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Audience with members of the Congregation of Saint Joseph (Josephites of Murialdo)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Congregation of Saint Joseph (Josephites of Murialdo), on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of its founding.

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I wholeheartedly thank Fr. Tullio Locatelli for the words he addressed to me, I greet the bishops present and Mother Orsola, the Mother General, and I welcome you all.

We are meeting on the 150th anniversary of the founding of your Congregation. Indeed, on 19 March 1873, Saint Leonard Murialdo founded the *Pia Società Torinese di San Giuseppe* primarily for the care and formation of young workers. This time makes me think a lot... there, in the “fire”, let’s say – in the centre of Freemasonry, in Turin, in Piedmont, there are many, many saints! And we must study why, why at that time. And right in the centre of Freemasonry and the “priest-eaters”, the saints... and many of them, not one, many. And he founded it right in Turin, in this hard context, marked by a great deal of moral, cultural and economic poverty, in the face of which he did not remain indifferent: he rose to the challenge and set to work, in the midst of Freemasonry.

And so, a congregation was born that over the course of a century and a half was enriched with people, works, diverse cultural experiences, and above all a great deal of love. A congregation made up of around five hundred religious – there are too few, you should grow a bit! – and, furthermore, the *Murialdine* Sisters of Saint Joseph, to whom we also convey our best wishes, on the seventieth anniversary of their founding, the secular Institute, and many laypeople, all united in a single Family. The seed placed by God in the Church through the generous hands of Saint Leonard Murialdo has grown a lot!

Last year, on the occasion of the opening of this Jubilee celebration, I wrote to your Superior General and I expressed my wish that you would continue to grow in “the art of grasping the needs of the times and providing for them with the creativity of the Holy Spirit”. One cannot control the Spirit; it is he who leads us on. However, it takes discernment and fidelity. I urge you to take special care of “the youngest, who today, more than ever, need credible witnesses”. And I encourage you never to stop dreaming, following the example of Saint Joseph, your Patron, and Saint Leonard, in a spirit of authentic fatherhood. [1]

Today, as I renew this invitation, I would like to emphasize three aspects, which seem to me important for your life and your apostolate. They are: the *primacy of God's love*, *attention to the changing world*, and the *paternal gentleness of charity*. The *primacy of God's love*, *attention to the changing world*, and the *paternal gentleness of charity*.

The *experience of God's love* profoundly marked Saint Leonard's life. He felt it within him, strong, concrete, irresistible, as he himself testifies, writing: “God loves me. What joy! [...] He never forgets me. He always follows and guides me!”. Today the preacher spoke to us about this. And he invited the brothers to first of all let themselves be loved by God. To let oneself be loved by God: this was the secret of his life and his apostolate. Not just to love, no, to let oneself be loved. That passivity - I emphasize - that passivity of consecrated life, which grows in silence, in prayer, in charity, and in service. And the invitation also applies to us: let us allow ourselves to be loved by God in order to be credible witnesses of his love; let us allow his love to guide our affections, thoughts and actions. Not rules, not dispositions. An anecdote: when a General of the Society, Father Ledóchowski, wanted to gather together all the spirituality of the Society in a book, to regulate everything – everything was regulated... even the cook's rule, the rule, everything regulated, so that the Society of Jesus would have the ideal model before it – he sent the first copy to the Benedictine abbot, who replied: “Dear Father General, with this document you have killed the Society of Jesus”. When you want to regulate everything, you cage the Holy Spirit. And there are many - religious, consecrated, priests and bishops - who have caged the Holy Spirit. Please, leave freedom, leave creativity. Always walk with the guidance of the Spirit.

Saint Leonard Murialdo was certainly a profoundly mystical man. It was precisely this, though, that made him very *attentive and sensitive to the needs of the men and women of his time* (cf. *2 Cor 5:14*), of whom he was an acute observer and a courageous prophet. He was able to perceive the existence, around him, of new hardships, serious and often concealed hardships, and did not hesitate to take care of them. In particular, he taught young workers how to plan their future, to make their voice heard and to help each other. He became a bearer of the prophetic word of the Church in a world dominated by economic interests and power, giving a voice to the most marginalized. He was able to grasp the value of the laity in the life and apostolate of the People of God. In the second half of the nineteenth century, a century before Vatican II, he said, “The laity, this social group, can be ... an apostle, no less than the priest, and in some environments, more than a priest”. [2] For that time, this sounded like Protestantism. He was brave. He was an intelligent, open man of God! I invite you to cultivate the same passion and the same courage: together, laypeople, men and women religious, on shared paths of prayer, discernment and work, so as to be artisans of justice and communion.

In this regard, I would like to refer to a final important value of your charism: the *paternal gentleness of charity*. May you be able to seek it and experience it among yourselves, with a spirit of fraternity, and exercise it in relation to all. Being like Mary, our Mother: at the same time strong in witness and gentle in love. Saint Leonard said, “Charity is to look at and say what is beautiful about everyone, to forgive from the heart, to have serenity of countenance, affability, and gentleness”. And to do this it takes the cross, knowing how to bear the cross. It takes prayer, it takes sacrifice. And again, he said, “Just as without faith, one does not please God, without gentleness one does not please one's neighbour”. They are his words: a simple and powerful plan for life and the apostolate. And I too would like to bear witness to your students. When I was a professor in San Miguel – they studied there – they had a very practical, very good Superior. We used to say that that Josephite, the Superior, was a Nobel Laureate in craftiness! Because he was a man of God, but he was cunning! He handled things well! I remember well ... a good group of students.

I would like to conclude precisely by recalling his invitation to holiness: “Make yourselves saints”, he said, “And do it quickly... Because the saint has a farsighted outlook, he makes life more human, he communicates hope and trust, and he knows how to share his experience that God is Love”.

Dear brothers, dear sisters, thank you for what you are and for what you do in the Church, following in the footsteps of Saint Leonard, and inspired by Saint Joseph. I wholeheartedly bless you all. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

Thank you!
