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Meeting with the Neocatechumenal Way on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its founding

At 11.00 this morning, the Holy Father travelled to the esplanade of Tor Vergata, Rome, where the Meeting of the Neocatechumenal Way took place, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. During the celebration, Pope Francis blessed the crosses and gave to the leaders 34 new *missio ad gentes*, to take the Gospel to various parts of the world.

In addition, the Pope sent some communities of the parishes of Rome to take their mission of faith and assistance to the peripheries of the capital.

The following is the address the Pope gave during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am happy to meet you and to say today with you: thank you! Thanks to God, and also to you, especially to those who have made a long journey to be here. Thank you for the “yes” you have said, for having welcomed the Lord’s calling to live the Gospel and to evangelize. And a big thank you also goes to those who began the Neocatechumenal Way fifty years ago.

Fifty is an important number in the Scripture: on the fiftieth day the Spirit of the Risen One descended upon the Apostles and manifested the Church to the world. Earlier still, God had blessed the fiftieth year: “The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you” (*Lev 25: 11*). A holy year, in which the chosen people would have experienced first hand new realities, such as liberation and the return home of the oppressed: “Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants”, the Lord had said. “Each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan” (*v. 10*). So, after fifty years of the Way it would be good if each one of you were to say, “Thank you, Lord, because you have truly freed me; because in the Church I have found my family; because in your Baptism the old things have passed and I savour a new life” (*cf. 2 Cor 5: 17*); because through the Way you have shown me

the path to discover your tender Father's love".

Dear brothers and sisters, at the end you will sing the "*Te Deum* of thanksgiving for God's love and faithfulness". This is very beautiful: thanking God for His *love* and for His *faithfulness*. Often we thank Him for our gifts, for what He gives us, and it is good to do this. But it is even better to thank Him for *what He is*, because He is the God who is *faithful in love*. His goodness does not depend on us. Whatever we do, God continues to love us faithfully. This is the source of our trust, the great consolation of life. So, take courage, do not be sad! And when the clouds of problems seem to gather dense and heavy over your days, remember that God's faithful love always shines, like the sun that never sets. Keep in your memory His goodness, stronger than any evil, and the sweet remembrance of God's love will help you in any distress.

There is still an important thank you to be said: to those who are about to go forth in mission. I would like to say something to you from the heart, precisely on the mission, on evangelization, which is the priority of the Church today. Because mission is giving voice to God's faithful love, it is announcing that the Lord cares for us and will never tire of me, of you, of us and of this world of ours, of which we perhaps tire. Mission is giving what we have received. Mission is fulfilling God's mandate which we have listened to and on which I would like to reflect with you: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (*Mt 28: 19*).

Go. The mission demands that we leave. But in life, there is a strong temptation to remain, not to take risks, to be content with having the situation under control. It is easier to stay at home, surrounded by those who love us, but it is not Jesus' way. He sends us out: "Go". He does not use half measures. He does not authorize reduced transfers or reimbursed trips, but he says to His disciples, to *all* his disciples one word only: "Go!". Go: a powerful call that resonates in every corner of Christian life; a clear invitation always to be outbound, pilgrims in the world in the search for the brother who still does not know the joy of God's love.

But how do we go? It is necessary to travel light, you cannot take all your household goods with you. The Bible teaches this: when God frees the chosen people, He makes them go into the desert with only their trust in Him as baggage. And making Himself man, He Himself walks in poverty, without having a place to lay His head (cf. *Lk 9: 58*). He asks the same style of His followers. To go forth it is necessary to travel light. To *proclaim* it is necessary to *renounce*. Only a Church that renounces the world can proclaim the Lord well. Only a Church freed from power and money, free of triumphalism and clericalism, can bear witness in a credible way that Christ frees man, and those who, for His love, learn to renounce passing things, embrace this great treasure: freedom. They are no longer bridled by their own attachments, which always demand something more but never give peace, and they feel that the heart broadens, without restlessness, available for God and for brothers.

"Go" is the verb of the mission, and it says another thing to us: it must be conjugated in the plural. The Lord does not say "You go, then you, then you", [one by one] but rather "Go together!" Those who go alone are not fully missionary, only those who walk together. Walking together is an art always to be learned, every day. It is necessary to be careful, for example, not to dictate the pace to others. Rather, one should accompany and wait, remembering that another person's journey is not identical to mine. Just as in life, no-one takes exactly the same steps, it is thus also in faith and mission: we go ahead together, without isolating ourselves and without imposing our own direction, united, as Church, with the Pastors, with all our brothers, without rushing ahead, and without complaining about who has the slowest pace. We are pilgrims who, accompanied by brothers, accompany other brothers, and it is good to do so *personally*, with care and respect for the journey of each person and without forcing the growth of anyone, because the response to God matures only in authentic and sincere freedom.

The Risen Jesus says: "*Make disciples*". This is the mission. He does not say: conquer, occupy, but rather, "make disciples", that is, share with others the gift you have received, the encounter of love that has changed your life. It is the heart of the mission: bearing witness that God loves us and that with Him it true love is possible, the love that leads us to give life everywhere, in the family, at work, as consecrated persons and as spouses. Mission is to return disciples, with the new disciples of Jesus. It is to rediscover part of a disciple Church. Certainly, the Church is a teacher, but she cannot be a teacher if first she is not a disciple, just as she cannot be a mother if first she is not a daughter. This is our Mother: a humble Church, daughter of the Father and disciple of the Master, happy to be the *sister of humanity*. And this dynamic of discipleship – the disciple

who makes disciples – is totally different from proselytism.

Here lies the strength of proclamation, so that the world may believe. What counts is not convincing arguments, but the life that attracts; not the ability to impose oneself, but the courage to serve. And you have in your “DNA” this vocation to proclaim, living as a family, following the example of the Holy Family: in humility, simplicity and praise. You bring this family atmosphere into so many desolate and unconcerned places. Let yourselves be recognized as the friends of Jesus. Call everyone your friends and be friends to all.

“Go and make disciples of *all peoples*”. And when Jesus says everyone, He seems to want to emphasize that in His heart there is room for every people. Nobody is excluded. Like children to a father and a mother: even if they are many, large and small, they love each one with all their heart. Because love, in giving itself, does not diminish, but increases. And it is always hopeful. Like parents, who do not see first of all the defects and shortcomings of their children, but the children themselves, and in this light they welcome their problems and their difficulties, missionaries do likewise with the people loved by God. They do not highlight the negative aspects and the things to change, but rather they “see with the heart”, with a look that appreciates, an approach that respects, a trust that is patient. Go in this way on your mission, thinking of “playing at home”. Because the Lord is at home with every people and His Spirit has already sown prior to your arrival. And, thinking of our Father, Who loves the world so much (cf. *Jn 3: 16*), be passionate about humanity, collaborators in the joy of all (cf. *2 Cor 1: 24*), authoritative because you are nearby, listenable because you are close. Love the cultures and traditions of peoples, without imposing pre-established models. Do not start from theories and fixed mindsets, but from concrete situations: it will thus be the Spirit Who shapes the proclamation according to His times and His ways. And the Church will grow in His image: united in the diversity of peoples, gifts and charisms.

Dear brothers and sisters, your charism is a great gift from God for the Church of our time. Let us thank the Lord for these fifty years. An applause for the fifty years! And looking at His paternal, fraternal and loving faithfulness, never lose trust: He will guard you, spurring you at the same time to go, as beloved disciples, to all peoples, with humble simplicity. I accompany you and encourage you: go ahead! And please do not forget to pray for me, as I remain here!
