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Audience with the Schönstatt Fathers on the occasion of the General Chapter

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Schönstatt Fathers on the occasion of their General Chapter.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Schönstatt Fathers,

I thank the new Superior General, Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello, for his kind words, as well as his service as secretary in the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life. And in other preceding services, because I knew him when he was "little" ("de podriilo"): you were my secretary at Aparecida, then my guide in the visit to Rio de Janeiro, and finally my secretary *causae*. Thank you, Father, for your collaboration during these recent years in communion with Peter's Successor, for the benefit of the entire Church. I wish you a fruitful ministry in this new responsibility that has been entrusted to you. At the same time, dear Fathers of the Schönstatt community, I pray that the Holy Spirit will make all your efforts during the General Chapter bear fruit. I would also like to thank Catoggio, that he sent you back to Africa. Thank you, thank you.

The mystery of redemption that Our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for all humanity and for the entire world has the characteristic note of the Hebrew word *berith*, a pact or covenant. The blood shed by Jesus on the Cross and offered as a sacrifice of love for us all (cf. *Mk 14: 24; 1 Cor 11: 25*) constituted an irrevocable bond between God and humanity: a covenant of love, a covenant of salvation.

And you, dear brothers, perform a good service to the Church and to the world, especially by accompanying families in the various events and vicissitudes they go through, announcing to all their members the beauty of the "Covenant of Love" that the Lord has established with his people. Nowadays there are many marriages in crisis, young people tempted, elderly people forgotten, children who suffer. And you are the bearers of a

message of hope in these bleak situations that run through every phase of life. And this advances somewhat in tandem with that plundering of human values, an unbridled plundering by ideological colonizations of every type.

Yes, the world increasingly demands that we give answers to the questions and apprehensions of the men and women of our time. We often see that the nature of the family is under attack by various ideologies, that rock the foundations that support the personality of the human person and all of society in general. Furthermore, within families, very often we see a gap of understanding between the elderly and the young. Recently, in the Wednesday catecheses, I have affirmed that the alliance between the generations, or rather between the elderly and children, is what can save humanity (cf. *Catechesis of the General Audience*, 17 August 2022), since in this way personal and family identity is conserved; one does not inherit only a genetic heritage or a surname, but also and above all one inherits the wisdom of what it means to be human, according to God's plan. The mystery of our redemption is therefore intimately linked also to the experience of love lived in families. And let us not forget that in the final analysis, faith is always transmitted in dialect through families, through the elderly, grandparents.

I think of the example offered to us by the Holy Family, and especially the Virgin Mary, who cares, with a tender and devoted heart, for all her sons and daughters, especially the poorest in body and spirit. In the beautiful hymn of the *Magnificat*, she confesses the prowess of the Lord, who "has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty" (*Lk* 1: 52-53), referring to the promise, the covenant made with "our fathers" in faith (cf. *Lk* 1: 55). The Blessed Virgin Mary, venerated with great love by every member of the Schönstatt community with the title "Mother Thrice Admirable", is a fundamental model for all, who leads us to create bridges based on fraternal charity and on the communion of goods with those most in need, and at the same time gives us hope and courage to reach out to those who have drifted away from friendship with the Lord, to recover them with the witness of a new life in Christ, characterized by mercy.

On my nightstand is enthroned the statue of the Virgin - Alexandre put it there, and after a fortnight he also brought a crown to crown her. That is, I have the whole ceremony done by your "sect". So every time I enter my bedroom it is the first thing I see, and I have to remember you.

I encourage you, dear brothers, to go ahead in your apostolates, always renewing yourselves with the grace of the Holy Spirit and showing the courage to open up new pathways in the service of families, to make the beauty of the Covenant - the beauty of the Covenant - established between God and mankind shine forth, with the spirituality and lived experience of Christian values. May Our Lord Jesus Christ, through the mediation of the *Mater Admirabilis*, always grant all members of the Schönstatt community abundant fruits of holiness. May God bless you. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
