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Audience with Seminarians of the diocese of Agrigento

Impromptu Address of the Holy Father

Prepared Address of the Holy Father

At 11.30 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the seminarians of the diocese of Agrigento.

After handing those present the address he had prepared for the occasion, the Pope addressed some impromptu remarks to them.

The following are the Holy Father's impromptu address and the text prepared for the occasion:

Impromptu Address of the Holy Father

There is a prepared address, with the icon of the disciples of Emmaus, that you can read at home calmly, and reflect upon in peace. I will hand it to the Rector. I feel more at ease speaking a little more spontaneously.

In that address, the last word was "mission". I liked what the Rector said about the horizon of Albania. Because mission, it is true, is something in which the Spirit drives us to go out, to go out, always to go out; but if there is not the apostolic horizon, there is the danger of making a mistake and going out not to bear a message but to go for a "stroll", that is to go out in the wrong way. Instead of making a journey of strength, of coming out of oneself, it means going around in a maze, where one never succeeds in finding the way, or one takes the wrong road. "How can I be sure that my apostolic outgoing is what the Lord wants, what the Lord wants from me, both in formation and afterwards?". There is the bishop! The bishop is the one who on behalf of the Lord says: "This is

the road". You can go to the bishop and say, "I feel *this*", and he will discern if it is that or not. But definitely, the one who gives the mission is the bishop. Why do I say this? One cannot live the priesthood without a mission. The bishop does not only give a task: "Take care of this parish", like a bank manager hands out jobs to the workers. No. The bishop gives a mission. "Sanctify those people, bring Christ to those people". It is another level. Therefore, dialogue with the bishop is important. This is where I want to arrive, at dialogue with the bishop.

The bishop must know you as you are: each person has their own personality, their own way of feeling, their own way of thinking, their own virtues, their own faults... The bishop is a father: he is the father who helps grown, the father who prepares for the mission. And the better the bishop knows the priest, the lesser the danger of making a mistake in the mission he will give. One cannot be a good priest without a filial dialogue with the bishop. This is non-negotiable, as some like to say. "No, I am worker of the Church". That is mistaken. Here there is a bishop, not an assembly where a place is negotiated. There is a father who makes unity: in this way Jesus wanted things to be. A father who makes unity. It is beautiful when Paul writes to Titus, to Titus whom he left in Crete to "sort things out". And he tells him the virtues of priests, of the bishop and of the laity, also of the deacons. But he leaves the *bishop* to arrange things: to arrange them in the Spirit, which is not the same as arranging them in an organizational chart. The Church is not an organizational chart. It is true that at times we use an organizational chart to be more functional, but the Church goes beyond the organization, it is another thing: it is life, life "arranged" in the Holy Spirit.

And who is in the place of the father? The bishop. He is not the owner of a business, the bishop, no. He is not the one who commands: "here I am in charge", some obey, others pretend to obey and others do not do anything. No, the bishop is the father, he is fruitful, it is he who generates the mission. This word mission, which I wished to take, is loaded, it is loaded with the will of Jesus, it is loaded with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I urge you, from the Seminary learn to see in the bishop the father who is placed there to help you grow, to go ahead and to accompany you in the moments of your apostolate: in the beautiful moments, and in the ugly moments, but always to accompany you: in moments of success, in the moments of defeat you will always have in life, all of them... This is something very, very important.

Another thing, that of the *vase of clay*. I liked to take Jeremiah. He says: when the vase does not turn out well, the potter remakes it. While he is making the vase and there is something that does not work, there is time to redo and restart everything; but once it is fired... Please, let yourselves be formed. What the formators ask for are not whims. If you are not in agreement, speak about it. But be men, not children, men, courageous, and say it to the rector: "I do not agree with this, I don't understand it". This is important, to say what you feel. In this way one forms one's personality, to be truly a vessel full of grace. But if you remain silent and do not engage in dialogue, if you do not say your difficulties, if you do not describe your apostolic anxieties and all that you want, a silent man, once he is "fired", cannot be changed. And all life is like that. It is true that at times it is not pleasant when the potter intervenes in a decisive way, but it is for your own good. Let yourselves be formed, let yourselves be formed. Before firing, because that way you will be good.

