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Audience with participants in the General Chapters of the Order of the Mother of God, the Basilian Order of Saint Josaphat, and the Congregation of the Mission

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Chapters of the Order of the Mother of God, the Basilian Order of Saint Josaphat, and the Congregation of the Mission.

The following is the Holy Father's address to those present during the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers of the Order of the Mother of God,

of the Basilian Order of San Josaphat,

and of the Congregation of the Mission, welcome!

I am keen to receive the General Chapters because it is a way of communicating with consecrated life, it is so important in the Church but there is not always the time, and indeed in this holiday season it is closed here, but for you it has been opened up in this new way, at least three of you together, please do not make war among yourselves! Some may think it is a "patchwork" of institutes, but it is as beautiful as the variety of the Church, and I am breaking the July "fast" to welcome you on the occasion of your General Chapters. I warmly return the greetings of the three Superiors and thank them for presenting the paths and prospects of their respective Institutes. I also wish first of all to express the Church's gratitude to you for the witness you give as consecrated persons and for the apostolic activity you carry out wherever you are present. Consecrated – this is important, this is in first place.

In these days you are engaged in the work of the Chapters. You, Clerics of the Mother of God, and you, priests

of the Mission, are approaching the end, whereas you Basilians have just started. I extend my wishes to those who have been elected for the service of governing, and I join in your gratitude for those who have concluded it.

I also think that for you, these Chapters have represented a coming together again in person after the period of forced distancing due to the pandemic. This should also help you not take for granted the fact of being able to meet and exchange, looking one another in the eye, and above all to pray together, to listen to the Word together and to share the Eucharist. So let us savour again what we had perhaps grown accustomed to; and let us once again be aware of what the Lord Jesus said as he took leave of his disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (cf. *Jn* 15:5). The Chapter members do this in person, but spiritually it is transmitted to all the confreres, to all the religious family, far beyond what we can know and experience.

The Chapter, in particular, is the moment of *community discernment*. It is not giving ideas, no, it is "discerning", with community discernment: with the help of the Holy Spirit we try to see if and to what extent we have been faithful to the charism, in what the Spirit drives us to go forward and in what instead he asks us to change; if the Spirit is not in a Chapter, close the doors and go home! He must be almost the protagonist of a Chapter. This is one of the most beautiful and most strongly "ecclesial" experiences we are granted: to come together to listen to the Spirit, presenting him with real situations, issues, problems... It is what we read in the Acts of the Apostles, regarding the first communities, and what we are called upon to relive in the Church and the world today.

Now, dear brothers, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate a criterion that I consider essential in discernment: the criterion of evangelization. When we ask ourselves about our creative faith to the original charism, we must ask ourselves if our way of interpreting and implementing it is "evangelizing", that is, if the choices we make – with regard to content, methods, tools, lifestyle – are oriented towards bearing witness to and announcing the Gospel. We know that by their nature, the charisms are different and that the Holy Spirit always creates them and distributes them with imagination and variety. But one thing is certain: the charisms, as Saint Paul teaches, are all for the edification of the Church, and since the Church is not for itself, they do not have this dimension of particularity, no, they are all for the edification of the Church, and since the Church is not an end in itself, but rather a means to evangelizing, it follows that every charism, bar none, can and must cooperate in evangelization. And this must be kept clearly in mind in discernment. And think that the vocation of the Church is to evangelize; or rather, the joy of the Church is to evangelize, as Pope Saint Paul VI said in that Letter that, even today, after so many years, remains current, *Evangelii nuntiandi*. The vocation of the Church is to evangelize, the joy of the Church is to evangelize.

With this principle in mind, there is no need to dwell on abstract theories, but rather it is better to *learn from the Saints*: in your case, Saint Giovanni Leonardi, Saint Josaphat and Saint Vincent de Paul. Precisely in their diversity, they show what it means to be "Spirit-filled evangelizers": "evangelizers who pray and work". Evangelizers, not proselytizers, because evangelizing is not proselytism, the one has nothing to do with the other. "Mystical notions without a solid social and missionary outreach are of no help to evangelization, nor are dissertations or social or pastoral practices which lack a spirituality which can change hearts" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 262). The witness of the Saints confirms to us that "what is needed is the ability to cultivate an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity. Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out" (*ibid.*). And allow me to ask you a question: do you worship in prayer? Or have you forgotten what worship means? Worship. Think of this, the freeness of worship. I think that in our time there is the danger of forgetting this. "Do I worship? Do I know what it is to worship?" All of you, answer to yourselves.

