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Audience with participants in the General Chapter of the Little Missionary Sisters of Charity (Opera Don Orione)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Chapter of the Little Missionary Sisters of Charity (*Opera Don Orione*).

The following is the address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear sisters, good morning and welcome!

I am meeting you at this significant moment for your Congregation, which is the General Chapter, a strong time of dialogue among yourselves and with the Holy Spirit, from which you can emerge renewed, first in the heart, then in initiatives and structures.

When Saint Luigi Orione founded the first of your communities, he gave you the mission of “making [people] experience God’s Providence and the motherhood of the Church”. That is, he called you to incarnate the merciful action of God and the Church in a maternal spirit. To do this he then indicated three fundamental ways: to be united to Jesus, close to your brothers and sisters and active in service. Let us look at these together.

Being *united to Jesus*. Saint Luigi Orione founded your Congregation – along with the Sons of Divine Providence, the visually impaired Sacramentine Sisters and the Contemplative Sisters of Jesus Crucified – under the insignia of the Pauline motto *Instaurare omnia in Christo*: “Unite all things in Him” (*Eph 1:10*). It is clear then that union with Christ for you must be at the root of every activity. Vatican Council II reminded us of this as a fundamental value for all religious, saying that they enrich the apostolate and the vitality of the Church the more fervently they live united to Christ (cf. *Perfectae caritatis*, 1), like the first disciples. It is not therefore a question of cultivating vague and barren intimacy in spiritual and apostolic life, not of transforming themselves into “efficient corporate executives” in the management of works. Rather, it is a matter of making Jesus' way of

life our own, letting Him act in us more and more, abandoning ourselves to Him, to the point of being able to say, like Saint Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20); and again: “*Caritas Christi urget nos*”, “The love of Christ controls us” (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). Fr. Orione was aware of this reality when he stated that “to conquer God and grasp others we must first live an intense life of God in ourselves”[1], a faith that burns within and shines around us. And so, let yourselves always be conquered first of all by the Lord, by his living presence in the Eucharist, in his Word, in yourselves, thanks to the Holy Spirit. Remember that, as mothers, the greatest gift you can give to the children that God entrusts to you is that of transmitting to them *your tender and impassioned love for Jesus*, of teaching them to love him and to know him as you know and love him, and of making them sharers in your faith in him.

The second direction left to you by Don Orione is that of being *close to your brothers and sisters*. Indeed, Jesus himself told us; “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25: 40). Then, your service too can be lived as an encounter with him, inspired by the same love. It is he who makes himself poor and small in the poor and small; it is he who asks you for warmth and protection in them. So, always have, among yourselves and towards others, a sense of motherly tenderness, never coldness. And if sometimes this sickness of heart makes itself felt, drive it out immediately, with thoughts, words and gestures of welcome and kindness! We know that a piece of bread shared with a smile is better than a dish that may be refined, but seasoned with coldness and insipid with love. May your homes and places of service be full of motherly warmth! As Fr. Orione used to say: may everyone be warmed and enlightened by “the flame that burns in your heart and the light of your inner fire”. [2]

Finally, Saint Luigi Orione taught you to “work hard”, not to spare yourselves in *service in aid of those most in need*. Serving “the poor, the small, those afflicted by every evil and suffering”, with your “sleeves rolled”, like good mothers, with compassion, creativity and imagination, in charity.[3] A mother never gives up, faced with the needs of her children; she ensures they never lack the attention, the surprises, tenderness and even the necessary reproaches; she managed to invent solutions and unexpected remedies, even in the face of difficult situations or the incomprehension of others: it is because a mother *loves*, and love makes us free and creative! Besides, it is above all this that makes children feel “at home”, safe, accepted regardless of their capabilities, their successes, their social conditions, their origin and religious affiliation, because a mother loves everyone, she makes no differences. This is how Christ loves, this is how Mother Church loves, and this is how I wish you too to know how to love, with this domestic motherhood, with a generous heart and with “elbow grease”! In this way you will give joy and hope to many, and a concrete example of healthy living, precious especially for young people, often disoriented by fragile and empty existential models.

You define yourselves by vocation as a “Samaritan congregation”: and who more than a mother is a “Samaritan” for her children? She sees, even senses their wounds, stops, heals them and finally lets them go on their way. I urge you to love in this way, as Saint Luigi Orione did, as *mothers in charity*. I bless you from my heart. And I urge you, do not forget to pray for me.

[1] *The Spirit of Don Orione*, vol. VI, X *Hope*, 10, “Silence and Union with God”).

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Cf. *Plan and programme of the Piccola Opera*, no. 3.
