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Audience with the community of the Claretianum Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life

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This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the community of the *Claretianum* Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its founding.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, dear Cardinal (Aquilino) Bocos (Merino): you understand these Claretian things, don't you? Dear bishops and priests, good morning and welcome!

I thank the Fr. Rector for his kind words; thank you.

You are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the *Claretianum* Institute of Theology of Religious Life. During this half-century, you have rendered many valuable services in accordance with the spirit and mission of Saint Anthony Mary Claret, who was greatly committed to supporting and promoting consecrated life in all its forms. And your publications, your works have helped me greatly in life, as a formator of young seminarians.

You carried forward in the Church the desire to be close to the communities of consecrated life and to help them. The contribution of the Claretian Missionaries to religious families, through spiritual accompaniment, doctrinal enlightenment and, above all, legal advice, is known throughout the world. Your publications and journals are proof of this, some of which have existed for more than one hundred years. In what is today called the Dicastery for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, Cardinals Arcadia María Larraona and Arturo Tabera, as well as Fr. Jesús Torres – ah, I remember him well: he was good, Torres, always hidden away

– they left their mark, while other missionaries have been and are valid contributors in this and in other Dicasteries.

Following Vatican Council II, the founding of the Claretianum Institute and that of Madrid had a very positive outcome, as did the Higher Centres of Manila, Bangalore, Bogotá and Abuja, following in their footsteps. In these decades they have all rendered, and continue to render, fruitful service to the understanding and development of the theology of consecrated life. In their programmes, the charismatic, Christological, historical and canonical origins and dynamics are structured. Their attention to the contributions of the human sciences has contributed to offering a more human face to consecrated life. I am not exaggerating, but you, with your work, have greatly, greatly humanized consecrated life. Let us thank God for the multiple expressions of the activity of your Institutes, which have helped so many people and communities: the study days and weeks, the conferences, the accompaniment provided to the chapters and governance of all types of institutes, societies of apostolic life and new forms of consecrated life. Thank you for the life and service of the six Institutes, but also for the initiatives you have organized and continue to promote in many other places: Mexico, Poland, the United Kingdom, Indonesia... Your presence is very visible in the local Churches and in the conferences of Major Superiors throughout the world. And also, I remember my first experience, as a bishop, of the 1994 Synod: how much you helped in that Synod on consecrated life! Your input was positive, always open, always removing unfounded fears. I remember that Synod well.

I thank you in a special way for the care reserved to the dissemination of the Magisterium of the Church, both of the Popes and of the Dicasteries most closely linked to consecrated life.

In this time in which the Church wishes to live her synodal vocation more intensely, I am pleased to note that your service to consecrated life is marked by the desire to implement what Saint Anthony Mary Claret valued so highly. Indeed, you have not only maintained communion with the Apostolic See, with the Pastors of the particular Churches and with the Federations of Major Superiors, but you have also endeavoured to share your service of animation and renewal with other ecclesial vocations and ministries: religious with other charisms, secular priests and lay people.

I encourage you to continue to serve consecrated life in the Claretian spirit, that is, by being missionaries. Consecrated life cannot be lacking in the Church and in the world. Fr. Claret also used to repeat those words of Saint Teresa that Saint John Paul II recalls in the Exhortation *Vita consecrate*: “What would become of the world if there were no Religious?” (no. 105). You help to consecrated men and women, before being intellectual, is witness, it is confession that Jesus is Lord. The first service of your Theological Institutes must be to offer themselves as houses of welcome, praise and thanksgiving; as places where charisms are shared and the desire to live the spirit of the Beatitudes and the eschatological discourse grows. In them, communion must be manifested and the option for the poor and solidarity, fraternity without frontiers and constantly outgoing mission must be encouraged. With this disposition, the gift of consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world will become more appreciated.

Today, consecrated life cannot let itself be discouraged by the lack of vocations or by aging. This would be a temptation, an encouragement: “But what should we do?”. This is the challenge. Those who let themselves be overwhelmed by pessimism put faith aside. It is the Lord in history who supports us and invites us to fidelity and fruitfulness. He takes care of his “remnant”, looking with mercy and benevolence at its work, and continues to send his Holy Spirit. The more we approach religious life through the Word of God and the history and creativity of the Founders, the more we are able to live the future with hope. Religious life can only be understood by what the Spirit does in each of the persons called. There are those who focus too much on the outside (structures, activities...) and lose sight of the superabundance of grace that is in people and communities. Therefore, please keep away the spirit of defeat, the spirit of pessimism: this is not Christian. It is not Christian. The Lord will not fail to be close to the people, and He will do it this way or that way, but it is he who is important.

