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## Audience with participants in the General Chapter of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Chapter of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers).

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

### Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the Superior General for the words with which he introduced this meeting of ours.

Unfortunately, to my great regret, I have had to postpone my trip to Congo and South Sudan. Indeed, at my age it is not so easy to go on a mission! But your prayers and example give me courage, and I am confident that I will be able to visit these peoples, whom I carry in my heart. Next Sunday, I will try to celebrate Mass with the Congolese community in Rome. Not next Sunday, 3 July, the day I should have celebrated in Kinshasa. We will bring Kinshasa to Saint Peter's, and there we will celebrate with all the Roman Congolese people – there are many of them!

I remember the celebration of your 150th, which we experienced three years ago with your Missionary sisters. Please, give my regards to them too!

For this General Chapter, you have chosen to work on the *mission as prophetic witness*. We will briefly reflect on this. But first, I want to tell you that I was very pleased to hear that you have lived these days "with gratitude" and "with hope". This is very good. Looking at the past with gratitude is a sign of good spiritual health; it is the "deuteronomic" attitude that God taught his people (cf. *Dt*, chapter 8). Cultivating grateful remembrance of the journey the Lord has had us take. And this gratitude is what nurtures the flame of hope. Those who do not thank

God for the gifts he has sown along the way – albeit tiring and at times painful – does not even have a hopeful heart, open to the surprises of God and trusting in his providence. In particular, this spiritual attitude is decisive to allow to mature the seedlings of the vocation that the Lord inspires with his Spirit and his Word. A community in which one knows how to say “thank you” to God and to one’s brothers, and in which one helps the other to hope in the Risen Lord, is a community that attracts and sustains those who are called to it. So, keep going in this way: gratitude and hope.

Let us now come to the theme of the *mission as prophetic witness*. Here faithfulness to your roots, to the charism that the Spirit entrusted to Cardinal Lavigerie, is at play. The world changes, and Africa changes too, but that gift retains its meaning and strength. And it is conserved in you to the extent that it always leads back to Christ and to the Gospel. If salt loses its flavour, what use is it? (cf. *Mt* 5:13). The Father General recalled the exhortation that the founder used to repeat: “Be apostles, none other than apostles!” And the apostle of Jesus Christ is not one who proselytizes. Evangelical proclamation has nothing to do with proselytism. If at any point one of you finds himself proselytizing, please, stop, convert, and then continue. Proclamation is another thing. The apostle is not a manager, he is not a learned lecturer, he is not an IT wizard, the apostle is a *witness*. This applies always and everywhere in the Church, but it applies especially to those who, like you, are often required to live in mission of contexts of first evangelization or where the Islamic religion is prevalent.

Witness essentially means two things: *prayer* and *fraternity*. A heart open to God and open to brothers and sisters. First of all, to be in the presence of God, to let oneself be looked at by him, every day, in adoration. There, to draw the lymph, in that “abiding in him”, in Christ, which is the condition for being apostles (cf. *Jn* 15:1-9). It is the paradox of the mission: you can *go* only if you *stay*. If you are not capable of abiding in the Lord, you cannot go.

Recently, the witness of Charles de Foucauld was proposed to the veneration of the universal Church: it is another charism, certainly, but it has much to say to you too, as to all Christians of our time. “Drawing upon his intense experience of God, [he] made a journey of transformation towards feeling a brother to all” (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 286). Prayer and fraternity: the Church must return to this *essential core*, this radiant simplicity, naturally not in a uniform way, but in the variety of her charisms, ministries, and institutions; but everything must allow this original core, which goes back to the Pentecost and the first community, described in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 2: 42-47; 4:32-35), to shine through.

Often, we are led to think of prophecy as an individual reality, and this is a dimension that always remains true, based on the model of the prophets of Israel. But prophecy is also and, I would say, above all, communitarian: it is the community that bears prophetic witness. I think of your fraternities, made up of people from many countries, from various cultures. It is not easy; it is a challenge that can be accepted only by counting on the help of the Holy Spirit. And then this little community of yours, which lives on prayer and fraternity, is required in turn to engage in dialogue with the environment in which it lives, with the people, with the local culture. In these contexts, where often, besides poverty, one experiences insecurity and precariousness, you are sent to live the *sweet joy of evangelizing*. Saint Paul VI uses this word in his *Evangelii nuntiandi*. Evangelizing is the mission of the Church, evangelizing is the joy of the Church. Incidentally: take *Evangelii nuntiandi*, which is still effective today, and it will give you many, many insights for reflection and mission. With you I thank the Lord for this tremendous gift of evangelization.

May Our Lady of Africa accompany you and keep you. I pray for you, I give you my blessing; take it also to your brothers and to the faithful of your communities. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

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