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Inauguration of the 94th Judicial Year of the Vatican City State Tribunal

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis presided over the inauguration of the 94th Judicial Year of the Vatican City State Tribunal.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am pleased to meet you for the inauguration of the 94th judicial year of Vatican City State Tribunal, and I address a cordial greeting to you all.

I thank Mr. Carlo Nordio, Minister for Justice, and Mr. Alfredo Mantovani, undersecretary of the Council of Ministers.

I greet the president of the Tribunal, Giuseppe Pignatone, and the promotor of justice, Alessandro Diddi, along with the magistrates of the respective offices. I thank you for your generous and competent commitment to the administration of justice, which has been particularly onerous over the past year. For this, I also thank your co-workers and the staff of the Gendarmerie Corps, who are always ready to provide the necessary support in the exercise of your delicate responsibilities.

I welcome the presence of several representatives of the highest courts of the Italian State, whom I greet and thank, and I hope that this occasion may help to foster knowledge and dialogue between persons engaged in the world of institutions and in particular of justice.

The time that has passed since our last meeting has, unfortunately, been marked by serious and unforeseen

events, which have led to deep rifts.

After the terrible ordeal of the pandemic, with its heavy aftermath of mourning and crisis, we hoped for a speedy recovery, fueled and sustained by a widespread spirit of solidarity. We hoped and worked to put aside selfishness and the thirst for profit to try to start again together, nationally and supranationally, demonstrating a sense of responsibility and capacity for collaboration.

Thanks be to God, in many parts of the planet and in many initiatives, this hope and this desire have found tangible expression, with believers and non-believers working side by side.

Unfortunately, just as progress was being made on this path of gradual recovery, the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine and its tragic evolution plunged the entire world back into a deep crisis, aggravated by the multiple outbreaks of war that continue to flare up in other nations as well. Indeed, there are wars that sometimes touch closer to home, but the reality is that there are many conflicts in the world, and they are a kind of self-destruction (cf. *Press conference on the return flight from South Sudan*, 5 February 2023).

Faced with these situations, the yearning for peace and justice grows in us. The need to bear witness to help build peace and justice strengthens in our conscience, to the point of becoming imperative.

As I recalled during my recent journey in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, “In a world disheartened by violence and war, Christians must be like Jesus. As if to insist on the point, Jesus told the disciples once more: *Peace be with you!* (cf. *Jn 20:19,21*). We are called to make our own the Lord’s unexpected and prophetic message of peace and proclaim it before the world. ... Yes, Christians, sent by Christ, are called by definition to be a *conscience of peace in our world*” (Homily of the Mass in Kinshasa, 1 February 2023).

Every commitment to peace implies and demands commitment to justice. Peace without justice is not a true peace, it has neither a solid foundation nor the possibility of a future. And justice is not an abstraction or a utopia. In the Bible, it is the honest and faithful fulfilment of every duty towards God, it is to fulfil his will. It is not merely the fruit of a set of rules to be applied with technical expertise, but it is the virtue for which we give each person what is due to them, indispensable for the correct functioning of every sphere of common life and for everyone to lead a serene life. A virtue to be cultivated through a commitment to personal conversion and to be exercised together with the other cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude and temperance[1].

This virtue is entrusted in an eminent way to the responsibility of those who are engaged in the judicial sphere, to permit the reestablishment of peace violated between the different subjects of the community in dispute with each other and within the community.

It is with this perspective that the Courts of the Vatican City State operate, playing a valuable role for the benefit of the Holy See when it comes to settling civil or criminal disputes. These are disputes that, by their very nature, fall outside the jurisdiction of the Holy See’s Tribunals and canonical courts and must be judged on the basis of a complex interweaving of canonical and civil sources, such as that provided for by the Vatican system, the application of which requires specific expertise.

In recent years, these legal disputes and related trials have increased, as has, in not a few cases, the seriousness of the conduct that comes to light, especially in the area of asset and financial management. Here we must be clear and avoid the risk of “not seeing the wood for the trees”: the problem is not the lawsuits, but the facts and conduct that give rise to them and make them painfully necessary. Indeed, such behaviour on the part of members of the Church seriously harms its effectiveness in reflecting the divine light. Thanks be to God, however, “neither the profound desire for this light nor the readiness of the Church to welcome it and share it are diminished [...]”[2]. because Christ’s disciples are “called to be ‘the light of the world’ (*Mt 5:14*). In this way, the Church reflects the saving love of Christ, the true Light of the world (cf. *Jn 8:12*) [3]”.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Church “carries out this command above all when, in all that she says and does,

she bears witness to the mercy that she herself has graciously received”[4]. “What a beautiful truth of faith this is for our lives: the mercy of God! God’s love for us is so great, so deep; it is an unfailing love, one which always takes us by the hand and supports us, lifts us up and leads us on” [5]. A love that is near, merciful and tender.

With this attitude of mercy and closeness we are required to look at our brothers and sisters, especially when they are in difficulty, when they err, when they are subjected to the trial of justice. A trial that is at times necessary, when it comes to ascertaining conduct that tarnishes the face of the Church and provokes scandal in the community of the faithful. This is helped by the exercise of rigorous discernment, which helps us “avoid the prevents a cold bureaucratic morality in dealing with more sensitive issues” [6]; as well as the prudent recourse to the canon of equity, which can help to find the necessary balance between justice and mercy. Mercy and justice are not alternatives but walk together, proceeding in balance towards the same end, because mercy is not the suspension of justice, but its fulfilment (cf. *Rm* 13:8-10).

Dear magistrates, the way of justice enables a fraternity in which everyone is protected, especially the weakest. I hope that in your work you will always keep alive this awareness and the aspiration towards truth. I bless you and assure you of my prayers. You too, please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

[1] *Address to the National Association of Magistrates*, 9 February 2019.

[2] Apostolic Constitution *In Ecclesiarum communione* (6 January 2023), 4.

[3] Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022), 2.

[4] *Ibid.*, 1.

[5] *Homily for the Mass for the Possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome*, 7 April 2013.

[6] Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, 312.
