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Audience with the Sisters of Social Service

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Sisters of Social Service on the occasion of the centenary of their founding.

After handing out the greeting prepared for the occasion, the Pope delivered an impromptu address.

The following is the greeting the Holy Father had prepared for the occasion:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear Mother General,

Dear Sisters of Social Service,

The celebration of the centenary of your founding brings us together today. It is undoubtedly a very special event for you and, for this reason, you wanted to celebrate it close to the tomb of the Apostle Peter. I want to assure you that it is also true for the Church, for every charism is a gift to her gift from God who, through the Holy Spirit, grants her those graces that she most needs in each moment of history.

Herein lies the mystery, for the gifts that we receive from people and all that we are able to bring about with our own strength grows old and spoils. However, the gifts of the Spirit always have new life, and in every circumstance of time and place they are regenerated and reinvented while at the same time being faithful to their roots.

In this way, we can see that the charism received one hundred years ago by your Foundress, Margaret Slachta, has been applied over time and through the Church's social teaching to different political and social situations, up to the present day. I am impressed that your Foundress was actively engaged in societal issues even while

living the consecrated life. What is particularly inspiring is her declaration during the Holocaust that the precepts of the faith obliged the sisters to protect the Jews, even at the risk of their own lives.

This is a truth that we find difficult to admit: many martyrs died for the faith, not because they were denied the freedom to worship their God, but because of the coherence of life that this faith imposed on them, thus making it a defence of freedom, justice and truth. It may seem surprising, but the first proof of this is the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist. The prophet died for admonishing the tyrant for not living according to divine law and for inviting the people to renounce the perverse system that distanced them from God's will. In doing so, he was a witness – martyr – to the Truth with a capital letter.

The circumstances present at the beginning of the last century, with the social changes that gave way to the world wars, were crucial moments in which God inspired the birth of your Society. Our current time is no different and today, as in the past, the call to be witnesses is still necessary. How good it would be if Margaret's words resounded in your hearts with the same intensity with which they surely did in the first sisters of your community. They are an inspiration to you, teaching you to face social challenges, like those sisters did against Nazism, with only the weapon of charity.

Dear sisters, your Foundress, the Church, the Holy Spirit challenge us by always repeating the same truth that there is no greater love than giving one's life for others. The social charity, which I spoke of in the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, and which permeates the writings of Margaret Slachta, are proof of this perennial novelty. May God give us the strength to be witnesses of that love, of that truth and of that justice, in living the vocation to which he has called us. We ask all this through the intercession of Blessed Sára Salkaházi. May Jesus bless you and the Holy Virgin watch over you!