Although I know that you are already facing many challenges of our time, I would like to invite you to emphasise the value of fidelity in following Jesus in accordance with the spirit of the Founders, to be attentive to community life: in an era where individualism is proposed in this way, be attentive to community life!, I urge you to live

interculturality as a path of fraternity and mission, and to promote the encounter between the different generations in consecrated life, in the Church and in society. And I want to emphasise this: the encounter between the different generations. Young people need to associate with old people, they need to talk, and old people need to talk with young people. Looking ahead, the prophecy of Joel, so beautiful! With this dialogue, with the spirit, the old will dream and the young will make prophecies: they will be able to go forward, but with the dream of the old. Please do not let the old die without dreaming: it is part of a mission. The young will do it. Let your young frequent the old and let the old frequent the young. At one time, in the post-Council period, there was this mentality of restructuring things: some congregations removed the old to a home for the old. Please, this is criminal! It's curious: religious women - I'm thinking of a case in point - old women religious, who worked well, after two months in the old people's home - poof!, to the other world. Of nostalgia, of sadness! The old must die dreaming, and those who make the old dream are the young, who must take the place of the old. Do not forget this: let them speak ...

Five years ago, with the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, I specified the contribution of ecclesiastical studies and theological centres to the new phase of the Church's mission in which we find ourselves. I thank you very much for the commitment with which you have heeded this call of mine, and I urge you to always seek new ways to serve the Lord and God's holy faithful people. As I have told you on other occasions, do not be afraid, cultivate increasingly God's style - and what is it, God's style? It is simple: closeness, compassion and tenderness; He Himself says it in Deuteronomy: "Think, what nation has its gods as close as you have me?" Proximity, which is compassionate and tender. Closeness, compassion and tenderness: this is God's style - continue to help so many consecrated men and women to be "a kind of Gospel spread throughout the centuries" (CICLSAL, Instruction: Starting Afresh from Christ, 2). Do not tire of going to the frontiers, even to the frontiers of thought; of opening paths, of accompanying, rooted in the Lord in order to be bold in mission.

Saint John Paul II already warned of the danger to consecrated life of a diminished regard for study. Neglecting theology, reflection, study, and the sciences, impoverishes the apostolate and encourages superficiality and frivolity in the mission (cf. *Vita consecrata*, 98). Superficiality, eh? I thank you because you continue to help so many to remain attentive; because you continue to take care of the quality of study and research. The problems of our time require new analyses and new syntheses (cf. *ibid.*). Your institutes, you, professors, and you, students, have a major task before you.

The Gospel teaches that there is a poverty that humiliates and kills, and another poverty, that of Jesus, which liberates and makes happy. As consecrated persons, you have received the immense gift of sharing in Jesus' poverty. Do not forget, either in your lives or in your work at university, those who live the other poverty. May you let life triumph over death and dignity over injustice (cf. Message for the Sixth World Day of the Poor [2022]). To truly encounter Christ, one must touch: touch his body in the wounded body of the poor, not just look at them: touch them; in confirmation of the sacramental communion received in the Eucharist (cf. Message for the First World Day of the Poor [2017]). How many founders, foundresses and consecrated persons have lived, and live, this way!

Paraphrasing the prayer that concluded the homily for the sixtieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, I invite you to pray with me: "We thank you, Lord, for the gift of the Council and for the blessing that these institutes of theology of consecrated life have been and are for the Church. You who love us, deliver us from the presumption of self-sufficiency and the spirit of worldly criticism. You who feed us with tenderness, deliver us from self-referentiality, from the diabolical deception of polarizations, deliver us from 'isms'. And we, your Church, with Peter and like Peter, say to you: 'Lord, you know everything; you know that we love you'" (cf. *Jn 21:17*)" (cf. *Homily*, 11 October 2022).

Dear brothers, dear sisters, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, may the Holy Spirit always assist you in the service you perform at the Claretianum. From my heart I bless you. And I ask you please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.