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Audience with participants in the 34th General Chapter of the Augustinians of the Assumption (Assumptionists)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 34th General Chapter of the Augustinians of the Assumption (Assumptionists), to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to welcome you as you come towards the end of your 34th General Chapter. I greet the new Superior General - thanking the outgoing one for his work - and offer my best wishes to you and to the Council you have elected.

I would like to share some reflections on the theme that guides your Chapter work: *"The Kingdom of God is at hand"* (Mk 1:15). *Living and proclaiming the hope of the Gospel*. This is a good way to bring up to date the motto left to you by your founder, the Venerable Emmanuel d'Alzon, in the spirit of Saint Augustine: *Adveniat Regnum tuum!* And indeed, one of the principal missions of apostolic religious life is to manifest very tangibly, in daily life, this vicinity of the Kingdom, and thus this hope for every person and for the whole world. Wherever you are, you are signs of the Kingdom by your closeness to the people to whom you are sent.

This proximity naturally passes through works, both those proper to your Congregation and those linked to the apostolic initiatives of the Church to which you contribute. But, beyond the actions, it is the very fact of making yourselves close to people, starting with those who are most in need of a supportive and fraternal presence, to show them that the Kingdom of God is approaching, that there is a horizon, that there is some hope, that life is not closed: this, to make them feel it through your evangelical witness. Witnessing has this power: to open windows to see the hope of a Kingdom that is near.

I would like, in this regard, to mention in particular two achievements, already consolidated and always alive, of your Congregation: the apostolate of pilgrimages, beginning with the National Pilgrimage to Lourdes, the fervour of which you have spread to distant countries, as far as Latin America. I remember, as a child, there were the Assumptionist Sisters in Buenos Aires, and from there they organized pilgrimages to Lourdes. As a child... It was like a star to be reached... I remember this well. And then the involvement in the media, which you develop today in all continents, for a varied audience, even distant from the Church.

Allow me also mention one of your historically most incisive and still present, albeit more modest, apostolates: your Eastern Mission. Thank you! I encourage you to continue that mission, in the Middle East where the plight of Christians is under threat, and in Eastern Europe, where the war in Ukraine endangers the civil and religious balance of the region. I would also like to express the Holy See's gratitude for your faithful commitment to the small Catholic Church of Byzantine rite in Bulgaria, which is counting on you. Your long experience of dialogue with Orthodoxy, as well as with Islam and Judaism, is precious for the Church; may it make you, today more than ever, artisans of unity and communion in the service of peace.

The aim of your General Chapter was to define the broad lines of your action for the six years to come. [*Addressed to the Superior*] And it is up to you to guide this. I assure you of my prayers and my confidence that you will be able to invest in it the best forces, especially those of the countries of the Global South which, in your Institute as in many others, are taking over the resources now declining in the North. They tell me that one in every three members of your Institute is in formation. This is great! In this time of scarcity of vocations, of zero birth rate, or "occasional", let's say, this is a grace. This remarkable proportion opens up prospects for the future, but at the same time constitutes a great challenge for the transmission of your charism. Please let those in formation receive the charism well. I give thanks together with you for this renewed vitality that the Lord grants you. And I invite you to welcome this novelty without fear, as a sign of the times, even if it can sometimes frighten us: we are all a little afraid of novelty, but we must be courageous. Is not the Kingdom of God itself a radical irruption of newness for our humanity? It is this. Be courageous.

To accept this challenge, do not be afraid to cultivate in yourselves and around you the "threefold love" that Fr. d'Alzon taught you: love Christ, love the Virgin Mary, and love the Church. In this way you will be faithful to your charism and you will find the ways, both faithful and innovative, to bring it up to date.

In all these things, this old and new ways, dear brothers, you can count on my prayer and my trust. The Church is confident in you. I wish you a good conclusion of your Chapter, and a good mission to you all, wherever the Lord sends you. I bless you all. And please, do not forget to pray for me.
