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Audience with participants in the General Conference of the Marist Brothers

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Conference of the Marist Brothers.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, good morning and welcome!

I thank the Superior General for his words and I greet all of you who are participating in your institute's General Conference, a very important event that brings you together every eight years, between two General Chapters.

It is therefore an important moment for reflection, for reading the signs of the times, and also for assessing how the journey is going and how the indications given by the previous Chapter are being received. But not looking back, always looking forward! Like someone who is at the helm of a boat: to see if the course is right, he doesn't look at the wake behind him, but looks ahead, keeping an eye on two or three points of reference for orientation. I imagine that you too have checked your course on the basis of a few fixed points. And the first fixed point is the Word of God. We are in Lent, and Mother Church is calling us to put things back in the right order: in first place is God and his Word. It is easy to say, but it is not easy to do it! Especially when the Word asks us to "look farther," to "look beyond," as the title of your Conference says. Beyond what? Beyond the worldly mentality, beyond short term interests, beyond a partial perspective, in order to open up to the horizon of a universal fraternity. But always beyond.

It seems that this is the perspective you have chosen for your work in these days, to be able to serve in the best way a family – that of the Marist Brothers – that is multicultural and multiethnic, and therefore demands that you overcome the boundaries, not so much geographical, but mental. This does not mean detaching from your roots, absolutely not! There is no contradiction between fidelity to the roots and universal openness: it is continuity,

normal growth. On the contrary, following the model of Christ the Lord, it means remaining faithful to the end to the covenant of love with the people entrusted to us, so that our service becomes fruitful for everyone, by the power and the grace of God. This is the fruitfulness that enables us to look ahead with fortitude.

For the Marist Brothers, this means remaining faithful to the service of the education and evangelization of the young, following the charism of Saint Marcellin Champagnat. He knew how to “look beyond”, and he knew how to teach the young to “look beyond”, to open themselves to God, to the prospects of love according to the Gospel. He was led by the example of the Virgin Mary, the “good Mother”, as he used to say: Mary was a little woman from an outlying village, but her heart looked beyond, she had the horizon of the Kingdom of God, she was open. And this shines through in the *Magnificat*, where God’s plan of salvation resounds through the voice of his humble servant. What is more beautiful, more effective than the *Magnificat* in teaching a girl or a boy how to open up to God and his plan of love? The *Magnificat* contains a vision of life and history; it is a school of faith and prayer, that frees us from being wrapped up in ourselves and from every form of spiritualism, and shows us the joy of believing, hoping and loving in accordance with Christ’s Gospel.

All this, dear brothers, belongs to you, it belongs to your roots and to your heritage, and demands always to be linked with the changing reality, with the characteristics of the new generations. For example, the young are showing sensitivity to and interest in ecology. Here there is a tremendous field for education, because unfortunately the worldly mentality – permit me a play on words – also pollutes ecology; it reduces it, making it ideological and superficial. Instead, God’s horizon is that of an integral ecology, that always keeps together the environmental and social dimensions, the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. Children and the young are predisposed to become guardians of creation, but they need to learn that this does not reduce it to slogans; it is not merely a denunciation, but rather it is a way of life, requiring patience, fortitude, temperance and justice. In short, one is not born a custodian of creation, but becomes one through an educational journey.

This also belongs to you. And the example I gave about ecology can be applied to other fields, such as social and political commitment, the field of communication, or even earlier, that of study and work, seen from the point of view of the integral promotion of the person. But above all, as religious, spiritual education, which is the basis for integral growth, belongs to you. This belongs to you as religious: spiritual education. Jesus Christ is the Master of life and truth, the way to follow to become men and women in their fullness, and the Holy Spirit is the interior Teacher who forms Christ in us. What a vocation, what a mission, brothers, to cooperate with Christ and the Spirit to accompany young people in this adventure! It is really too great for us, poor sinners. But God - our Mother reminds us - loves to do great things with the little ones and the poor, as long as they open themselves humbly to Him and welcome His Word, placing themselves fully at his disposal.

This is what I wish for you and for all your brothers and sisters throughout the world. To look beyond, so as to educate in looking beyond, with Mary, in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. And this is precisely the strongest critique of the Enlightenment conception of education, that is, copying ideas, ideas, ideas... No. To educate to look beyond in order to teach to look beyond. This destroys the whole static and enlightened, ideological conception of education. Education is a challenge to the whole person: to the way people think, feel and work. But this must look beyond.

May the Holy Spirit always enlighten and comfort you on your journey and in your service. And may my blessing accompany you as well. And you, please, do not forget to pray for me, because this work is not easy!
