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Audience with pilgrims from the diocese of Alessandria and candidates for Confirmation from the diocese of Spoleto-Norcia

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the pilgrimage of the diocese of Alessandria and the candidates for Confirmation of the diocese of Spoleto-Norcia.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank Bishop Gallese and Archbishop Boccardo for their presentations. I will first address the pilgrims of Alessandria, in alphabetical order!

Dear brothers and sisters of the diocese of Alessandria, the 450th anniversary of the death of Saint Pius V, the only Piedmontese Pope, born in Bosco Marengo, in the present-day territory of Alessandria, offers us a starting point for some very timely considerations.

Pope Pius V, born Antonio Ghislieri, in his pontificate of just six years, faced many challenges, both pastoral and in governance. He was a reformer of the Church, who made courageous choices. Since then, the style of the governance of the Church has changed, and it would be an anachronistic error to evaluate some of Pope Pius V's works with today's mentality, just as we must also be careful not to reduce him to a nostalgic recollection, an embalmed memory, but rather grasp his teaching and witness. With this in mind, we can see that the backbone of his entire life was *faith*.

How can we interpret his teachings today? Firstly, they invite us to be *truth seekers*. Jesus is the Truth, not only in a universal but also a community and personal sense; and the challenge is to live today the search for truth in

the daily life of the Church, of Christian communities. This search can only be accomplished through personal and community discernment starting from the Word of God (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 30, 50, 175).

This undertaking, implemented in discernment, makes a community grow in an ever more intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ; and so He, the truth, the Lord, becomes the foundation of community life, interwoven with bonds of love. Love is expressed in actions of sharing, in the physical and spiritual dimension, actions that render visible the secret we carry in our “clap pots” (cf. *2 Cor 4:7*).

The Word of God comes alive in particular in the Eucharistic celebration, both in the “banquet of the Word” and in the “banquet of the Eucharist”, where in some way we touch Christ’s flesh. Saint Pius V was concerned with reforming the Liturgy of the Church, and four centuries later, Vatican Council II implemented a further reform to adhere better to the needs of today’s world. In these years much has been said about the Liturgy, especially its external forms. But the greatest effort should be made to ensure that the Eucharistic celebration effectively becomes the source of life of the community (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10).

Indeed, the Liturgy, before the crossroads of the journey of the community, as well as the crosses of our personal lives, integrates us into Christ’s priesthood, giving us a new way that Saint Paul summarized as follows: “I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church” (*Col 1:24*). At the end of the Liturgy, after touching the Eucharistic body of Christ, the evangelizing community is sent and “gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 24).

And then, we must not forget Saint Pius V’s commitment to recommending prayer, in particular that of the Rosary. Indeed, the Church’s “first steps in the world were interspersed with prayer. The apostolic writings and the great narration of the *Acts of the Apostles* give us the image of a Church on the move, an active Church which, however, finds the basis and impulse for missionary action while gathered in prayer” (*Catechesis*, 25 November 2020).

In this way, dear friends from Alessandria, I have reminded you of the four coordinates that guide the ecclesial path, according to *Acts 2: 42*: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”.

I invite you to journey together in the pastoral renewal of your diocese, which in the coming days will begin the constitution of the Pastoral Units. May “all communities ... devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. ‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 25). This synodal journey requires a laborious but fruitful growth in fraternal community among bishops, presbyters and laypeople. May the Lord bless your steps and make them rich in fruit that encourage all the faithful.

And now I address you, boys and girls of the diocese of Spoleto-Norcia. You are the Confirmation group: either you have already received it, or you will receive it soon. I am very pleased that you too are here at this audience. You give us a more complete sense of family, because you represent the new generation; you are like many blooming flowers. But then, and above all, because you are young disciples of Jesus: this is the greatest fact that fills us with joy!

The path of the Sacrament of Confirmation is beautiful, because it makes us relive the experience of Jesus’ first disciples: Simon, Andrew, James, John, and then Mary of Magdala, Martha and Mary of Bethany, and the others. You can also add your own names to this list, each one your own, which you received in Baptism.

And in this regard, I would like to ask you a question, to each one of you. Do you know the date of your Baptism? Thinking about it. Do you know the day on which you were baptized? Each one of you, answer to yourself... And now let’s see... None of you, three or four or five over there. And the others don’t remember the

date. And now raise your hand if you don't remember. Good. Those of you who don't remember, when you go home, ask your parents, or your grandparents. "But when was I baptized?" All right? It seems as if you don't agree. All right? [Answer: Yes!] But are you dead or alive? All right, or not? [Applause]. What must you do as soon as you arrive home? [Answer: Ask the date of our baptism]. "On what day was I baptized?" It is important! It is important, especially for you who are candidates to or have just received Confirmation, because Confirmation *confirms Baptism*. This is why it is called *Confirmation*. Christian life is a house that is built on the foundation of Baptism. Always. At eleven years of age, at twenty, at forty, at eighty. The foundation is always the same: Baptism. This is why it is important to remember the day on which we were baptized, and also to celebrate it, in your heart! All right? But remember the day, and never forget it: it was the beginning of my Christian life, of my friendship with God.

I said that Christian life is a house to be built. You come from an area where many buildings were ruined or damaged by the earthquake. You are well aware of the difference between a solid house, that resists the tremors, and a fragile house that collapses. Jesus too, as you know, used this image. When he wanted to make it understood that one enters the Kingdom of God not with beautiful words: "Lord, Lord!", but by doing God's will, putting it into practice in our life (cf *Mt 7: 24-27*), he said, "He who enters in this way builds his house on the rock".

Today you have brought me a *stone from the ancient Abbey of Saint Eutizio*, for it to be blessed and placed as a symbol of its reconstruction. Here, boys and girls, today I bless each one of you so that you may become a living stone to build the Christian community: a living stone in the family, a living stone in the parish, a living stone in the company of friends, a living stone in the sports environment... and so on. But to be living, not dead. Living! Being living stones: this is possible with the power of the Holy Spirit, who in Confirmation confirms you as baptized, children of God and members of the Church. So, I leave you with these two words: *Baptism* and *stone, living stone*. Go forth with this: to build the house on the rock!

And this I say to all, also to you of the diocese of Alessandria. And I bless you all from my heart. May Our Lady accompany you always. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
