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Message of the Holy Father to participants in the Fourth Day for elderly and sick priests of Lombardy

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the Fourth Day for elderly and sick priests of Lombardy, taking place today at the “Santa Maria del Fonte” Shrine in Caravaggio, Bergamo:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear brother priests,

I rejoice that this year too, despite the limitations necessary to counter the pandemic, you have joined your bishops in the Shrine of Our Lady of Caravaggio.

I thank the Episcopal Conference of Lombardy, which for six years has organized this day of prayer and fraternity with elderly and sick clergy. This attention paid by pastors for the more physically frail members of the presbytery is good. In reality, you are priests who, in prayer, in listening, in the offering of suffering, carry out a ministry that is not of secondary importance in your Churches.

I thank UNITALSI and those who are working for the success of this meeting. With their concrete commitment and the spirit that animates them, the volunteers express the gratitude of all God's people to their ministers.

And it is to you in particular, dear confreres who live the time of old age or the bitter hour of sickness, that I feel the need to say thank you. Thank you for your witness of faithful love to God and to the Church. Thank you for the silent announcement of the gospel of life. Thank you, because you are the living memory we draw upon to build the Church's tomorrow.

In recent months, we have all experienced some restrictions. The days, spent in a limited space, seemed endless and always the same. We felt the lack of our dearest affections and friends; the fear of contagion

reminded us of our precariousness. After all, we knew what some of you, as well as many other elderly people, experience on a daily basis. I hope that this period will help us to understand that, much more than occupying space, it is necessary not to waste the time that is given to us; that it will help us to enjoy the beauty of the encounter with the other, to heal from the virus of self-sufficiency. Let us not forget this lesson!

In the hardest moment, filled with “a deafening silence and a desolate emptiness” (Moment of prayer, 27 March 2020), many people, almost spontaneously, raised their eyes to Heaven. With God’s grace, it can be an experience of purification. For our priestly life too, fragility can be “like a refiner’s fire, like fuller’s lye” (*Mal* 3: 2), which, lifting us up towards God, refines us and sanctifies us. Let us not be afraid of suffering: may the Lord bear the cross with us!

Dear brothers, I entrust each one of you to the Virgin Mary. To her, Mother of priests, I remember in prayer the many priests deceased due to this virus, and those who are facing the path of rehabilitation.

I impart to you my heartfelt blessing. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 13 August 2020
