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Audience of the Holy Father with participants in the pilgrimage of the diocese of Crema, Italy

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Paul VI Hall, participants in the pilgrimage of the diocese of Crema, Italy.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome! And welcome to you who have just arrived!

I thank Bishop Daniele Gianotti for the words he addressed to me. I greet Bishop Rosolino Blanchetti, bishop of Quiché, in Guatemala – he is not here – the Superior General of the Pontifical Institute for the Foreign Missions, the seminarians of the diocese of Taungngu, in Myanmar, the priests and missionaries present, and the president of the Province of Cremona and the mayors gathered here. And I wholeheartedly greet all of you, who have come in such large numbers: thank you. Thank you for your visit.

This meeting of ours has been planned for some time, after the beatification of Fr. Alfredo Cremonesi, from Crema, missionary and martyr in Burma, present-day Myanmar. As you know, it is a troubled land, which I hold in my heart and for which I invite you to pray, imploring of God the gift of peace.

So, the pandemic forced us to postpone our meeting until today. This too, however, is a special year: indeed, precisely these months mark the seventieth anniversary of the martyrdom of Blessed Alfredo, which occurred on 7 February 1953 in Donoku. In that mountain village, Fr. Cremonesi worked for most of his life, and he returned there several times, despite a thousand difficulties and dangers, to be close to his people and to build and rebuild what war and violence continued to destroy. What is striking about Father Alfredo is the tenacity with which he exercised his ministry, giving himself without calculation and without sparing for the good of the people entrusted to him, believers and non-believers, Catholics and non-Catholics. A universal man, for everyone.

He thus certainly incarnated, in an exemplary way, the solid virtues of his native land of Crema: robust piety, generous labour, a simple life and missionary fervour. He sowed communion, knowing how to adapt to a world that was completely new to him and making it his own, with love. He exercised charity especially towards those most in need, finding himself several times with nothing and forced to beg himself. He spent himself for the education of the young, and did not let himself be intimidated or discouraged by misunderstandings and violent opposition, up to the machine-gun fire that cut him down. But even this extreme violence did not stop his spirit and did not silence his voice. Indeed, he continued to speak through those who followed in his footsteps: among these missionaries, Fr. Andrea Mandonico is present today, and although he could not be here with us, Fr. Pierluigi Maccalli, who has been a prisoner in Niger and in Mali for two years, and for whose liberation you have prayed a lot! The missionary voice of Fr. Alfredo, though, is not entrusted only to them: it is entrusted to all of us, to all of you, to your words and above all to your life as a Christian community.

In the writings left by Fr. Alfredo, there is a very beautiful phrase on his missionary spirit: He says: "We missionaries are truly nothing. Ours is the most mysterious and wonderful work that has been given to man, not to fulfil, but to see: to perceive souls that convert is a greater miracle, greater than any miracle". These words summarize some important characteristics of the missionary, on which I invite you to reflect and which I invite you to make your own: the humble awareness of being a small instrument in the great hands of God; the joy of carrying out "wonderful work" by making brothers and sisters encounter Jesus; wonder before what the Lord himself works in those who meet and welcome him. Humility, joy and wonder: three beautiful features of our apostolate, in every condition and state of life.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is truly a gift to have you here: a community rich in those of every age and condition. To paraphrase Saint Lawrence, deacon and martyr of the Church of Rome, we can say that this is the treasure of the Church: yes, the treasure of the Church is you, it is us, all poor before God and all rich in his infinite love, which is reflected in a unique way in the eyes of each person, and of which we are witnesses and missionaries.

Therefore, I want to encourage you to continue your community journey with commitment and enthusiasm, in all its dimensions. I urge you to cultivate communion, among people and among communities, in mutual assistance, collaboration, openness to new paths, in an ever more rapidly changing world. Do not be afraid to translate ancient values in modern languages, so they can reach everyone, and so that everyone can savour them and enjoy their benefits. Try always to be welcoming and inclusive to those who knock on your door; to take particular care of the education of the young, helping them to "bring out" the best of themselves and to find God's plan in their life, making it a mission, with passion. Do not forget elderly people, the weakest, especially the poor and the sick; I invite you to listen to them, because there is a great deal to learn from those who know what life, toil and suffering are all about. Finally, in a land as rich and beautiful as yours, may you be models of respectful stewardship of creation, of sobriety in using its fruits, and of generosity in sharing them.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for coming! I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of Saint Pantaleon. I cordially bless all of you and the entire diocesan community. And I urge you, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