And then, another two things. What is the spirituality of the diocesan clergy? As that priest used to say to the religious, "I have the spirituality of the religious congregation that Saint Peter founded". The spirituality of the diocesan clergy, what is it? It is "diocesanitas". "Diocesanitas" has three forms, three relationships. The first is the *relationship with the bishop*, but I have already spoken enough about that. The first relationship: one cannot be a good diocesan priest without the relationship with the bishop. Second: the *relationship with the presbytery*. Friendship between you. It is true that one cannot be close friends with everyone, because we are not equal, but good brothers yes, who care about each other. And what is the sign that in a presbytery there is brotherhood, there is fraternity? What is the sign? When *there is no gossip*. Gossip, the gossip is the plague of the presbytery. If you have something against him, say it to his face. Say it man to man. But do not talk behind his back: this is not what a man does. I am not saying it is not of a spiritual man, no, it is simply not of a man. When there is no gossip in a presbytery, when that door is closed, what happens? Well, there is a bit of noise, in meetings people say things directly, "I don't agree!", perhaps they raise their voices... but like brothers! At home, we brothers argue like that. But in *truth*. And then, caring for your brothers, wishing each other well. "Yes, Father, but you know, I don't like that other one". But there are also many I don't like, and there will be someone who doesn't like me, this is a natural thing in life, but the level of our consecration leads us to something else, to be harmonious, to be in harmony. This is a grace you must ask of the Holy Spirit. "*Ipse harmonia est*", He is harmony. It seems a

bit strange, the Holy Spirit, because with the charisms – because you are all different – He creates, let's put it this way, disorder: everyone different. But then He has the power to make that disorder into a richer order, with many different charisms that do not annul the personality of each one. *The Holy Spirit is He Who makes unity: the unity of the presbytery.*

And then, two other things. What is the spirituality of the diocesan clergy? As the priest said to the religious: "I have the spirituality of the religious congregation that founded Saint Peter". The spirituality of the diocesan clergy, what is it? It is diocesanity. Diocesanity has three addresses, three relationships. The first is the relationship with the bishop, but I have already talked about it sufficiently. The first report: one can not be a good diocesan priest without the relationship with the bishop. Second: the relationship in the presbytery. Friendship among you. It is true that one can not be a close friend of everyone, because we are not equal, but good brothers, yes, that they love each other. And what is the sign that in a presbytery there is brotherhood, is there fraternity? What is the sign? When there is no talk. The chatter, the chatter is the plague of the presbytery. If you have something against him, say it in your face. Dilla from man to man. But do not speak badly: this is not for men! I do not say from a spiritual man, no, it's not just a man. When there is no chatter in a presbytery, when that door is closed, what happens? Well, there is a bit 'of noise, in the meetings you say things in the face, "I do not agree!", A little raises his voice ... But as brothers! At home, we brothers quarreled like that. But in the truth. And then, take care of the brothers, love each other. "Yes, Father, but you know, that other dislike me ...". But I too have many who dislike me and I dislike someone else, this is a natural thing of life, but the level of our consecration leads us to something else, to be harmonious, in harmony. This is a grace that you must ask the Holy Spirit. That phrase of St. Basil - which some say was not from St. Basil - in the Treatise on the Holy Spirit: "Ipse harmonia est", He is harmony. It seems a little strange, the Holy Spirit, because with the charisms - because all of you are different - he does, so to speak, like a disorder: all different. But then it has the power to make that disorder a richer order, with many different charisms that do not nullify each person's personality. The Holy Spirit is what makes unity: unity in the presbytery.

The relationship with the bishop, the relationship between you. Negative sign: gossip. No gossip. Positive sign: saying things clearly, discussing, even getting angry, but this is healthy, this is what men do. Gossip is for cowards.

The relationship with the bishop, the relationship between you, and the third: *the relationship with the people of God*. We are called by the Lord to *serve* the Lord in the people of God. Or rather, we are *drawn* from the people of God. This helps us greatly! The memory, that of Amos, when he says, "You are a prophet". I am? Which prophet? I was drawn from behind the flock, I was a shepherd... Each one of us was drawn from the people of God, he was chosen and we must not forget where we come from. Because very often, when we forget this, we fall into the trap of *clericalism* and we forget the people we came from. Please, do not forget your mother, your father, your grandmother, your grandfather, the village, poverty, family difficulties: do not forget them! The Lord has taken you from there, from the people of God. Because with this, with this memory, you will know how to speak to the people of God, how to *serve* the people of God. The priest who comes from the people and does not forget that he was taken from the people, from the Christian community, at the service of the people. "But no, I have forgotten, now I feel a bit superior to everyone...". *Clericalism*, my dears, it is our ugliest perversion. The Lord wants you to be shepherds, shepherds of the people, not state clerics.

