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Audience with members of the Secular Institute of the COMI (Cooperatrici Oblate Missionarie dell'Immacolata)

The following are the words the Holy Father Francis addressed to the members of the Secular Institute of the COMI (Cooperatrici Oblate Missionarie dell'Immacolata), whom he received in audience this morning in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of the Institute and the twentieth of its Pontifical approval:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear sisters, and dear brothers!

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of two of your anniversaries: the seventieth of the birth of the Institute, and the twentieth of its pontifical approval. I address in particular you Oblates, but also extend my greeting and my reflections to those of you who share their spirituality and their mission: thank you for your presence!

The Institute was founded by Father Gaetano Liuzzo, who passed on to you the charism of Saint Eugene of Mazenod, founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Thus, you have been called to embrace the evangelizing mission by imitating the boldness of Saint Eugene in the proclamation of Christ the Saviour, in his passionate love for Him, for the Church and for every brother and sister. You are called to live this charism in secularity, integrated in the world with your heart immersed in God. Being consecrated in a secular Institute does not mean taking refuge in a "middle ground", but sharing fully, like Jesus, the condition of ordinary people, the daily routine of work, of the home, of neighbourly relations, and so on, all inspired by the light of faith, the warmth of charity, the horizon of hope. It is living the spirit of the Incarnation in the time and place in which God has placed us, taking on reality with an open heart, to sow the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Your specificity is precisely that of sanctifying secular activities in order to *recapitulate everything in Christ*. To live like others, in the midst of others, in the same professions, in the same trades, in the same difficulties; but with such a union with God that it sanctifies projects and actions. When Pope Pius XII, in his Motu Proprio *Primo*

Feliciter, dealing with secular institutes, says that “*the entire life of the members must be translated into an apostolate*”, he means precisely this. Indeed, Jesus, in his hidden life, is a model for all. Even his ordinary actions had a divine value, conferred by his Person, by his union with the Father, by the redemptive purposes for which he became incarnate. The same applies to the members of secular institutes and to the lay people associated with them. Their common daily activities acquire a very special apostolic value because of their personal consecration, their union with God and the purpose given to their lives. Secular activities, in themselves, are not a direct apostolate, but they can become one.

If mission is dedicating oneself to God’s plan in history, secularity consists in living it. And the prophecy of secular consecration is incompatible with the fear of places and situations at risk. On the contrary, it is precisely these situations that are propitious for such consecration, so that in them the members of secular institutes can make their contribution, with humility and courage, to the history of salvation, wherever people suffer exclusion and marginalization, and their dignity is violated. Everyday relationships - in the family and in the Christian community, at work and at school, in the various psychological and social situations, and above all in the sharing of faith and in apostolic commitment - this is the fabric on which to embroider the richness of your charism. Without relationships everything falls apart and everything risks being a counter-witness.

Saint Eugene of Mazenod often repeated to the Oblates: “in the name of God, be holy”. I would like to structure this call to holiness according to three attitudes:

Being ready. Jesus says: “Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning” (Lk 12: 35). This means living fully in the present by grasping the promise of eternity. Our whole life is a striving for eternal life and we must be ready. A person is ready when he or she is completely given to God and to his or her brothers and sisters. Not when there is applause and success, no, life is much more than that. It is being in the world to the full, in the truth and freedom of the children of God and in the relationship of brotherhood with others. And this intensity of relationship with the Father and with our brothers and sisters is nourished by prayer: prayer allows God to be close to us, it frees us from solitude and infuses hope. Prayer oxygenates life: just as one cannot live without breathing, one cannot be a Christian and live as a Christian, let alone as a consecrated person, without prayer.

Being oblates: you are “Oblate Cooperatrici”, “Oblate co-workers”, that is, totally given - *oblate* - to Christ in order to identify spiritually with Him. It is very important to always remember this “totally”. It indicates an exclusive, generous and unreserved belonging. But beware! We must not focus our gaze on our commitment, but on him, on the grace of his gift. He is the Oblate, in whom you are Oblates. Jesus, coming among us as a servant, and dying on the cross in the midst of two evildoers, explained to us well what life is: it is love that asks for love, grace that asks for gratuitousness. And he shows it to us from the cross, because this road is not easy, it is not comfortable, it requires payment in person. But it is the path of peace and joy.

And the third: being *confident in God like Mary*: imitating her in listening to and accepting God’s will, so that his Word may also become flesh in us. Thanks to her faith, to her “yes”, to her “here I am”, the Father’s plan of universal salvation was fulfilled. The safe path, therefore, also for you who are “of the Immaculate”, is the one travelled by her. This path is well described by the incandescent words that your historical Founder left you in his testament: “Your vocation is *love*, your law is *love*, your medicine is *love*. Trinitarian Christocentric love and universal missionary love, at home and throughout the world, reincarnating that of the Mother, as true new Mary of Nazareth, ardent and generous like and with her”.

And this is also my wish for you. May you do everything with joyful dedication like Mary, so as to be truly “Oblate missionary co-workers of the Immaculate”. Go forward with courage and boldness, without concern for numbers! You - you have said it - are like yeast. Small, hidden, but full of faith. The larger the dough to be leavened, the richer the quality of the leaven must be!

I bless you, consecrated women and all you friends and co-workers. I pray for you. And you too, please do not forget to pray for me.

