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Audience with participants in the Plenary of the Dicastery for Evangelization - Section for Fundamental Questions regarding Evangelization in the World

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Plenary of the Dicastery for Evangelization – Section for fundamental questions regarding evangelization in the world.

The following is the address prepared by the Pope for the occasion, and read out by Msgr. Filippo Ciampanelli:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

I am pleased to welcome you, Superiors, Members and Consultors of the Dicastery for Evangelization – Section for the fundamental questions in the world, gathered in plenary assembly. It is an important moment for the exchange that the problems of evangelization entail, especially when looking at the various regions of the world, so different from each other in terms of culture and tradition.

My first thought goes to the condition in which several *local Churches* find themselves, where the *secularism* of past decades has created enormous difficulties: from the *loss of a sense of belonging* to the Christian community, to *indifference* regarding faith and its content. They are serious problems, which many brothers and sisters must confront every day, but one must not lose heart. Secularism has been studied and scores of pages have been written about it. We know the negative effects it has produced, but this is the right time to understand *what effective answer we are required to give to the young generations*, so that they can recover the meaning of life. The call for the autonomy of the person, advanced as one of the claims of secularism, cannot be theorized as independence from God, because it is indeed God who guarantees the freedom of personal action. And it relates to our new digital culture, which presents many interesting aspects for the progress of humanity – think of medicine and the protection of creation – yet also brings with it a vision of mankind that appears problematic when referring to the need for truth that resides in every person, joined with the need for freedom in

interpersonal and social relationships.

Therefore, the major issue before us is to understand how to *overcome the rupture that has occurred in the transmission of faith*. To this end, it is urgent to recover an effective relationship with families and with formation centres. In order to be transmitted, faith in the risen Lord, which is the heart of evangelization, requires significant experience lived within the family and the Christian community as an encounter with Jesus Christ who changes life. Without this encounter, real and existential, we will always be subject to the temptation to make faith a theory and not a testimony of life.

Again, with regard to the priority question of the transmission of faith, I thank you for the service you give in the field of *catechesis*. And you do so also by making use of the new *Directory*, which you compiled in 2020. It is a valid tool, and can be effective not only for the renewal of catechistic methodology, but I would say above all for the involvement of the Christian community as a whole. In this mission, a specific role is entrusted to those who have received and will receive the *ministry of Catechist*, in order to be strengthened in their commitment to the service of evangelization. I hope that the Bishops will be able to nurture and accompany vocations to this ministry, especially among the young, so that the gap between generations may be narrowed and the transmission of the faith may not appear as a task entrusted only to older people. In this regard, I encourage you to find ways for the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to continue to be known, studied, and valued, so that it may respond to the new needs that manifest themselves with the passing decades.

A second theme I wish to share with you is the *spirituality of mercy*, as a fundamental component of the work of evangelization. God's mercy is never lacking, and we are called to bear witness to it and, so to speak, to make it circulate in the veins of the body of the Church. God is merciful: this perennial message was relaunched with strength and renewed methods by Saint John Paul II for the Church and humanity at the beginning of the third millennium. The *pastoral care of Shrines*, which is your responsibility, must be imbued with mercy, so that those who come to these places may find an oasis of peace and serenity. The *Missionaries of mercy*, with their generous service to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, offer witness that should help all priests to rediscover the grace and the joy of being ministers of God who forgives, always and without limits. Ministers of God who not only awaits us but comes towards us, goes in search of us, because He is a merciful Father, not a master; He is a good Shepherd, not a mercenary, and He is full of joy when He can welcome a person who returns, or whom He finds wandering in the wilderness (cf. *Jn 10; Lk 15*). When evangelization is carried out with the anointment and the style of mercy it receives a better hearing, and the heart opens more willingly to conversion. Indeed, we are touched in what we feel to need the most, namely pure, freely-given love, which is the wellspring of new life.

The third theme I wish to propose to you is *preparation for the next year's Ordinary Jubilee*. It will be a Jubilee in which the power of *hope* should emerge. In a few weeks' time I will publish the Apostolic Letter for its official proclamation: I hope that those pages will be able to help many people to reflect and above all to experience hope in a real way. This theological virtue has been seen poetically as the "little sister" among the other two, faith and charity, but without which these two do not flourish, do not express their best. The holy people of God needs it so much! I know the great effort the Dicastery makes on a daily basis in the organization of the forthcoming Jubilee. I thank you, and I am sure that so much effort will bear fruit. The welcome of pilgrims, however, needs to be expressed not only in the necessary structural and cultural works, but also by enabling them to live the experience of faith, conversion and forgiveness, encountering a living community that bears joyful and convinced witness to this.

And let us not forget that *this year* that precedes the Jubilee is *dedicated to prayer*. We need to rediscover prayer as the experience of being in the Lord's presence, of feeling we are understood, welcomed and loved by Him. As Jesus taught us, it is not a question of multiplying words, but rather of giving space to silence so as to listen to His World and to welcome Him in our life (cf. *Mt 6:5-9*). Let us start, brothers and sisters, to pray more, to pray better, in the school of Mary and of the saints.

Thank you for your work in these days, and for your service to the Church. I bless you from my heart, and I pray for you. And you too, please, pray for me. Thank you!

