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Audience with participants in the 15th Elective General Chapter of the Union “Saint Catherine of Siena” of the School Missionaries

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the fifteenth Elective General Chapter of the Union “Saint Catherine of Siena” of the School Missionaries, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear sisters, good morning!

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of your general Chapter and the centenary of the founding of the Union “Saint Catherine of Siena” of the School Missionaries. The School is a mission, do not forget.

You have chosen, for your meetings, a demanding theme: *Understanding the past to understand together the future of the Union as it journeys with the Church*. Understanding the present, comprehending it, to understand the future, on the move, not still – the dead are still! – journeying with the Church. It is beautiful. It is in line with the legacy left to you by Venerable Luigia Tincani of giving creative answers to the questions of the men and women of our time, especially those who are indifferent to the faith and those who are far away, through the promotion of a Christian humanism. To do this, your foundress proposed three attitudes, which Saint John Paul II summarized as follows, I quote: “Constant commitment to one’s own sanctification, a serious theological and professional preparation, and a lifestyle that is friendly and loving towards everyone, especially young people” (*Address to the Union Saint Catherine of Siena of the Missionaries of the School*, 2 January 1995). And I like that, the friendly and loving lifestyle. Many times in my life I have encountered nuns with a vinegar face, and this is not friendly, this is not something that helps to attract people. Vinegar is ugly, and nuns with a vinegar face, let’s not say! In short: *holiness, preparation and friendliness*. I ask this of you.

First: *holiness*. It is a demanding term, which can be frightening, to the point that we struggle to apply it to ourselves. And yet it is the vocation we all have in common (cf. Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican,

Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 40) and the essential objective of our life is holiness. But holiness is a joyful thing, holiness attracts, holiness is spiritual joy. It is true that it is not easy to find holiness, but with the grace of God we can do it. How important this mission is today, especially for the young! You, as consecrated women, achieve it first and foremost in the *sequela Christi*, with the profession of the Gospel counsels, the sacramental life, listening and daily reflection on the Word of God, prayer and communal life (cf. *ibid.*, 44), as the Dominican motto teaches: “*contemplata aliis tradere*”. Remain well rooted in these foundations, so that your apostolate may be solid and rich. And in order to contemplate to hand down to others, speaking well and friendliness are necessary, and there is a great enemy of this, which is gossip. Please, distance yourself from gossip. Gossip kills, gossip poisons. Please, no gossip among you, none. And to ask this of a woman is heroic, but come on, let’s go forward, and no gossip.

And we come to the second attitude: *preparation*. We could say, with a modern term, “professionalism”: not, however, in the reductive sense of functional efficiency, but in the evangelical sense of dedication, lived in study and the continual furthering of one’s own knowledge and capacities, in personal confrontation and fraternal sharing of the truths learned, in the updating of teaching and communicative methods, to make your own the “worthy elements ... found in today's social movements” (Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 42), with openness, openness, and in dialogue with everyone. The Lord has taught us that He conversed with everyone, apart from one person who does not converse with the Lord, never: the devil. And when the devil approaches to ask those questions, the Lord does not dialogue with him. He answers with the Word of God, with the Scripture. Please, converse with everyone, apart from the devil. The devil comes into communities, look, jealousy all these things that are of everyone, not just women, everyone, and the devil goes there. You do not converse with the devil. Do you understand? You do not converse with the devil.

Be messengers of this friendliness, which is a gift of the Spirit, and of this joy, living every encounter with warm appreciation of the other in his or her sacred uniqueness.

Dear sisters, thank you for your work, thank you, especially in the sphere of youth! And I see that young nuns are lacking! How many novices do you have in the world? [Someone answers: “A dozen”]. Just a few! Look for a vocational apostolate, look for it. Continue to carry it forward with your openness and courage, ready to renew yourselves where necessary, with holiness of life, preparation and friendliness. I bless you and pray for you. And you too, please do not forget to pray for me – for, not against.