This is the spirituality [of the diocesan priest]: the relationship with the bishop, the relationship between you and the contact, the relationship with the people of God in memory – where I come from – and in service – where I am going. And how can we make this grow? With spiritual life. You have a spiritual father: open your heart to the spiritual father. And he will teach you how to pray, prayer: how to love Our Lady... do not forget this, because she is always close to the vocation of each one of you. Conversation with the spiritual father. Who is not an inspector of your conscience, he is one who, on behalf of the bishop, helps you to grow. Spiritual life.

Thank you for the visit. I forgot to bring the booklet I wanted to give to you, but I will send it to the bishop, for each one of you. And pray for me, I will pray for you. Do not forget this: the spirituality of the diocesan clergy. Take courage!

Prepared Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers,

I welcome you and thank you for this visit. I thank in particular your Rector, also for his words of introduction.

In the short time of our meeting I would like to give you some ideas for personal and community reflection, and I will take them from the recent Synod of young people.

First of all, the biblical icon: *the Gospel of the disciples of Emmaus*. I would like to restore this icon to you, because it has guided all the work of the last Synod and can continue to inspire your journey. And it is precisely *journey* that is the first key word: the Risen Jesus meets us on the journey, which at the same time is the path, that is, the reality in which each of us is called to live, and it is the inner path, the path of faith and hope, which knows moments of light and moments of darkness. Here, in the journey, the Lord meets us, listens to us and speaks to us.

First of all, He listens to us. This is the second key word: *listen*. Our God is Word, and at the same time He is the silence that listens. Jesus is the Word that has listened to us, the acceptance of our human condition. When He appears next to the two disciples, He walks with them listening to them, and even stimulating them to bring out what they have inside, their hope and their disappointment. This, in your life as a seminary, means that in the first place there is the dialogue with the Lord, which is constituted of mutual listening: He listens to me and I listen to Him. No fiction. No mask.

This listening to the heart in prayer educates us to be people able to listen to others, to become, God willing, priests who offer the service of listening – and how much we need it! – and it educates us increasingly to be a Church *that listens*, a community that knows how to listen. You now live this in particular in contact with the young, meeting them, listening to them, inviting them to express themselves ... But this applies to all pastoral life: like Jesus, the Church is sent into the world to listen to the cry of humanity, which is often a silent cry, sometimes repressed, suffocated.

I walk; I listen; the third word is *discernment*. The seminary is a place and time of discernment. And this requires accompaniment, as Jesus does with the two disciples and with all His disciples, especially the Twelve. He accompanies them patiently and with wisdom, and He educates them to follow Him in the truth, exposing the false expectations they carry in their hearts. With respect and decision, like a good friend and also a good doctor, who sometimes has to use the scalpel. Many problems that occur in the life of a priest are due to a lack of discernment during the seminary years. Not all and not always, but many. It is normal, and the same goes for marriage: certain things not addressed beforehand can become problems later. Jesus does not pretend with the two of Emmaus, He is not evasive, He does not circumvent the problem: He calls them “foolish and slow of heart” (Lk 24: 25) because they do not believe in the prophets. He opens their minds to the Scriptures, and then, at the table, He opens their eyes to His new Presence, in the sign of the broken bread.

The mystery of vocation and discernment is a masterpiece of the Holy Spirit, which requires the collaboration of the young man who is called, and of the adult who accompanies him.

We know that the fourth word is *mission*; and the Synod of Youth greatly valued the synodal dimension of mission: of *going together* to meet others. The two of Emmaus return together to Jerusalem and above all they join the apostolic community which, by the power of the Spirit, becomes entirely missionary. This emphasis is important, because the temptation to be good individual missionaries is always lurking. Already as seminarians one can fall prey to this temptation: feeling good because one is brilliant in preaching, or organizing events, or in beautiful ceremonies, and so on. Too often our approach has been individual, rather than collegial and fraternal. And so the presbytery and diocesan pastoral work may present splendid individuality but little testimony of

communion, of collegiality. Thanks to God we are growing in this, also forced by the scarcity of clergy, but communion is not made by compulsion: we must believe in it and be docile to the Spirit.

Dear brothers, here are the ideas I leave you, all contained in the Gospel icon of the disciples of Emmaus: walking; listening; discerning; going together. I ask the Lord and the Virgin Mary to accompany you, I bless you and I pray for you. And please, remember to pray for me.
