



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with the community of the San Paolo Theological Studium of Catania

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Community of the *San Paolo* Studium of Catania, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, dear sisters and brothers, good morning and welcome!

I greet the moderator of the Theological Studium, the director of the Studium, the teachers and the officials, and the students.

The *San Paolo* Theological Studium can be considered one of the first fruits of Vatican Council II: it was founded in 1969, when the dioceses of eastern Sicily decided to establish a single place of theological formation, which over time proved fruitful for priests, religious and laypeople. I encourage you to go forward on this path: *continue to walk together*, offering a broad-ranging formation, incisive in ecclesial and social life. Together with the Theological Faculty of Palermo, to which it is affiliated, your Studium constitutes a model that also stimulates other Churches to walk together in this sphere. Indeed, when we talk about communion, we must also include the relationship between formative structures, which become laboratories of communion and mission, inspired by theological reflection. The recent Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops has emphasized the synodal dimension of the ministry of theologians and theological institutions (cf. *Final Document*, 67).

The mission of a Theological Studium *cannot ignore the territory in which is located*. In this way, already in your academic journey, you experience ecclesiality, which places you alongside each other, in the diversity of vocations and gifts and in the search of new ways of evangelization. This too is a sign of the times, to be grasped with wisdom; it is a style of co-responsibility in which you are being “trained” today and which should continue in the life of your Churches, valuing the charisms of every person. Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of female students among you, who are now included in your Church communities with tasks of pastoral responsibility, religious and academic teaching: this too is a sign of the times, in an area where

women have often been devalued in their social role. But let us not forget that Sicily is the homeland of the martyr saints Agatha and Lucy, who were the “seed” of a robust faith, capable of renewal and of generating ever new witnesses, such as, for example, in our time, Blesseds Giuseppe Puglisi and Rosario Livatino.

Your land has wonderful natural and artistic beauty, unfortunately – unfortunately – threatened by Mafia speculation and corruption, which hinder development and impoverish resources, condemning most of all the inland areas and causing the emigration of the young. The Mafia always impoverishes. Always. Sicily needs men and women who are able to look to the future with hope and form new generations to be free and transparent in the care of the common good, to weaken both old and new forms of poverty. And I look at you, young people, and I say to you: in Christ “we learn to relate to one another in wholesome and happy ways, and to build up in this world God’s kingdom of love and justice”. And work so that the young people who go away to study return. May Sicily not lose its young blood, which has gone away to study. “Our hearts, united with the heart of Christ, are capable of working this social miracle” (Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos*, 28). Be aware that the culture and formation of a Theological Studium are at the service of the people, the poor, the last. In your land, which has always been a crossroads of peoples, many migrants land and many stay and become integrated: I urge you to be welcoming, to be creative in fraternity. And this commitment will be more fruitful if you know how to engage in dialogue with the cultures and religions of the other Mediterranean peoples, who look to the future with hope. Please, let us not extinguish the hope of the poor, of those poor who are the migrants! And you are welcoming towards migrants. Integrate migrants. For you, also the challenge of Muslim migrants: of how to integrate them and help them to enter into the dioceses.

Your Theological Studium has established a fruitful relationship with the University of Catania, the oldest cultural institution in Sicily, and many lecturers are involved in courses on Christian literature, law, and bioethics. This collaboration certainly benefits you, because it opens your studies and your future to a dialogue that must always be cultivated, to better understand the world in which you live and to inculturate the faith. On the other hand, it offers a fruitful contribution to the culture of your people, marked by the tragic nature of certain life experiences. I think of the greats of Sicilian literature, particularly Verga, who populates his novels with “losers”, resigned to pain and poverty. A film comes to mind that mirrors you well: “Kaos”. I have seen it three times, because I had to teach it as well. But it mirrors you well, your culture. In dialogue with this culture, which expresses itself in so many ways of living and thinking, know how to bring hope and commitment, *know how to “abound in hope”*. Never abound in complaint, in resignation, no... Complaining is a thing for people who have no courage. No, go forward with hope, and be missionaries of hope. Keep going, be brave!

Brothers and sisters, today is the liturgical memorial of Saint Nicholas, a saint who unites East and West, a pastor of the Church who reminds us of the Council of Nicaea, in which he participated and where he devoted himself to defending faith in the divinity of Christ. Please also heed the appeal I have made in view of the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, so that it may represent “a summons to all Churches and Ecclesial Communities to persevere on the path to visible unity” (Bull *Spes non confundit*, 17). Let us not grow weary, let us try to seek adequate forms to respond fully to Jesus’ prayer “so that they may all be one” (*Jn* 17:21).

May the Blessed Virgin Hodegetria, Patroness of Sicily, always accompany your journey. I bless you from my heart. And please, pray for me! Thank you.
