaiming the Gospel. I ask you to keep me in your prayers. I entrust you, those responsible, as well as all the members of your teams, to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, and I give you my blessing.