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Audience with participants in the Third International Congress of Catechists

This morning, in the Vatican, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the International Congress of Catechists.

The following is his address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear catechists, good morning!

It is a source of joy to meet you because I am well aware of your commitment to the transmission of faith. As Archbishop Fisichella – whom I thank for this appointment – said, you come from many different countries and are the sign of the Church's responsibility towards many people: children, young people and adults who ask to carry out a journey of faith.

I greeted you all as catechists. I did so intentionally. I see among you a number of bishops, many priests and consecrated persons: they too are catechists. Indeed, I would say, they are first and foremost catechists, because the Lord calls on us all to make the Gospel resonate in the heart of every person. I confess to you that I greatly enjoy the Wednesday morning appointment, when every week I meet many people who come to participate in the catechesis. This is a privileged moment because, reflecting on the Word of God and the tradition of the Church, we walk as the People of God, and we are also required to find the necessary forms for bearing witness to the Gospel in daily life.

I beg you: never tire of *being catechists*. Not of "giving a lesson" of catechesis. Catechesis cannot be like an hour at school, but rather a living experience of the faith that each one of us feels the desire to transmit to the new generations. Certainly, we must find the best ways to ensure that the communication of faith is adequate to the age and preparation of the people who are listening to us; yet the personal encounter we have with each one of them is decisive. Only the interpersonal encounter opens the heart to receive the first proclamation and to

desire to grow in the Christian life with the proper dynamism that catechesis allows. The new *Directory for Catechesis*, which was delivered to you in recent months, will be very useful to you to understand how to follow this itinerary and how to renew catechesis in the dioceses and parishes.

Never forget the purpose of catechesis, which is a privileged stage in evangelization, that of meeting Jesus Christ and allowing him to grow in us. And here we enter directly into the specifics of your third International Meeting, which has taken into consideration the third part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. There is a passage in the *Catechism* that I think is important to offer to you regarding your being "Witnesses of the new life". It says: "When we believe in Jesus Christ, partake of his mysteries, and keep his commandments, the Saviour himself comes to love, in us, his Father and his brethren, our Father and our brethren. His person becomes, through the Spirit, the living and interior rule of our activity" (2074).

We understand why Jesus told us that his commandment is this: *That you love one another as I have loved*. True love is that which comes from God and which Jesus revealed by the mystery of his presence among us, by his preaching, his miracles and above all by his death and resurrection. The love of Christ remains as the true and only commandment of the new life, which the Christian, with the help of the Holy Spirit, makes his own day by day in a journey that knows no rest.

Dear catechists, you are required to make visible and tangible the person of Jesus Christ, who loves each one of you, and therefore becomes the rule of our life and the criterion of judgement for our moral action. Never stray from this source of love, because it is the condition for being happy and full of joy, always and despite everything. This is the new life that sprung forth in us on the day of our Baptism, and which we have the responsibility to share with everyone, so that it may grow in everyone and bear fruit.

I am sure that this journey will lead many of you to discover fully the vocation of being a catechist, and therefore to ask to enter the *ministry of catechist*. I instituted this ministry knowing the great role it can play in the Christian community. Do not be afraid: if the Lord calls you to this ministry, follow him! You will be participants in the same mission of Jesus of proclaiming his Gospel and introducing others to the filial relationship with God the Father.

And I would not like to end – I consider it good and right – without remembering *my catechists*. There is a religious sister who leads a group of catechists; sometimes she taught, sometimes two good women, both called Alicia, I always remember. And this religious sister laid down the foundation of my Christian life, preparing me for First Communion, in the years 1943 to 1944. I don't think any of you were born at that time. The Lord also gave me a very great grace. She was very elderly, I was a student, I was studying abroad, in Germany, and after I finished my studies I returned to Argentina, and the day after she died. I was able to accompany her that day. And when I was there, praying before her coffin, I thanked the Lord for the witness of that sister who passed her life almost entirely in giving catechesis, preparing children and youngsters for the First Communion. She was called Dolores. I let myself say this to bear witness that a good catechist leaves a trace; not only the trace of what he or she sows, but the trace of the person who has sown. I hope that your young people, your children, your adults, those you accompany in catechesis, will always remember you before the Lord as a person who sowed good and beautiful things in their heart.

I accompany you all with my blessing. I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the martyr catechists – there are many of them, it is important – even in our times, there are many of them! And I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me. Thank you!
