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HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 240525d

Saturday 25.05.2024

Audience with participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies,
Dear National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies.
Dear co-workers of the Dicastery for Evangelization,
Brothers and sisters, good morning!

I warmly welcome all of you who have travelled from more than one hundred and twenty countries across five Continents for the Annual General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS). I extend my greetings to Cardinal Tagle, to the Secretary, Archbishop Nwachukwu, and to Archbishop Nappa, Adjunct Secretary and President of the PMS, together with the four General Secretaries.

On the eve of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, we are invited to contemplate the mystery of God: a mystery of love that offers itself, gives itself, and spends itself completely for the salvation of all. Reflecting upon this work of salvation, we discover three fundamental characteristics of the divine mission that have been present from the beginning: *communion, creativity* and *tenacity*. Let us consider these essential words, which are relevant for the Church in its permanent state of mission, and especially for our Missionary Societies called to renewal in order to be ever more effective in service.

First, *communion*. When we contemplate the Trinity, we see that God is a communion of persons, a mystery of love. The love with which God comes to seek and save us, rooted in his being One and Triune, is also the basis of the missionary nature of the pilgrim Church on earth (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 1; *Ad Gentes*, 2). In this perspective, we are called to live a spirituality of communion with God and with our brothers and sisters. Christian mission is not about transmitting some abstract truth or religious conviction, but, first and foremost, is

for enabling those we meet to have a fundamental experience of God's love. Indeed, if we are shining witnesses reflecting a ray of the Trinitarian mystery, they will be able to discover God's love in our lives and in the life of the Church.

Therefore, I urge everyone to grow in this spirituality of missionary communion, which is the foundation of the Church's current synodal journey. I emphasized this in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* and I reiterate it now, especially as you work on renewing your Statutes. Since a journey of missionary conversion is necessary for everyone, it is essential that opportunities for personal and communal formation be provided in order to grow in the dimension of "communal" missionary spirituality. The purpose of the Church's mission is "making everyone know and live the 'new' communion that the Son of God made man has introduced into the history of the world" (*Praedicate Evangelium*, I, 4).[1] Let us not forget that the call to communion implies a synodal style: walking together, listening to each other, engaging in dialogue. This expands our hearts, and fosters that increasingly universal outlook which was emphasized at the founding of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith: "We must not think only of this or that mission in particular, but of all the missions and missionary initiatives throughout the world" (cf. MONS. CHRISTIANI AND J. SERVEL, *Marie-Pauline Jaricot*, 39).

The second word I would propose is *creativity*. Rooted in the communion of the Trinity, we are involved in the creative work of God, who makes all things new (cf. *Rev* 21:5). We also participate in that creativity. I would like to say two things about this. The first is that creativity is linked to God's own freedom, which he gives to us in Christ and in the Spirit. Indeed, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (*2 Cor* 3:17). We must not allow ourselves to stifle missionary creative freedom! Second, as Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe, the Franciscan missionary in Japan and martyr of charity, said: "only love creates". Let us remember that evangelical creativity stems from divine love, and that all missionary activity is creative to the extent that Christ's charity is its origin, form and end. Thus, with inexhaustible imagination, such charity inspires new ways of evangelizing and serving others, especially the poorest, and include the customary collections taken for the universal funds of solidarity with the missions. To this end, we must promote these collections and explore new ways of encouraging the participation of individuals, groups and institutions who wish to support the Church's missionary endeavours as an expression of their gratitude for the graces received from the Lord.

The third and final word is *tenacity*, that is, steadfastness and perseverance in purpose and action. Let us also contemplate this characteristic of the love of the Triune God who, in order to fulfil his plan of salvation, with constant faithfulness has sent his servants throughout history and, in the fullness of time, gave himself in Christ Jesus. The divine mission "is a tireless going out to all men and women, in order to invite them to encounter God and enter into communion with him. Tireless! The Church, for her part, in fidelity to the mission she has received from the Lord, will continue to go to the ends of the earth, to set out over and over again, without ever growing weary or losing heart in the face of difficulties and obstacles" (*Message for World Mission Day* 2024).

We are called, then, to persevere and be tenacious in purpose and action. Those of you in the Pontifical Mission Societies encounter a great variety of situations and events that are part of the great ebb and flow of the Church's life across the globe. Thus, although you may come across many challenges, complex situations, burdens and weariness that accompany ecclesial life, do not be discouraged! Have the eyes, hearts and, allow me to say, the "flair", in order that, even amid numerous difficulties, you may recognize God's work, the gifts of consolation and healing he bestows, and the sometimes invisible yet fruitful sowing of hidden holiness. By focusing on the positive aspects and the joy that comes from contemplating God's work, we will know how to face even problematic situations with patience, avoiding inactivity and the spirit of defeatism. With tenacity and perseverance, go forth in the Lord!

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you once again, together with your co-workers, for your generosity and dedication in promoting the missionary responsibility of the faithful, especially in caring for the children of the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood. May Our Lady intercede for you. I impart to you my heartfelt blessing. Please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

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[1] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 32.