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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Message of the Holy Father to the participants in the “II Congreso Internacional de Hermandades y Piedad Popular”

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father to the participants in the *II Congreso Internacional de Hermandades y Piedad Popular*, taking place in Seville from 4 to 8 December, which was read aloud at the opening of the event by the Substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State, Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra:

Message

Dear brothers and sisters,

Through these words I would like to join in the study days on fraternity and popular piety that you are holding in this city of Seville, cradle of saints and of a people who live with fervour the expressions of their faith to the point of making them consubstantial to their social fabric.

I would like to highlight three challenges in your programme, proposing them as a *trisagion*, a plea that we raise to God, asking the Father for the evangelizing effectiveness of our efforts, the Son for the beauty of our witness of life, and the Holy Spirit for a heart full of hidden charity that allows us to reach out to people, even silently.

Our life is a pilgrimage, a continuous station of penance which, in the felicitous expression of Saint Manuel González, we can propose as “a round trip, which begins, on the outward journey, in Christ and ends in the people, and begins in the people, on the return journey, and ends in Christ” (*Complete Works II*, no. 1884). The evangelizing efficacy of your proposal lies in its being born of Christ, of the faith received in the family; of the experience of living and sharing that faith in fraternity; of going out, united with your priests, from the parish, from the temple of your patron saint, towards the Holy Cathedral Church, together with the other Fraternities, showing that you are a People walking towards God.

All different and all united, hence a sublime beauty. How endearing to see the children in their children's costumes, doing children's work: carrying the water, the baskets of incense, feeling important in what they do, and at the same time longing to be able to grow up, and to wear the costume of the grown-ups, to be able to carry the cross, to be able to place themselves under the mantle of their Blessed Mother. The beauty of this diversity is also a school, it is a path: Saint Manuel began dancing before the throne of the *Corpus Domini* and he dedicated his whole life as a bishop and saint to serving it.

On the other hand, its *beauty* is perceived in that perfect union that is born of the combination of so many peculiarities, ministries, works, that with tenacity and patience are blended together. Above all, it is the *beauty* of Christ that summons us, calls us to be brothers and sisters and urges us to take Christ out into the streets, to bring him to the people, so that everyone can contemplate his beauty. What a joy it is to see the procession walk, accompanied by the rhythm of silent prayer, which overwhelms the heart of those who see it. Whether one carries, or simply accompanies, whether one wears a penitential habit, or a rosary, it is the same fervour, the same love, notes of the same score that only together can form a song of praise.

How many tears are shed at such moments, "weeping with Christ who weeps, accompanying the abandoned Christ, placing their hearts very close to the Heart of Christ" (*idem*, no. 1891) until they seem, as Saint Manuel would say, "madmen", madmen of love. This is surely what many who see them call them, thinking that there is no point in such an effort. But they are mad with love for God, to the extent that they touch the hearts of their people, to bring them to God.

A return journey, from the people we have met in the street, to whom we have shown the *beauty* of Jesus, of his Church, of this "crazy" love, to return to God. Saint Manuel assures us: "Alas, gentlemen, the people [...] are hungry for truth, for affection, for well-being, for justice, for heaven and, perhaps, without realizing it, for God" and "the tears of his heart" (*idem*, no. 1900), the heart-rending tears of his soul, cannot leave us unmoved. Our imaginary penitential station continues on its way to the Holy Church Cathedral, to the Tabernacle where the Lord awaits us, before Him we present these hearts, so that God the Father may make the seed we have tried to sow grow. This living Bread is the only one that can satisfy the hunger of our society, a Bread that was born to be given, to be consumed, and that from the altar calls us to dialogue with Him, to be our consolation and our rest.

As a people on the move, in almost martial order, whether carrying their cross or under the mantle of their blessed Mother, we feel that we are God's field, the seed of the kingdom, and it is in his presence that we return to our homes, to continue to reveal this joy, this beauty, this overflowing love, which is communicated to our children, to our families, friends, neighbours. It is in that intimate moment that we ask Jesus to give you the strength to join us in this pilgrimage, of procession and of life, together we will continue to carry Christ, taking him out into the streets so that he may enter into all hearts.

Dear brothers and sisters, I must confess something to you: the text I have proposed for your meditation by Saint Manuel González does not speak of devotion, public liturgies or contemplative prayer. In reality, it speaks of the social work of the Church, of the lay commitment to the transformation of the world, of the need to bring God's tenderness closer to people who suffer in body and soul. But his words reflect the same love, because "carrying" Christ in procession, carrying the cross that the Lord proposes to us every day, or carrying on our shoulders the brother we encounter prostrate on the road, as the Good Shepherd would do, is the same love, the same hidden charity that we find in the tabernacle of the Holy Church Cathedral, and in that of our titular church. It is that love that we take from Christ and bring to the people, that we bring to Christ together with that people, in a continuous round trip that makes up our earthly existence. May this be our wish and our supplication before the thrice holy God.

May Jesus bless you and the Holy Virgin keep you, and please, do not forget to pray for me.

Faternally,

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 9 May 2024, Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord.
