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Audience of the Holy Father with delegations from the diocese of Aosta and the Congregation of the Canons of Great Saint Bernard

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the delegations of the diocese of Aosta and the Congregation of the Canons of Great Saint Bernard.

The following is the address Pope Francis delivered to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet the bishop of Aosta, the Prevost of Great Saint Bernard, the distinguished civil and religious authorities present, and all of you.

I am happy to meet you at the end of the Jubilee Year dedicated to the centenary of the proclamation of Saint Bernard of Aosta as Patron Saint of mountaineers, travellers and inhabitants of the Alps (cf. Pius XI, Letter *Quod Sancti*, 20 August 1923), as well as the ninth centenary since his canonization and the first millennium since his birth.

The fulcrum of the various moments that accompanied this celebratory time was therefore the figure of this Alpine Saint, on whom we too will pause for a moment to reflect. We could summarize some of the fundamental traits of his work by referring to three areas of action to which Providence called him, which are also very relevant today, namely: *proclamation*, *hospitality* and the *promotion of peace*. Proclamation, hospitality and the promotion of peace.

First of all: *proclamation*. Bernard, archdeacon of the diocese of Aosta, was a preacher capable of touching even the most hardened hearts, opening them to the gift of faith and conversion. He was able to make proclamation

“an intense and happy experience of the Spirit” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 135), and he devoted himself to this mission zealously until his death in 1081 in Novara, where indeed he was preaching.

Second: *hospitality*. First, *proclamation*; second, *hospitality*. The charitable adventure that made him famous is however linked to another mission entrusted to him by obedience: that of taking care of pilgrims and wayfarers who were crossing the Alpine passes near Mont Blanc – passes that still bear his name today, and he was nearby – to enter Italy from France and Switzerland, and vice versa, in international journeys. The trip was arduous and there was the risk of getting lost, being attacked and dying in the ice. To take care of these people, Bernard founded two noted Hospices, gathering with him your community of Canons, who still dedicate themselves to this service today, faithful to the motto: *Hic Christus adoratur at pascitur*, “Here Christ is adored and nourished”. It is a programme of integral charity, material and spiritual, that has the Eucharist at its centre, and which flows from prayer to hospitality towards whoever knocks at the door. A true model also for our times: to welcome and take care of whoever asks for help, in body and in spirit, without distinction and without barriers.

Proclamation, hospitality, and the third point: *worker for peace*. Bernard as a worker for peace. The emblematic episode in this regard is his journey to Pavia, already sick, to try to convince the Emperor Henry IV to desist from his intention to wage war against Pope Gregory VII. It was a journey that cost him his life. Indeed, he died shortly after his return. As we know, his attempt was unsuccessful. However, this makes him even more noble in our eyes, because it shows him engaged in a delicate and uncertain undertaking, with no guarantee of success. To promote peace, without being discouraged, even in the face of defeat: and how much we need this courage even now!

Dear friends, given that some of you are Alpine guides and ski instructors, I would like to conclude by remembering your Patron Saint through two symbols of the mountain: the pickaxe and the rope. Saint Bernard's pickaxe was the Word of God, with which he was able to break into the coldest and most hardened hearts; his rope was the community, with whom he walked – and helped others to walk – even along risky paths, to reach the destination. I wish for everyone to walk beautiful paths like his, among the high mountains, but above all paths within the heart. Do we have the courage to walk within the heart, to know what the heart feels, what the heart says? I bless you and the people of Val d'Aosta, and I ask you, please, to pray for me.
