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Audience with participants in the 18th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Oblates of Saint Joseph

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Oblates of Saint Joseph (Josephites of Asti of Saint Joseph Marelo).

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, good morning!

I welcome you as you are concluding your 18th General Chapter. I greet Fr. Jan Pelczarski, re-elected – he did well, didn't he? They re-elected you! I greet the counsellors, all of you present here and the entire family of Joseph Marelo: religious sisters, laypeople and young people, an entire family: I greet you all. There are some religious sisters representing women and laypeople, there.

As you know, my family too has its origins in Asti. We have common roots in that land of Piedmont, which was the birthplace of your founder, Saint Joseph Marelo. It is a beautiful land, with good wine... ah, a beautiful land.

As a guide for your Chapter works, you have chosen Saint Paul's phrase to Timothy: "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Tim 1:6). They are demanding words, these, with which you recognize yourselves as beneficiaries of a gift – the holiness of the Founder, the charism and the history of your Congregation – and you commit yourselves to taking on the consequent responsibilities: to safeguard and make fruitful the talents received by placing them – yourselves and the talents – in the service of your brethren.

And these two attitudes – gratitude and responsibility – well recall the figure of Saint Joseph, guardian of the

Holy Family, who is the model, the inspirer and the intercessor of your Congregation.

I would like, therefore, to underline three dimensions of the existence of Joseph of Nazareth, which seem important to me also for your religious life and for the service you perform in the Church: *hiddenness*, *fatherliness* and *attention to the least*.

First: *hiddenness*. Saint Joseph Marello synthesized this value with the motto: “Be Carthusians indoors, and apostles outdoors” – it is beautiful, I did not know that. When I read it, it struck me as a beautiful summary – and it is very important. It is important first of all for you, so that you are able to root your life of faith and your religious consecration in “staying” with Jesus daily. Let us not delude ourselves: without Him, we cannot remain standing, none of us: everyone has his or her own frailties, and without the Lord to sustain us we would not stand. Therefore, I encourage you always to cultivate an intense life of prayer – well, *intense* is too strong an adjective, a *good* life of prayer, this, do not neglect it – through participation in the Sacraments, listening and meditation of the Word of God, Eucharistic adoration, both personal and community. And I want to highlight this: at times, we neglect adoration, but the prayer of adoration, silence before the Lord, at times a bit boring, no? – *to adore*, in silence: we should all do this, but men and women religious... This is how, first of all, Saint Joseph responded to the immense gift of having the very Son of God made man in his home: staying with Him, listening to Him, talking with Him and sharing everyday life with Him. Let us remember this: without Jesus, we cannot remain standing! And every one of us... in this moment I ask you to think of your own sins: we are all sinners. But think of your sins, now, and see that when you fell into sin, it was because you were not close to the Lord: it is always like this. Those who are close to the Lord cling on immediately, and do not fall. Closeness to the Lord.

And all this will reflect positively on your apostolate too, especially on that mission that characterizes you as “apostles of youth”. The young do not need us: they need God! And the more we live in His presence, the more we are capable of helping them to encounter Him, without pointless protagonism and having at heart only their salvation and their full happiness. Our young people – but in truth, all of us, a little – live in a world made up of externality, where what counts is appearance, obtaining consensus, always having new experiences. But a life lived entirely “outside” leaves a void within, like those who spend all their time in the street and let their own home fall to ruin through lack of care and love. Make your heart, your communities, your religious houses, make them places where one can feel and share the warmth of familiarity with God and among brothers; where this familiarity with God and among brothers, as Saint John Paul II said, “salvation – which comes through the humanity of Jesus – is realized in actions which are an everyday part of family life” (Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, 8). And this is what happened with Saint Joseph.

Second: *fatherliness*. And this is very important in order to go forward. In this regard, the words Saint Joseph Marello wrote to Don Stefano Delaude are very important: “Poor youth, too abandoned and neglected, poor growing generation too often left at the mercy of itself!” (*Letter 31*, 20 February 1869). One feels here the heart of a father, moved by the beauty of his children humiliated by the indifference and disinterest of those who should instead be helping them to give the best of themselves. And in the same letter he continues, considering how unjust and sterile is the attitude of those who then limit themselves to criticizing this abandoned and disoriented youth. And this is also the case today. The bishop-saint talks about “incorrect generosity”, of “misdirected affections” (cf. *ivi*), and this therefore shows that he sees in young people a great potential for good, which is simply waiting to blossom and bear fruit, if supported and accompanied by wise, patient and generous guides. And this is how you must be, attentive to the integral good of the young, present in a concrete way beside them and their families, experts in the maieutic art of good formators, wisely respectful of the times and possibilities of each person. Brothers, this is a great task, this: laborious but indispensable, always, and especially in our times (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 75).

And finally, after fatherliness, *attention to the least*. One of the striking things about Mary’s holy Spouse is the generous faith with which he accepted in his home and his life a God who, contrary to all expectations, appeared at his door in the son of a fragile girl with no possibility of recrimination. There was no right that Mary and her Child could humanly claim before the holy Patriarch, other than that of a Presence that only faith could recognize and charity welcome. And Joseph was capable of taking this step: he recognized the real presence of God in their poverty and made it his own; indeed, he joined it to his life. Because our acceptance of the last is this. It is not a question of stooping paternalistically to their supposed “inferiority”, but sharing our own poverty with them.

This is what God's making Himself poor teaches us (cf. *Phil 2:5-11*); this is what Saint Joseph Marengo taught us, reserving in his heart as a pastor a very special place for the most problematic young people, for the "poor youth", as he loved to say, and this is what the Lord calls us to do today too.

Dear brethren, I wanted to share with you these insights for your journey. Thank you for what you do in the Church and in society, thank you for your service! Continue with this generosity. I pray for you, and I bless you. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

And I would like to tell you something that makes me laugh. It is said – I have a painting of a sleeping Saint Joseph in my room, but it is said that in his life he was unable to sleep, he suffered from insomnia, because every time he fell asleep, his life was changed [laughter]. This is outside the text, right! This is outside the text... The man who let his life be changed: and it does me a great deal of good to think of this. He is brave, the boy...

[Blessing]
