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Audience with the Convitto San Luigi dei Francesi (Saint Louis of the French) priestly community in Rome

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the priests of the Convitto San Luigi dei Francesi (Saint Louis of the French) priestly community in Rome.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers,

I thank the rector, Msgr. Laurent Bréguet, for his kind words.

In a society marked by individualism, self-assertion and indifference, you experience living together with its daily challenges. Situated in the heart of Rome, your house, with its witness of life, is able to communicate to the people who frequent it the Gospel values of a diverse and supportive fraternity, especially when someone is going through a difficult moment. Indeed, your fraternal life and your various commitments are capable of making felt the fidelity of God's love and His closeness. A sign, a signal.

In this year dedicated to Saint Joseph, I invite you to rediscover the face of this man of faith, this tender father, model of fidelity and trusting abandonment to God's plan. "Even through Joseph's fears, God's will, his history and his plan were at work. Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses" (Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, 2). We must not ignore frailty: it is a theological place. My frailty, that of each one of us, is a theological place of encounter with the Lord. The "superman" priests come to a bad end, all of them. The fragile priest, who knows his weaknesses and talks about them with the Lord, this will go well. With Joseph, we are called to return to the experience of the simple acts of acceptance, tenderness, the gift of self.

In community life, there is always the temptation to create small closed groups, to isolate oneself, to criticise and speak ill of others, to believe oneself superior, more intelligent. Gossip is a habit of closed groups, a habit also of priests who become like spinsters: they go and talk, they gossip: this does not help. This undermines us all, and it is not good. We must give up this habit, and look at and think about God's mercy. May you always welcome one another as a gift. In a fraternity lived in truth, in the sincerity of relationships and in a life of prayer, we can form a community in which we can breathe the air of joy and tenderness.

I encourage you to live the precious moments of sharing and community prayer in active, joyful participation. The priest is a man who, in the light of the Gospel, spreads the taste for God around him and transmits hope to restless hearts: this is how it should be. The studies you undertake at the various universities in Rome prepare you for your future tasks as pastors and enable you to appreciate better the reality in which you are called to proclaim the Gospel of joy. However, you do not go into the field to apply theories without taking into account the environment in which you find yourselves, as well as the people entrusted to you. I wish you to be "shepherds, with the 'odour of the sheep'" (*Homily*, 28 March 2013), people capable of living, laughing and crying with your people, in a word, communicating with them. It worries me when people reflect on and think about the priesthood as if it were a laboratory thing: this priest, that other priest... You cannot reflect on the priest outside the holy people of God. The ministerial priesthood is a consequence of the baptismal priesthood of the holy faithful people of God. This must not be forgotten. If you think of a priesthood isolated from the people of God, that is not a Catholic priesthood, no; nor is it even a Christian one. Rid yourselves of your preconceived ideas, your dreams of greatness, your self-assertion, and put God and people at the centre of your daily concerns. To put God's holy faithful people at the centre you have to be a pastor. "No, I would like to be an intellectual only, not a pastor": then ask to be reduced to the lay state - it will be better for you - and be an intellectual. But if you are a priest, be a pastor. You will be a pastor in many ways, but always in the midst of God's people. As Paul reminded his beloved disciple: "Remember your mother, your grandmother, the people, who taught you". The Lord says to David: "I have chosen you from the back of the flock", from there.

Dear brother priests, I invite you to always have broad horizons, to dream, to dream of a Church that is entirely at the service of a world that is more fraternal and solidary. And for this, as protagonists, you have your contribution to offer. Do not be afraid to dare, to risk, to go forward because you can do everything with Christ who gives you strength (cf. *Phil* 4:13). With him you can be apostles of joy, cultivating in yourselves the gratitude of being at the service of your brothers and sisters and of the Church. And with joy goes a sense of humour. A priest who does not have a sense of humour is not liked, something is wrong. Imitate those great priests who laugh at others, at themselves and also at their own shadow: a sense of humour is one of the characteristics of holiness, as I pointed out in the Apostolic Exhortation on holiness, *Gaudete et exultate*. And cultivate in yourselves the gratitude of being at the service of your brothers and of the Church. As priests, you have been "Anointed with the oil of gladness so as to anoint others with the oil of gladness" (*Homily*, 17 April 2014). And it is only by remaining rooted in Christ that you can experience a joy that moves you to conquer hearts. Priestly joy is the source of your action as missionaries of your time.

Finally, I invite you to cultivate gratitude. Gratitude to the Lord for what you are to each other. With your limitations, frailties, tribulations, there is always a loving gaze resting on you and giving you confidence. Gratitude "is always 'a powerful weapon'" (*Letter to Priests on the 160th anniversary of the death of Saint John Mary Vianney*, 4 August 2019), enabling us to keep the flame of hope burning in moments of discouragement, loneliness and trial.

I entrust each one of you, your family members, the staff of your home, as well as the members of the parish of Saint Louis of the French to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and to the protection of St Louis. I bless you from my heart, and I ask you please not to forget to pray for me, for I am in need. This role is not easy. And in the books of spirituality there is a chapter - in some books, but let us think of Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori and many others - a chapter on a theme and then an example, and some say: "Where it can be proved, I have told it with an example", and they give an example from life. Today, before you came in, Father Landousies told me that at the end of June he will be leaving this office here in the Curia: he has been my French translator for so long. But I would like to give a summary of who he is. He is exemplary. I found in him the witness of a happy priest, of a consistent priest, a priest who was able to live with martyrs who had already been beatified - whom he knew one by one - and also to live with an unidentified illness, with the same peace, with the same witness.

And I take advantage of this publicly, even in front of *L'Osservatore Romano*, to thank him for his witness, which has done me so much good. His way of being has done me good. He will leave, but he will go to carry out his ministry in Marseille, and he will do so much good there with his ability to welcome everyone; but he leaves here the good odour of Christ, the good odour of a priest, of a good priest. So before you all I say thank you, thank you for all that you have done.
