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Audience with participants in the General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the participants in the General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to whom the Pope delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers,

Good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to meet you, on the occasion of your General Chapter. I thank the Superior General — poor thing, taken from the desert and brought here to Rome! — for his introduction, and I wish serene and fruitful work to him and the new Council. And let us thank the Superior and the Counsellors who have concluded their service.

You are a religious family dedicated to evangelization, and you are gathered to discern together the future of your mission in the Church and in the world. You have chosen, for this Chapter, a demanding theme, very similar to what has been chosen for the Church's next Jubilee: "Pilgrims of hope in communion". It is a theme that sums up your identity on the streets of the world, to which, as disciples of Jesus and followers of your founder Saint Eugène de Mazenod, you are called to bring the Gospel of hope, joy and peace. It is a world that, on the one hand seems to have reached seemingly unreachable goals, yet on the other is still enslaved by selfishness and full of contradictions and divisions. The cry of the earth and of the poor, wars and conflicts that shed blood on human history, the distressing situation of millions of migrants and refugees, an economy that makes the rich ever richer and the poor ever poorer, are some aspects of a scenario where only the Gospel can keep the light of hope burning.

You have chosen to be pilgrims, to rediscover and live your condition as wayfarers in this world, beside the men and women, the poor and the least of the earth, to whom the Lord sends you to announce his Kingdom. Your

founder too was a wayfarer, at the origins of your religious family, when he would go walking with his first companions in the villages of his native Provence, preaching the popular missions and restoring to the faith the poor who had turned away from it, and that even the ministers of the Church had abandoned. It is a tragedy when the ministers of the Church abandon the poor.

Pilgrims and wayfarers, always ready to set out, like Jesus with his disciples in the Gospel. As a missionary Congregation, you are at the service of the Church in 70 countries throughout the world. To this Church, which the Founder taught you to love as a mother, you offer your missionary zeal and your life, participating in her exodus towards the peripheries of the world beloved by God, and living a charism that leads you towards the furthest, the poorest, those whom no one reaches. Walking this road with love and fidelity, you, dear brothers, render a great service to the Church.

You have heard the call to rediscover your identity as priests and brothers united by the bonds of religious consecration. Pilgrims of hope, you walk with the holy people of God, living in fidelity your missionary vocation, together with laypersons and young people who share in the Church the charism of your holy Founder, and who wish to play an active part in your mission. Saint Eugène taught you to look at the world with the eyes of the crucified Saviour, this world for whose salvation Christ died on the cross.

You have already dedicated one of your preceding General Chapters to the theme of hope, when you heard a particular call to be witnesses to this virtue in a world that seems to have lost it, and that seeks elsewhere the source of its happiness. Being missionaries of hope means knowing how to read the signs of its hidden presence in the daily life of the people. Learning to recognize hope among the poor to whom you have been sent, who often succeed in finding it amid the most difficult situations. Letting yourselves be evangelized by the poor you evangelize: they teach you the way of hope, for the Church and for the world.

In addition, you wish to be witnesses of hope in communion. Communion today is a challenge on which the future of our world, the Church and consecrated life may depend. To be missionaries of communion, it is necessary first of all to live it among ourselves, in our communities and in mutual relations, and then to cultivate it with everyone, without exception. You frequently referred, during your Chapter, to the ecclesial pathway of this time, which is rediscovering the beauty and the importance of “walking together”. I urge you to be promoters of communion through expressions of solidarity, closeness, synodality and fraternity with all. May the Good Samaritan of the Gospel be an example and a stimulus to make you close to every person, with the love and tenderness that impelled him to take care of the robbed and wounded man (cf. Lk 10:29-37). To make yourself a neighbour is a daily job, because selfishness pulls you in, pulls you down; to make yourself neighbour is to go out.

In this Chapter, you have also often evoked your commitment to the common home, seeking to translate it into concrete decisions and actions. I encourage you to continue to work in this direction. Our mother earth nourishes us without asking for anything in exchange; it is up to us to understand that she cannot continue to do so if we do not also take care of her. They are all aspects of that conversion to which the Lord calls us continually. Returning to the common Father, returning to the source, returning to the first love that prompted you to leave everything in order to follow Jesus: this is the soul of consecration and mission!

May your Founder, the charism he transmitted to you, and his missionary vision be and remain points of reference for your life and your work; to stay rooted in your missionary vocation, above all by living the testament of your Founder, in mutual love among yourselves and in zeal for the salvation of souls. It is the heart of your mission and the secret of your life, and this is why the Church still needs you. In the immense field of mission that is the entire world, may Jesus always be your model, as he was for Saint Eugène. Before the crucified Saviour, he decided one day to offer his own life so that everyone, especially the poor, might be able to experience the same love of God that had restored him to the path of faith.

This year you celebrated the memorial of a special grace that Saint Eugène received two centuries ago, before the statue of Our Lady Immaculate in the church of the mission in Aix-en-Provence. This renews to you the invitation to take Mary as your travelling companion, so that she may always accompany you on your pilgrimage.

Mary the pilgrim, Mary journeying, Mary who arose in haste to go and serve. After saying her “yes” to God through the archangel Gabriel, she departed in haste to go to her cousin Elizabeth, to share the gift and to place herself at her service. In this too, may Mary be an example to you, for your life and for your mission.

Dear brothers, I wish you a good conclusion to your Chapter, and I accompany you with prayer. From the heart, I bless all of you and your confrères, especially those who are sick and frail, and those who are in difficulty at this time. And you too, please, pray for me. Thank you!