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Audience with participants in the Plenary Assembly of the International Theological Commission

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis received in audience the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the International Theological Commission, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence, dear brothers and sisters,

We are fast approaching the opening of the Holy Door of the Jubilee and we recently concluded the sixteenth Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. In light of these two events, I would like to offer two points for your reflection: first, the need to *put Christ back at the centre*, and second, to develop *a theology of synodality*.

To put Christ back at the centre. The Jubilee invites us to rediscover the face of Christ and to “re-centre” ourselves in him. During this Holy Year, we will also celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the first great Ecumenical Council, the Council of Nicaea. I am thinking of going there. This Council was a milestone in the history of the Church but also of humanity as a whole, because faith in Jesus, the Son of God made flesh “for us and for our salvation”, was defined and professed as a light that illumines the meaning of reality and the destiny of all history. In this way, the Church responded to the exhortation of the Apostle Peter: “Worship the Lord, Christ, in your hearts, always ready to answer anyone who asks you about the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15).

This exhortation, addressed to all Christians, can be applied in a particular way to the ministry that theologians are called to exercise as a service to the People of God. You are called to foster an encounter with Christ and to attain a deeper understanding of his mystery, so that we can better appreciate “what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge” (Eph 3:18-19).

The Council of Nicaea, in stating that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, highlighted something essential: in Jesus, we come to know the face of God and, at the same time, the face of humanity, and thus realize that we are sons and daughters in the Son and brothers and sisters of one another. This fraternity, grounded in Christ,

becomes for us a fundamental ethical imperative. It is significant, then, that you have devoted a large part of this Plenary Session to working on a document intended to shed light on the timeliness of the faith professed at Nicaea. A document of this sort could prove invaluable, in the course of the Jubilee Year, to nourish and deepen the faith of believers and, based on the figure of Jesus, to offer insights and reflections useful for a new cultural and social paradigm inspired by the humanity of Christ.

In today's complex and often polarized world, tragically marred by conflicts and violence, the love of God revealed in Christ and bestowed on us in the Spirit becomes an invitation to every man and woman to learn how to live fraternally and become an artisan of justice and peace. Only in this way can we sow seeds of hope wherever we live.

Putting Christ back at the centre means rekindling this hope, and this is precisely what theology is called to do, with perseverance, wisdom and foresight, and in dialogue with all other fields of knowledge.

We thus come to the second point, which is the need *to develop a theology of synodality*. The Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops devoted a paragraph of its Final Document to the task of theology, in the section on 'Charisms, Vocations and Ministries for Mission'; and offered these words of encouragement: "The Assembly invites theological institutions to continue research aimed at clarifying and deepening the meaning of synodality" (No. 67). This was a vision of Saint Paul VI when, at the end of the Council, he created the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. Almost sixty years later, this synodal theology has gradually developed and today we can say that it is mature. Today we cannot think of pastoral care without this dimension of synodality.

Along with the centrality of Christ, then, I would ask you to be mindful of the ecclesiological dimension of synodality, so as to accentuate its missionary purpose and the participation of the whole People of God in the variety of our cultures and traditions. I would say that the time has come to take a courageous step forward and to develop a theology of synodality, a theological reflection that can help, encourage and accompany the synodal process, for a new, more creative and daring missionary phase, inspired by the *kerygma* and involving every component of the Church's life.

Let me conclude by expressing my hope that you may be like the Apostle John, who as the beloved disciple placed his head close to the heart of Jesus (cf. *Jn* 13:25). As I observed in the Encyclical *Dilexit Nos*, the Sacred Heart of Jesus "is the unifying principle of reality, because 'Christ is the heart of the world; his Passover of death and resurrection is the centre of history, which thanks to him is the history of salvation'" (No. 31). By remaining, as it were, close to the heart of the Lord, your theology will draw from the source and bear fruit in the Church and in the world!

One fundamental thing for a fruitful theology is not to lose one's sense of humour. Please! This is a great help. The Holy Spirit is the one who helps us in this dimension of joy and of good humour.

Sisters and brothers, I thank you for your service. I accompany you with my blessing, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. For me, not against me! Thank you.
