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Audience with participants in the pastoral days of the French-speaking Catholic Communities in the world

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the pastoral days of the French-speaking Catholic Communities in the world.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank Bishop Denis Jachiet for his words. I am happy to welcome you, the members of the Francophone Catholic communities in the world, accompanied by your brother bishops, whom I warmly greet and thank. Together you have organized this meeting, on the occasion of your Pastoral Days. Your communities unite French-speakers who, living abroad, seek to share fraternity in order to experience the joy of the Gospel together. I thank you for coming and I extend my greetings to all the French-speakers who belong to your communities.

These days of pastoral formation that you are spending in Rome, reflecting together on the Church's synodal process, are a sign of communion: communion of your local communities with the dioceses where you are; communion with the Church in France; and communion with the Pope and the universal Church. I would like to share with you a few ideas taken from the Word of God and attuned to this deepening of your understanding of synodality in the Church.

The first thing I notice is that Jesus' disciples, after his Ascension, began to gather in the Upper Room. They are

all united “with one heart” (cf. *Acts* 1:14). We too are called to meet and remain united, and to turn to others, to let ourselves be challenged by the questions of our brothers and sisters, to help each other and enrich each other in the diversity of our charisms, vocations and ministries. Strengthened by our cultural differences, our differences of approach to the faith, let us become experts in the art of encounter. And this is very important: the art of encounter. You have the great opportunity to experience this in the countries where you are. With the local Christians you are called to form one heart, to be a community not closed in on itself in sterile isolation, but as an active part of the local Church. Meeting faces, crossing gazes, sharing the story of each one: this is the closeness of Jesus that we are called to experience. *An encounter can change a life*. And the Gospel is full of these encounters with Jesus that uplift and heal. Encounter requires openness, courage, readiness to let oneself be challenged by the other's story. Encounter transforms us and always opens up new paths that we had not imagined. We discover this very soon when we live abroad!

In the account of the Acts of the Apostles, it is important to note that the disciples come together to pray assiduously: prayer, which we neglect too often and which is necessary in order to hear what the Spirit wants to say to the Church. The Synod is a journey of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, which is accomplished above all in worship, in prayer, in contact with the Word of God, and not from our own will, our own ideas or our own plans. Synodality presupposes listening: we must develop listening in the Church. This is how God shows us the way to follow, bringing us out of our habits, calling us to take new paths like Abraham. We need to listen to God speaking to us, and not just to hear Him in a distracted way. For the Word of God is “living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword” (*Heb* 4:12). It is listening to his Word that opens us up to discernment and enlightens us. If it is not at the heart and basis of synodality, we risk reducing this time of grace to yet another ecclesial meeting, or a study colloquium, or a kind of parliament.

The Synod is not a parliament, let me be clear, it is something else. Why is it not a parliament? Because the most important figure at the Synod is the Holy Spirit. We speak, but it is not a parliament. The Synod is a moment of grace, a process guided by the Spirit who makes all things new, who frees us from worldliness, from our closures, from our repetitive pastoral patterns and from fear. It calls us to question ourselves about what God wants to say to us in this time, today, and the direction in which He wishes to lead us. Today, God, what is He saying to me? Today, not yesterday. Do not be backward-looking: going back to yesterday. No, today, looking to the future.

Finally - the account says – “when the time for Pentecost was fulfilled [...] they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim” (*Acts* 2:1, 4). The Spirit's action frees the disciples paralysed by fear. It overcomes their human resistance. It expands and opens their hearts. It is this change of hearts that will enable us to change the world, to renew the face of the Church. The Spirit, who dwells in us, protects us from inner ageing, gives us the courage to bring the Gospel to all, in an ever new way. We Christians cannot be content with being enlightened and inflamed by the Spirit, enriched with his gifts, without feeling called to communicate this fire, to bear witness to the “mighty acts of God” (*Acts* 2:11) in our lives, with the quality of our encounters, our listening and our fraternal love. This is what the apostles did on the day of Pentecost: there was total confusion, nobody understood anything, it was all a mess... But who was the author of the mess? The Spirit. And harmony was then drawn from the disorder. It is curious: the harmony of the Spirit is not a logic, no, it does what it did on the day of Pentecost, nobody understood anything. And then they all entered into this new harmony.

Dear friends, I thank you for coming and I encourage you to continue to walk together every day, all united, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to be the outgoing Church, which is not afraid to reach out to the stranger, to the brother or sister who is waiting for us to bring him the Good News of God's merciful love for every person: the message of God. And all of you here present, take advantage of what you are given to live in contact with other cultures, with other brothers from various parts of the world. Your experience and your encounters will enrich the synodal movement of the whole Church. I entrust you all to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, so that she may lead us ever closer to the encounter with Christ and keep us united in the Church under her maternal mantle; we ask her, Mother of all, to guide our path. I bless you all from my heart. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

