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Audience with the Spanish Episcopal Commission for Missions and Cooperation with Churches and the NGOD Misión América

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Spanish Episcopal Commission for Missions and Cooperation with Churches and the NGOD *Misión América*.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Most Reverend Excellency,

Reverend Priests

brothers all,

I know that *Misión América* is celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of its founding, thus approaching what tradition calls the "perfect age", that is, the age of Christ at the moment of his Passion and death. On this important date you have wished to visit the See of Peter, to renew your commitment to the universal Church, which takes tangible form in your work to assist the missions in America and Africa. I congratulate you and I invite you to ensure that the three years remaining before you reach the perfect age will be a journey in which you can continue to progress in your identification with Christ. With Christ who told us: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (*Jn 20:21*), so that you can open the Church to mission. The Church must go out, she must be on the street. That text of Revelation, in which Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock", says a lot to me. If someone will open up to me, I will enter, I will stay with you, I will dine with you (*Rev 3:20*).

Today's problem is a little different. Jesus continues to knock on the door, but very often from inside, for us to open the door and let him out. I think this is the challenge today. The mission. Opening the Church to the

mission.

It is evident that in your work you have already travelled an important path. In fact, you propose four defining words: *visibility*, *respect*, *volunteerism* and *collaboration*. It is good to re-read them a little in the light of this gospel of the mission.

Indeed, in the scene just quoted, Jesus first of all shows you “his hands and his side” (v. 20). This image is interesting, because in a certain sense it sums up for us the “way” in which Jesus was sent by the Father and now sends us, giving *visibility* to the reality of pain, sin, death, not in order to condemn anyone – we have used this finger a lot to condemn, and it is not the best thing – not to condemn anyone, but to heal, to heal humanity, taking it on in his own person. Likewise, in organizing awareness campaigns to make the reality of Latin America known, the aim cannot be anything other than to show the outstretched hand of Christ, who in his wounds offers us the best refuge.

The biblical text, as you well know, continues with the episode of Saint Thomas. It is another attractive idea, beyond the theological value of the story, this *respect* for the other, his time, his space. Jesus is always attentive to the need, but above all to the person as a whole. Jesus respects people. True equality, true justice, is not to impose a single and utilitarian path for all, but to be able to accompany each person, in his freedom and in his need, so that all may respond to God’s call, to the plan God has for each one of us, according to his time, his journey, his patience. Knowing how to wait.

Furthermore, on that occasion, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on the disciples, giving them with that gift the strength, the authority to fulfil the mission entrusted to them. From that moment, it is if the disciples enter another level, more active, more enterprising, with the strength of the Holy Spirit, obviously. In a similar way, and always recognizing that only in God is our strength, try to give impetus, starting with the Church in Spain, to this vocation of *volunteerism* – it is one of the most beautiful things that society has. The volunteerism of the laity, isn’t it? Active volunteerism, which is none other than supporting with prayer, work, solidarity, those who, moved by the same Spirit, journey through the world. The volunteerism of support, in any way.

Finally, a word that is crucial to understand the immense gift of the risen Jesus: “Peace be with you!” (v. 21), says the Lord. The gift of Jesus risen is this peace that he gives us. As impossible as it is to grasp all the meaning that this concept contains, you translate it as *collaboration*. To collaborate in peace, which is needed for growth. It is something beautiful, it means that the “peace” that God establishes with us and among us transforms existence, it becomes the daily reality of journeying every day, in seeking the good, in spreading love and concord. And it generates new realities, creating bridges, destroying fears, destroying grudges, the same ones that, as the biblical text points out, kept the disciples locked up.

This image of Jesus sending his Church on mission be a stimulus for you, to give visibility to the wounds that are still tangible in his Mystical Body; to demand and give respect for every man and his right to be able to discern the path that God traces out for him; to work and support the work of all those who have been, like us, sent, collaborating, with all men of good will, to the glory that the Lord has prepared for us, which is that man lives, as Saint Irenaeus says (cf. Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4, 20.5-7).

May Jesus bless you. Thank you truly for what you do. You will say, “It is little, and it is very familiar”. But the little things, the familiar things, are those that last the most, while at times the great things do not last.

May the Blessed Virgin accompany you, and do not lose your good humour, please. Keep going, and pray for me.
