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Audience with the Conference of Missionary Institutes in Italy

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Conference of Missionary Institutes in Italy, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its founding.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am pleased to welcome you on the fiftieth anniversary of your founding. For half a century you have dedicated yourselves to promoting the mission *ad gentes* in Italy, acting as the voice of thousands of missionary men and women who, by dedicating themselves to the proclamation of Christ, in reality speak to everyone about a dimension of Christian life, the missionary dimension, proper to every baptized person by virtue of Baptism.

Vatican Council II states it clearly: "The whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God" (Decree *Ad gentes*, 35). Therefore, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* invited Christians to establish themselves "throughout the world ... permanently in a state of mission" (25). For the Church, proclamation is not an optional or marginal aspect, but rather a vital dimension, inasmuch as she was born apostolic and missionary, moulded by the Holy Spirit as an "outbound" community (cf. *Catechesis*, 15 March 2023). Mission is oxygen for Christian life, which without it ails and withers (cf. *ibid.*), and becomes bad, bad.

It is precisely with this in mind that you operate, through the sharing of experiences, the missionary animation of local communities, raising awareness among young people in seminaries, vocational animation, the contribution to the drafting of missionary documents at various levels, the synergy with other ecclesial realities such as *Caritas*, *Missio* and *Migrantes* for the promotion of acceptance between peoples and cultures and for the dignity of the person in every part of the world.

I encourage you to go forward with courage, so that the power of the Spirit may always find in the Church and in

the world minds and hearts eager to sow the Word and to bring the joy of the Risen Lord to all, breaking down barriers and fostering the building of a society founded on the Gospel principles of charity, justice and peace.

Precisely in the years of your foundation, Saint Paul VI, speaking of the mission, recalled some fundamental dimensions of it: the witness of life, the preaching of the Word, catechesis and the celebration of the Sacraments (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 40-48). Founded on these pillars and animated by the Holy Spirit, the first Christian community drew inspiration and vigour from them for the proclamation of the Gospel (cf. *Acts* 2:42-47).

Let this also be your style. It is not a matter of proselytizing, this is not Christian, no; the style is this: proclaim Christ first of all with the testimony of life. This is why I recommend that you cultivate charity first of all in and between your communities, within and between your Institutes, harmonizing differences in culture, age, mentality, so that in communion each charism may be at the service of all (cf. *1 Cor* 12:4-7; *Catechesis*, 1 October 2014). And take to heart the welcoming of the poor and the little ones, among yourselves and towards the people you serve in your ministry, in a spirit of inclusion and service. Let this be your first joyful Paschal proclamation.

To this end, like the first disciples, do not neglect to nourish your life and your apostolate with the Word of God, the Eucharist and prayer. For the mission, like communion, is first and foremost a mystery of Grace. It is not our work, but God's; we do it not alone, but moved by the Spirit and docile to his action. Mission and communion spring from prayer, are shaped day by day by listening to the Word of God - listening in prayer - and have as their ultimate goal the salvation of the brothers and sisters the Lord entrusts to us. Without these foundations, they become empty and end up being reduced to a mere sociological or welfare dimension. And the Church is not interested in providing welfare... helping, yes, but first of all, evangelizing, bearing witness: if you give assistance, let it come from witnessing, not from proselytizing methods.

Therefore, not only your life and your missionary work, but also your planning, meetings and decisions should always be marked by listening to the Word, by Eucharistic celebration and prayer. Together and individually entrust everything to God, purifying your hearts and the institutions in which you work from everything that might hinder the free and creative action of the Spirit.

would like to conclude by recalling another passage from *Evangelii gaudium*, where it is recalled that mission is not a business or a corporate project, nor is it a humanitarian organization or proselytism. It is "something much deeper, which escapes all measurement" (cf. 279).

This is an invitation to spend ourselves with commitment, with creativity and generosity, but without becoming discouraged if the results do not correspond to expectations; to give the best of ourselves, without sparing ourselves, but then entrusting everything with trust to the hands of the Father; to give our all, but leaving it up to Him to make our efforts as fruitful as He wishes (cf. *ibid.*).

This, dear friends, I wish you for your work. Thank you for your service to the mission and to communion. May Our Lady accompany you. I bless you from my heart and I ask you, please, to pray for me.
