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Audience with young participants in the “Progetto Policoro”, organized by the Italian Episcopal Conference

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the young people of the “Progetto Policoro”, organized by the Italian Episcopal Conference.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Archbishop Baturi, dear young people, welcome!

Thank you for your greetings. This meeting gives me the opportunity to encourage the path of socio-political formation that continues the Italian Church’s “Progetto Policoro”. I like to emphasize that the need for this journey arose from the grass roots, from your need to be trained in service in society and in politics; and also in order to be able, in turn, to collaborate in the formation of other young people.

This year, you have peace as your theme. It is a theme that cannot be lacking from socio-political formation, and unfortunately it is also urgent due to the current situation. War is the failure of politics. This must be stressed: war is the failure of politics. It feeds on the poison that considers the other as an enemy. War brings home to us the absurdity of the arms race and the use of weapons to resolve conflicts. An expert told me that, if weapons were not produced for one year, world hunger could be eliminated. Therefore, there is a need for a “better politics” (cf. Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, chapter 5), that presupposes precisely what you are doing, that is, education for peace. This is the responsibility of everyone. Wage war, but another war, an inner one, a war on ourselves to work for peace.

Today politics does not enjoy a good reputation, especially among the young, because they see scandals, many things that we all know. The causes are several, but how can one not think of corruption, inefficiency, distance from the lives of the people? Precisely for this reason, there is even greater need for good politics. And people

make the difference. We see this in local administrations: it is one thing to have a mayor or a councillor who is available, another to have one who is inaccessible; one thing is politics that listens to reality, that listens to the poor, quite another that which is closed up in palaces, a “rarefied” politics.

I am reminded of the biblical episode of the King Ahab and the vineyard of Naboth. The king wants to appropriate for himself the vineyard of Naboth, to extend his garden; but Naboth does not want this and cannot sell it, because that vineyard is the legacy of his forefathers. The king is angry and sulks, like a spoiled child. Then his wife, Queen Jezebel – who is a devil! – solves the problem by contriving to eliminate Naboth on a false charge. So Naboth is killed and the king takes his vineyard. Ahab represents the worst kind of politics, that of forging ahead and making room for oneself by eliminating others, that pursues not the common good but particular interests, and uses every means to satisfy them. Ahab is not a father, he is a master, and his rule is dominion. Saint Ambrose wrote a book on this bible story, entitled *De Nabuthae*, “On Naboth”. At a certain point, addressing the powerful, Ambrose writes: ““Why do you cast out those who share in the goods of nature and claim for yourselves alone the possession of natural goods? The earth was created in communion for all, for rich and for poor. [...] Nature knows not what the rich are, she who begets all equally poor. When we are born we have no clothes, we do not come into the world laden with gold and silver. This earth brings us into the world naked, in need of food, clothing and drink. Nature [...] creates us all equal and all equally encloses us in the womb of a tomb” (1,2). This short but precious work by Saint Ambrose will be useful for your formation. Politics that exercises power as dominion and not as service is not capable of caring, it tramples on the poor, exploits the earth and deals with conflict through war; it does not know how to dialogue.

As a positive biblical example, we can take the figure of Joseph, son of Jacob. Remember that he was sold as a slave by his brothers, who were jealous of him, and taken to Egypt. There, after a series of vicissitudes, he is freed, enters the service of the Pharaoh and becomes a sort of viceroy. Joseph does not behave like a master, but like a father: he cares for the country, and when famine strikes, he organizes the grain reserves for the common good, so much so that the Pharaoh says to the people: “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do” (*Gen* 41:55) – the same phrase that Mary will say to the servants at the wedding in Cana, referring to Jesus. Joseph, who has suffered injustice personally, does not pursue his own interest, but that of the people, he pays personally for the common good, he makes himself an artisan of peace, he forges relationships capable of innovating society. As Don Lorenzo Milani wrote: “Others’ problems are like mine. To come out of them together is good politics. To come out alone is stinginess”.^[1] It is like that, it is simple.

These two biblical examples, one negative, the other positive, help us understand what kind of spirituality can fuel politics. I will highlight just two aspects: *tenderness* and *fruitfulness*. Tenderness is “that love that draws near and becomes real. ... Tenderness is the path of choice for the strongest, most courageous men and women. Amid the daily concerns of political life, the smallest, the weakest, the poorest should touch our hearts: indeed they have a ‘right’ to appeal to our heart and soul” (Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 194). Fruitfulness is made up of sharing, a long-term outlook, dialogue, trust, understanding, listening, time spent, answers ready and not deferred. It means looking to the future and investing in the future generations; undertaking processes rather than occupying spaces. This is the golden rule: is your activity to occupy a space for yourself? That will not do. For your group? That will not do either. Occupying spaces will not do: initiating processes will. Time is superior to space.

Dear friends, I would like to conclude by proposing the questions that every good politician should ask: “How much love did I put into my work? What did I do for the progress of our people? What mark did I leave on the life of society? What real bonds did I create? What positive forces did I unleash? How much social peace did I sow? What good did I achieve in the position that was entrusted to me?” (*ibid.*, 197). Your concern should not be electoral consensus or personal success, but involving people, generating entrepreneurship, making dreams flourish, making people feel the beauty of belonging to a community. Participation is the balm on the wounds of democracy. I invite you to give your contribution, to participate and to invite your peers to do likewise, always with the purpose and style of service. The politician is a servant; when the politician is not a servant, he or she is a bad politician, not a politician.

Thank you for your commitment. Go forward, and may Our Lady accompany you. I wholeheartedly bless you, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!

[1] *Letter to a teacher*, Florence 1994, 14.
