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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 220930a

Friday 30.09.2022

Audience with Members of the “Fraternidad de Agrupaciones Santo Tomás de Aquino (FASTA)”

Today, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Fraternidad de Agrupaciones Santo Tomás de Aquino” (FASTA).

After handing to those present the discourse prepared for the occasion, the Pope delivered an impromptu address to the participants in the meeting.

The following is the address the Holy Father prepared for the occasion and distributed to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters:

I would like to express my congratulations and best wishes for the sixtieth anniversary of the “Fraternidad de Agrupaciones Santo Tomás de Aquino” (FASTA). I thank Father César Garcés, President of FASTA, for his kind words. Aníbal Fosbery, who founded them in 1962 with a great desire to contribute to the implementation of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, we can only thank God, in humility, for the good fruits that the Spirit has brought forth in his person and ministry through this work of apostolate.

One of the novelties of the Council was the awareness of the rights and duties of the laity in relation to the evangelizing mission which they also possess, as sons and daughters of God through baptism. The lay faithful have the important responsibility of bringing the light of the Gospel to temporal realities, in communion with the pastors of the Church and moved by Christian charity (cf. Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 7).

It is always surprising to see how the Holy Spirit makes his way into every situation of the human being through the talents he inspires in Jesus’ disciples. And today, we see how your Fraternity has embraced the Council’s

message and has launched various projects for the evangelization of culture, youth and the family, creating a variety of educational institutions, such as colleges, universities, and university residences in different parts of the world. Likewise, the *Fraternidad de Agrupaciones Santo Tomás de Aquino* for priests and the *Fraternidad Apostólica Santa Catalina de Siena* for consecrated women provide a valuable service for the maturing of the teaching charisms in all the faithful, including those who have consecrated themselves to the Lord.

The historical context in which their patron saint, Thomas Aquinas, lived also had its challenges. At that time - the thirteenth century - the writings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle were being rediscovered in the West. Some were reluctant to study his works, fearing that his pagan thought was contrary to the Christian faith. However, Saint Thomas discovered that much of Aristotle's works were in accord with Christian Revelation. In other words, Saint Thomas was able to show that there is a natural harmony between faith and reason. By recognizing this richness, which is essential for overcoming fundamentalism, fanaticism and ideology, a broad path opens up for bringing the message of the Good News to different cultures, always with proposals that are compatible with the intelligence of human beings and respectful of the identity of each people.

Another testimony that Saint Thomas has left us was his profound relationship with God, which is manifested, for example, in his adoration of Jesus in his real presence in the Eucharist. We know that he was the author of beautiful Eucharistic hymns used to this day in the Liturgy of the Church. His spirituality helped him to discover the mystery of God, while his talents made it possible for him to put it in writing. This is an important fact: to unravel the presence of the Lord in the world, in events, it is necessary to pray, to unite one's heart to that of Jesus in the tabernacle. In this way our spirit is nourished and strengthened, our human powers, such as our intelligence, are perfected, and we are able to see every situation in a transcendent way, even those which, according to human logic, can only present a discouraging picture. Precisely, faith and reason, when they walk hand in hand, are capable of strengthening the culture of the human being, imbuing the world with meaning, and building societies that are more human, more fraternal, and consequently, more filled with God.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, I commented that there are new cultures in the world in which Christians "are no longer the customary interpreters or generators of meaning. Instead, they themselves take from these cultures new languages, symbols, messages and paradigms which propose new approaches to life, approaches often in contrast with the Gospel of Jesus. A completely new culture has come to life and continues to grow in the cities" (73). The evangelising challenge that you share as an association, especially in the context of plural, multicultural and multi-religious cities, implies on your part a great humility in knowing how to approach everyone without exclusion, even those who do not share our faith or our values. And there, to enter into dialogue with people, with their dreams, their stories, their wounds and their struggles, for all that is human is worthy of being embraced by the love and mercy of God.

In living their charism, which they realize concretely through education, it is important to remember that teaching is precisely one of the spiritual works of mercy. Education offers a meaning, a narrative to every element of human life. It does not stop at sharing knowledge or developing skills, but, as its etymology makes clear, it helps to bring out the best in each person, to polish the diamond that the Lord has placed in each person. Education helps this diamond to let in the Light, which is Christ (cf. *Jn* 8:12), and thus to shine in the midst of the world. But let us also remember the words that Jesus addresses to us in the Gospel of Matthew: "You are the light of the world" – you do not "light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house" (*Mt* 5:14-15). In other words, the Lord makes us sharers in his light, in his very nature, and so each of his disciples illuminates the world, banishing darkness and transforming reality.

I would like to end my message by entrusting you to the protection of our Blessed Mother. Friar Anibal chose a Marian feast to found the Fraternity. Always remember that your apostolic work also has a maternal dimension. And Mary teaches us to be evangelizers of culture, of young people and of families, bringing divine tenderness. May our Lord Jesus Christ, Light of the world, multiply the good fruits that this work brings to society, for the good of the whole human family. God bless you. Thank you very much.
