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Audience with participants in the pilgrimage of thanksgiving for the Beatification of Armida Barelli

This morning, in Saint Peter's Square, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the pilgrimage of thanksgiving for the Beatification of Armida Barelli.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am pleased that you have come in such large numbers to give thanks to the Lord for the Beatification of Armida Barelli, which took place in Milan a year ago. I thank the Catholic Action head of youth who has acted as a "spokesperson" for you all, namely, the three entities who promoted the cause for beatification: the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Italian Catholic Action, and the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ.

First of all, I address those of you of the Catholic University. Armida Barelli was among its founders and from this we can infer a first feature of her character: she was a *generative* woman. Let us reflect a moment on this aspect.

The woman is the privileged steward of *generativity* – we know this – which is realized through reciprocal dialogue with man. Barelli was a creator of great works, and she did this by weaving a formidable network of relationships, travelling the length and breadth of Italy and keeping in contact with everyone. This is documented by her many impassioned letters. Today there is no shortage, unfortunately, of opposing, or rather degenerative, drives. They are very damaging to family life, but can also be observed at social level, in the polarization and extremism that do not leave space for dialogue and have a dehumanizing effect. Not leaving space for dialogue: let us think a little about this.

Also with regard to the theme of female leadership in the ecclesial and social spheres – of which Barelli can be considered a formidable forerunner – we need an integrated model, uniting competence and performance, often associated with the male role, with care for bonds, listening, the capacity to mediate, to network and to nurture relationships, long considered the prerogative of the female gender and often underestimated in their productive value. In short, also in this case it is integration, the reciprocity of differences, that guarantee generativity, also in the social and employment fields. And this is a task entrusted in a particular way to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, whose National Day will be celebrated tomorrow, on the theme: “*For the love of knowledge. The challenges of new humanism*”. This great academic institution is required today to have the same educational zeal and the same formative initiative that guided Fr. Agostino Gemelli and Blessed Armida Barelli.

In particular, Barelli, through the University, contributed to forming civil awareness in hundreds of thousands of young people, including many women. An achievement that became especially visible in the moment at which, after the war ended, it was necessary to rebuild the country by embarking on a democratic process. Today we still need women who, guided by faith, are capable of leaving their mark on spiritual life, education and professional formation.

Thank you, friends of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart! May Blessed Armida continue to inspire your work.

I will now address you, brothers and sisters of Catholic Action, and I would like to highlight a second feature of the Blessed: the first feature was generativity; the second feature of the Blessed is being an *apostle*. It is different, it is something different. One can generate things, but not be an apostle; Barelli was generative and she was an apostle.

We know that the Kingdom of God germinates, grows and bears fruit everywhere continually: the life of Armida Barelli expresses this dynamic when people make themselves available and docile to his will, engaging with humility, creativity and initiative. Her biography narrates great perseverance in trying to remain with the Lord, like a branch in the vine, and shows her desire to share this experience with many others. Remaining with the Lord, like a branch in the vine.

Armida describes that, after accepting the Pope’s proposal to found Female Youth in Italy, she felt she “no longer belonged to herself”, that she had to make her own existence a gift for others, of being “a mission” herself, regardless of her limits and her imperfections. Indeed, “our falling short of perfection should be no excuse; on the contrary, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue growing” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 121). Thus, the Blessed’s invitation resonates today: not to be satisfied with living in an accommodating way, settling for compromises and self-absolution – “I can’t do it”, “I am not up to it”, “I don’t have time”, and so on, no – but rather to live as apostles *in and of joy*.

Being apostles means being laymen and laywomen with passion, impassioned by the Gospel and by life, taking care of the good life of all and building paths of fraternity to give soul to a more just, more inclusive, more solidarity-based society. And it is important to do all this together, in the beauty of an associative experience that, on the one hand, trains us to be able to listen and dialogue with everyone and, on the other, expresses that “greater we” that educates in the ecclesial life, the life of a people that walks together.

In the fields of the economy, culture, politics, school as well as work, in constant attention to the smallest, the frail and the poor, I encourage you to seek out paths to walk with everyone, pursuing peace and justice. This is what Blessed Armida Barelli did in her time, with a spirit of total entrustment to the Lord and with a style marked by concreteness.

At the heart of associative life may there always be integral formation, and at the heart of formation, evangelical spirituality. May being rooted in and dedicated to the life of your local Churches always nurture in you a missionary impetus, to increasingly enlarge your heart and your contemplative outlook on the world. Let us welcome the exhortation of Blessed Armida, the “big sister”, to love, love, love; to love without measure, regenerated in God’s love, which transforms the life of people, in a tangible and credible way, and through the

people, activates processes and paths of social renewal. Thank you, members of Catholic Action!

And now I address the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ, and so we can shine a light on Armida as being *consecrated in the world*.

Secular consecration is a vocation, and a demanding vocation. The approval of secular institutes by Pius XII with the *Provida Mater Ecclesia* was a revolutionary decision in the Church, a prophetic sign. And since then, you have done great good in the Church, courageously giving your testimony in the world.

Secular consecration is a paradigm of a new way of living as laypeople in the world: laypeople capable of discerning the seeds of the Word within the folds of history, committed to animating it from within like leaven, capable of giving value to the seeds of good present in earthly realities as the prelude to the Kingdom that is coming, promoters of human values, weavers of relationships, silent and active witnesses of evangelical radicality. Saint Paul VI said: "If they remain faithful to their proper vocation, the Secular Institutes will become almost the 'experimental laboratory' in which the Church tests the practical methods of her relations with the world".[1]

Yours, dear sisters, is a female secular Institute, and this calls into lay women and their special vocation in the Church and in the world. Blessed Armida, with this form of life, promoted them in a new way, following the example of many women witnesses of the Gospel throughout the centuries. The model she proposed also in consecrated life is a new image of the woman, not to be "protected" and kept to one side, but to send to build the Kingdom, trusting in her.

Armida was capable of reading the *signs of her times* and the most urgent needs: think of the need for a renewed care of spirituality; think of formation and the call the action for young women; think of the educational challenge and the dream of a Catholic university in Italy; think of passion for the world, starting from the certainty of the universality of Christ's message. These needs were for Armida Barelli the ground for commitment and mission.

Thus, she anticipated the times of Vatican Council II, putting into practice a community style in which women and men, young people and adults, laypeople and priests, collaborate together for the apostolic purpose of the Church, all together as agents of the same mission by virtue of Baptism. We often struggle to embark on a path of commitment, because we think we are never up to it, in personal choices and in those of service to the community. If Armida were here speaking today, she would still tell us that if we entrust ourselves to the Lord nothing is impossible. Entrusting ourselves to Him is not delegation, but an act of faith that gives vigour and impetus to hope and action. So, thank you too, Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ!

Dear brothers and sisters, Blessed Armida has gathered us together and helped us to recognize these essential traits of being Christians today: generativity, being apostles and consecration in the world. Generativity, apostleship and consecration in the world. Everyone can embrace your example according to their own vocation: it is a wealth for us all, for the whole Church. That is why I thank you so much for this meeting. I bless you all from my heart and I ask you not to forget to pray for me. Thank you.

[1] *Address to the Executive Council of the World Conference of Secular Institutes* (in French, 25 August 1976).