As religious brothers, are you required to evangelize, not only on the personal level, like every baptized person, but also in a *community* form, with *fraternal life*. This is the high road to showing belonging to Christ, because he himself assured his disciples: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*Jn* 13:35). But we are well aware, also by experience, of how demanding this is: it is the great challenge of communal life, inconceivable for the mentality of the world, but for this very reason, a sign of the Kingdom of God. It requires a daily attitude of conversion, it requires willingness to question oneself, vigilance over rigidity as well as excessive and "comfortable" tolerance. Above all, it requires humility and simplicity of

heart, which we must never cease to ask of God, because they come from Him. For us in fact, who, unlike our Holy Mother, have original sin, humility and simplicity of heart are not “natural” gifts, no, but the work within us of divine Grace, always to be welcomed, always to be renewed in the journey of life and in different relational contexts.

It is there, in the crucible of relationships, that our hearts are tested and that, with the commitment of everyone, a beautiful testimony of brothers can take shape. Not something mawkish, not a superficial harmony, not a homogeneity flattened out by the personality of the superior or some leader. No, no. A free fraternity, with a taste for diversity and in search of an ever more evangelical harmony. As in an orchestra with many instruments, where the essential thing is not the skill of the soloists, but the ability of each one to listen to all the others to create the best possible harmony.

And that is what gives rise to joy. Just as I asked the question "Do I worship?" that each of you must ask yourselves, "Do I know how to worship in silence?", I would also like to ask you another: "Am I joyful in my vocation, or do I get by as best I can, or do I look for joy elsewhere?" A real joy, not formal joy, not that joy with that smile that says nothing, not the artificial smile, “brother, brother”, and then the dagger in the back. It happens, it happens, we know. The non-formal joy, not the artificial smile. The joy of being Christ's and being together, with our limitations and our sins. Joy of being forgiven by God and sharing this forgiveness with our brothers and sisters. This joy cannot be hidden, it shines through! And it is contagious. It is the joy of the saints and holy men and women, who, if they are founders, are not founders by birth. One is not born a founder! One becomes one by attraction: in the twofold sense that first of all Christ attracts that man or woman to Himself; and so he or she is able to attract others to him. Let us emphasize this “to Him”: the saint does not attract to himself, but always to the Lord. So, humility and simplicity of heart and joy. This is the way of an evangelizing fraternity. Impossible to men, but not to God! One of the things that kills community joy is gossip. Please, no gossip, nothing! If you have something against another person, go and say it to their face. Or say it to those who can put it right, but don't say it secretly: chit-chat destroys, not only the community, it destroys yourself. Gossip is not for men, Gossip makes people superficial, they go from one side to the other and live in this way. Please guard your tongues. I know it is not easy in a religious congregation to avoid chatter. I was once told there is a good medicine for that: bite your tongue in time. Yes, it will swell a little, but at least... Please, I ask you: no chatter. This kills, this destroys.

And I would not like to end without expressing my closeness to you, dear Ukrainian Basilian brothers, in this moment of pain, in this moment of martyrdom of your homeland. I would like to tell you that I am close to you, the whole Church is close, all of you. We accompany you as we can in your pain. I often think that one of the greatest dangers now is to forget the drama of Ukraine. One gets used to it, one gets used to it... and then it is not so important and one talks... In recent days, I saw in the newspaper that the news about the war was on page 9! It's not a problem of interest, and this is bad, it's bad. That is why we are close to you and we must all look to them because they are suffering martyrdom right now. You are suffering martyrdom. And I hope that the Lord will have compassion on you and in another way be close to you with peace and the gift of peace. Then one more thing I would like to say to you, lest we forget. You are three religious congregations, one of the problems, we know, that exist so many times, is the problem of abuse. Please remember this well: zero tolerance on abuse of minors or incapacitated persons, zero tolerance. Please do not hide this reality. We are religious, we are priests in order to bring people to Jesus, not to “consume” people with our concupiscence. And the abuser destroys, he “consumes” the abused with his concupiscence. Zero tolerance. Do not be ashamed to report it: “He did this, he did that...” “I accompany you, you are a sinner, you are a sick person, but I have to protect others”. Please, I beg you, zero tolerance. You do not solve this with a transfer. “Ah, I'll send him to this continent, I'll send him to the other continent...”. No.

Dear brothers, I beg the Holy Spirit to grant you His gifts in abundance, so that you may discern what He suggests to you; may He give you strength to face challenges, and constancy in your ecclesial service. May the Virgin Mary protect you, help you and be the sure guide on your path. From my heart I bless you all and your Institutes, and I ask you please do not forget to pray for me, because this work is not easy.

