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Audience with the community of the Pontifical North American College

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the community of the Pontifical North American College.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I offer a warm welcome to all of you, priests, deacons, seminarians and staff of the Pontifical North American College, and I thank the Rector, Monsignor Powers, for his kind words offered in your name. I remember my visit to the College in May of 2015 and celebrating Mass in the Chapel.

Dear friends, your time here in Rome coincides with the synodal journey that the whole Church is presently undertaking, a journey that involves listening, to the Holy Spirit and to one another, in order to discern how to help God's holy people live his gift of communion and become missionary disciples. This is also the challenge and task you are called to take up as you walk together along the path that leads to priestly ordination and pastoral service.

In this regard, I want to share with you some brief reflections on three elements that I think are essential to priestly formation: *dialogue*, *communion* and *mission*. We can see these in the passage from Saint John's Gospel about Andrew and another disciple of John the Baptist who meet Jesus, stay with him for a time and then lead others, particularly Simon Peter, to encounter the Lord (cf. *Jn* 1:35-42).

First, *dialogue*. When Jesus noticed the disciples following him, he asked what they were seeking. When they questioned him about where he was staying, he invited them: "Come and see" (vv. 38-39). Over the course of

your lives, and especially throughout this time of seminary formation, the Lord enters into a personal dialogue with you, asking what you are looking for and inviting you to “come and see”, to speak with him from your hearts and give yourselves to him confidently in faith and love. Doing so involves fostering a daily relationship with Jesus, one nourished especially by prayer, meditation on the word of God, the help of spiritual accompaniment and listening to him in silence before the Tabernacle. Always remember this: listening in silence before the Tabernacle. For it is in these moments of familiar relationship with the Lord that we can best hear his voice and discover how to serve him and his people generously and wholeheartedly.

Saint John tells us that the disciples “stayed with” Jesus that day (v. 39). Here is the second essential element: *communion*. By staying with Jesus, the disciples began to learn, from his words, gestures and even his gaze, what really mattered to him and what his Father had sent him to proclaim. In a similar way, the journey of priestly formation demands a constant communion: first with God, but also with those joined together in Christ’s body, the Church. During your years in Rome, I invite you to keep your eyes open both to the mystery of the Church’s unity, manifested in legitimate diversity yet lived in the oneness of faith, and to the prophetic witness of charity that the Church, particularly here in Rome, expresses through her concrete acts of care for those in need. It is my hope that these experiences will help you develop that fraternal love capable of seeing the grandeur of our neighbour, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 92).

Finally, *mission*. After staying with Jesus, Andrew went and found his brother Simon and brought him to the Lord (cf. vv. 40-41). Here we see how witness, born of dialogue and communion with Christ, becomes mission: the newly called disciples go on to attract others by their testimony. Whenever Jesus calls men and women, he always does so in order to send them out, in particular to the vulnerable and those on the margins of society, whom we are not only called to serve but from whom we can also learn much. People nowadays need us to listen to their questions, anxieties and dreams so that we can better lead them to the Lord, who rekindles hope and renews the life of all. I trust that, as you carry out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy through the various educational and charitable apostolates in which you are already engaged, you will always be signs of a Church that goes forth (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20), sharing the presence, compassion and love of Jesus with our brothers and sisters.

Dear friends: I pray that your experience of studying in Rome and your formation at the Pontifical North American College will enable you to grow in faithful love of God and humble service to our brothers and sisters. Entrusting you to the maternal intercession of Mary Immaculate, Patroness of the College and of the United States, I assure you of my prayers for you, your families and your local Churches. To all of you, I cordially impart my blessing, and I ask you, please, to remember to pray for me. Thank you.
