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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with seminarians of the dioceses of Pamplona, Tudela, San Sebastián and Redemptoris Mater

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the seminarians of the dioceses of Pamplona, Tudela, San Sebastián and Redemptoris Mater.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear bishops,
Dear sister – there is only one,
Dear brothers,

Good morning. I welcome you with pleasure, seminarians from Pamplona and San Sebastián. Your archbishop was very excited about this audience and told me that you were counting on the affection I have for prisons, so that I would also grant you this audience. The seminary is not a prison, it is a place where you learn that a priest is a man, a human being who wishes to redeem, like your Mercedarian archbishop, a redeemer of prisoners; for a priest can be nothing other than a living image of Jesus, the Redeemer with a capital R.

This means many things, but a very precise one is that we must go into the prisons; certainly, into the government prisons, to offer to those who are detained in them the oil of consolation and the wine of hope, but also to all those prisons that confine the men and women of our society: ideological prisons, the moral ones, those that create exploitation, discouragement, ignorance or forgetfulness of God.

I return to prisons: please, go into the prisons, go, make the effort. Ever since I became bishop, on Holy Thursday, I perform the washing of the feet in a prison. They are those who most need us to wash their feet, as if to say, "Look, I am washing your feet because I am worse than you, but I had the luck not to be caught".

I remember, during the washing of the feet – it was in a women’s prison – I was washing a woman’s feet and when I was about to pass to the other, she grasped my hand, came close to my ear, and said to me, “Father, I killed my son”. The inner dramas of the conscience of those who live in prison. When you become priests, go into the prisons, it is a priority. And we can all say what I feel: why them and not me?

You will receive priestly anointment and it is to free prisoners, those who are in chains, without being aware of it (cf. *Lk 4:18*). Chained by many things: by culture, society, vices, hidden sins.

Good, you have this written. I will leave it with the bishop, who will let you read it. In this way we will not waste time because soon you will not listen any more. It is better for you to ask questions.

Second part of the address, handed to the archbishop

In the fourth chapter of his Gospel, Saint Luke offers a good meditation for the preparation of future priests, which I propose to you: he speaks to us of docility to the Spirit, of making a desert in order to meet God, emptying ourselves of so many things that we carry as ballast. He encourages us not to be afraid to confront the temptation of an idolatrous ministry where we are at the centre, seeking material power or applause.

The chapter goes on to say that Jesus went to Nazareth, His homeland, aware that in the eyes of the world He was no more than the son of Joseph, one like us. Never forget these roots, never forget that you are children of the People. This text from Luke also teaches us that in our apostolate we cannot make distinctions between people, even if they are strangers or even enemies, because for God we are all His children. When we look at our brother, let us recognize in him his readiness to receive the grace that the Lord offers him.

In another passage, the Lord indignantly grieves at the hardness of heart of His contemporaries who do not understand Jesus' solicitude to free a woman bound by an evil spirit for many years (cf. *Lk 13:16*). You, on the contrary, be always ready to bless, to liberate, and when you feel the hands that He anointed are paralyzed, then stretch them out with confidence like the crippled man in the Gospel of Mark (cf. 3:5). This is what Jesus did on the Cross, imprinting our wound in his Heart and arm, destroying with His love our death and crossing with His Passion the abyss that separated us from God (cf. *Song of Songs 8:6*).

Thus be courageous, selfless and tireless in bearing the divine mercy that the Lord has so generously poured out on you by choosing you for this ministry. May He bless you and may the Blessed Virgin watch over you.
