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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with participants in the International Conference “Man-Woman: Image of God. Towards an anthropology of vocations”

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the International Conference “Man-Woman: Image of God. Towards an anthropology of vocations”, organized by the Centre for Research and Anthropology of Vocations (CRAV), taking place in the Vatican, in the Synod Hall, from 1 to 2 March 2024.

The following is the Pope’s address, which was read out by Msgr. Filippo Ciampanelli, and the Holy Father’s impromptu greeting to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

[Words of the Holy Father before his address]

Good morning! I will ask for my address to be read, so I don’t get too tired; I still have a cold and I get tired reading for a while. But I would like to highlight something: it is very important for there to be this encounter, this encounter between men and women, because today the worst danger is gender ideology, which cancels out differences. I asked for studies to be made on this ugly ideology of our time, which erases differences and makes everything the same; to erase difference is to erase humanity. Man and woman, on the other hand, stand in fruitful “tension”. I remember reading a novel from the early 1900s, written by the son of the Archbishop of Canterbury: *The Lord of the World*. The novel speaks of the futuristic and it is prophetic, because it shows this tendency to erase all differences. It is interesting to read it, if you have time, because there are these problems of today; that man was a prophet.

[Reading of the Holy Father’s address]

Brothers and sisters!

I am pleased to participate in this Conference organized by the Centre for Research and Anthropology of Vocations, during which scholars from various parts of the world, each with their his or her own expertise, will discuss the theme “Man-Woman: Image of God. Towards an anthropology of vocations” I greet all the participants and thank Cardinal Ouellet for his words: we are not yet saints, but we hope to be always on the way to becoming one - this is the first vocation we have received! And thank you above all because, a few years ago, together with other influential people and seeking an alliance of knowledge, you set up this Centre to initiate international academic research aimed at an ever better understanding of the meaning and importance of vocations, in the Church and in society.

The purpose of this Conference is first and foremost to consider and value the *anthropological dimension* of every vocation. This refers us to an elementary and fundamental truth, which we need to rediscover in all its beauty: *the life of the human being is vocation*. Let us not forget this: the anthropological dimension, which underlies every calling within the community, which is associated with an essential characteristic of the human being as such: namely, that *man himself is vocation*. Every one of us, both in the big decisions regarding a state of life, and in the numerous occasions and situations in which these are embodied and take shape, discovers and expresses him- or herself as one who is called, as a person who is realized in listening and answering, sharing one’s own being and one’s own gifts with others for the common good.

This discovery makes us come out from the isolation of a self-referential ego, and it makes us look at ourselves as a *relational identity*: I exist and live in relation to those who generated me, to the reality that transcends me, to others and to the world that surrounds me, with respect to which I am called to embrace a specific and personal mission with joy and responsibility.

This anthropological truth is fundamental because it *responds fully to the desire for human realization and happiness* that dwells in our heart. In today’s cultural context, at times this reality tends to be forgotten or obscured, with the risk of reducing the human being to his or her material needs or primary requirements alone, as if he or she were an object without conscience or will, simply swept along by life as part of a mechanical gear. Instead, man and woman are created by God and are the image of the Creator; that is, they carry within themselves a desire for eternity and happiness that God Himself has sown in their hearts, and which they are called to realize through a specific vocation. Therefore, a healthy inner tension dwells within us, which we must never stifle: we are called to happiness, to the fullness of life, to something great to which God has destined us. The life of each one of us, no-one excluded, is not incidental; our being in the world is not merely the fruit of chance, but rather we are part of a plan of love and are invited to come out of ourselves and fulfill it, for ourselves and for others.

For this reason, if it is true that each one of us *has* a mission, namely to offer one’s own contribution to improve the world and forge society, I like always to remember that it is not an external task entrusted to our lives, but a dimension that involves our very nature, the structure of our being man-woman in the image and semblance of God. Not only has a mission been entrusted to us, but each one of us *is* a mission: “I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptized man and woman is a mission. People in love never stand still: they are drawn out of themselves; they are attracted and attract others in turn; they give themselves to others and build relationships that are life-giving. As far as God’s love is concerned, no one is useless or insignificant” (*Message for World Mission Day 2019*).

An eminent intellectual and spiritual figure, Cardinal Newman, has illuminating words on this. I quote some of them: “I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created; I have a place in God’s counsels, in God’s world, which no one else has; whether I be rich or poor, despised or esteemed by man, God knows me and calls me by my name. God has created me to do Him some definite purpose; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission… Somehow I am necessary for His purposes”. And he continues: “[God] has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling” (J. H. Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*).

Brothers and sisters, your research, your studies and in particular these opportunities for exchange are so necessary and important, in order to spread awareness of the vocation to which every human being is called by God, in various states of life and thanks to his or her many charisms. They are equally useful for questioning today's challenges, the current anthropological crisis and the necessary promotion of human and Christian vocations. And it is important that an increasingly effective circularity between the various vocations be developed, also thanks to your contribution, so that the works that flow from the lay state of life in the service of society and the Church, together with the gift of the ordained ministry and consecrated life, may contribute to generating hope in a world over which heavy experiences of death loom.

Generating this hope, placing oneself in the service of the Kingdom of God for the construction of an open and fraternal world is a task entrusted to every man and woman of our time. Thank you for the contribution you give in this regard. Thank you for your work in these days. I entrust it to the Lord in prayer, by the interession of Mary, Icon of the vocation and Mother of every vocation. And please, you too, do not forget to pray for me.

[Words of the Holy Father at the end of the reading of the address]

I wish you all the best in your work! And do not be afraid of these rich moments in the life of the Church. The Holy Spirit asks something important of us: *fidelity*. But fidelity requires motion, and fidelity often leads to taking risks. “Museum fidelity” is not fidelity. Go forward with the courage to discern and to risk, in search of God’s will. I wish you the best. Take courage and keep going, without losing your sense of humour!