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Audience with the participants in the General Assembly of the “Union Mundial de las Organizaciones Femeninas Católicas” (UMOFC)

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Assembly of the *Union Mundial de las Organizaciones Femeninas Católicas* (UMOFC), taking place in Assisi from 14 to 20 May 2023.

The following is the Pope’s address to participants in the course:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear sisters!

I welcome you, and those who are following the broadcast remotely, women who form part of the *Unión Mundial de Organizaciones Femeninas Católicas*, who have come from various parts of the world with your families, to be imbued with the ecclesial spirit and to be able to return with greater enthusiasm to your places of origin. I address my warmest greeting to you. I give thanks for the speeches that preceded me and that presented your work and the initiatives you are carrying forward. Thank you.

With your presence here, you intend to prepare to participate in the General Assembly you are holding in Assisi next week. You will be able to do so by accompanying the delegates with prayer, so that they may be enlightened by the Spirit, and that it may be an opportunity to renew your missionary impulse, following the original principles that moved the founders of the *Unión* and, at the same time, to look to the future with eyes and hearts open to the world, to listen to the lament of so many women in the world who suffer injustice, abandonment, discrimination, poverty, or inhuman treatment since childhood in some cases. The World Women's Observatory that you have started will give you pointers to identify the needs and thus be able to be “Samaritans”, fellow travellers, who instil hope and serenity in hearts, helping and enabling others to help alleviate the many corporal and spiritual needs of humanity.

Nowadays there is an urgent need to find peace in the world, a peace that begins, above all, within the heart, an ailing heart, lacerated by the division of hatred and rancour. In addition to peace, the anthropological identity of women is also in danger as they are used as tools, as the subject of political disputes and cultural ideologies that ignore the beauty with which they were created. There is a need for greater appreciation of their capacity for relationship and giving, and for men to better understand the richness of the reciprocity they receive from women, in order to recover those anthropological elements that characterise human identity and, with it, that of women and their role in the family and society, where they never cease to be a beating heart. And if we want to know what humanity is without woman, what man is without woman, we have it in the first page of the Bible: loneliness. Man without woman is alone. Humanity without woman is alone. A culture without women is lonely. Where there is no woman, there is loneliness, arid loneliness that breeds sadness and all manner of harm to humanity. Where there is no woman, there is loneliness.

Today, the day when we commemorate the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to the shepherd children of Fatima – and today I am also very sad, because in the country where the Virgin appeared, a law is being passed to kill, a further addition to the long list of countries with euthanasia – today, then, thinking of the Virgin, let us look to Mary as a model of the quintessential woman, who lives fully a *gift* and a *task*: the gift of maternity and the task of taking care of her children in the Church. You too, as women, possess this gift and this task, in every environment where you are present, aware that without you these environments are lonely. It is not good for man to be alone, hence there are women. Mary teaches us to generate life and to protect it always, relating with others with tenderness and compassion, and combining three languages: that of the mind, that of the heart and that of the hands, which must be coordinated. What the mind thinks, let the heart feel and the hands do; let what the heart feels be in harmony with what the mind thinks and the hands do; let what the hands do be in harmony with what one feels and what one thinks. As I have said on other occasions, I believe that women have this capacity for thinking what they feel, for feeling what they think and for doing what they feel and think. I encourage you to continue to offer this sensibility in the service of others.

Returning to Fatima, in the midst of the silence and solitude of the fields, a good woman filled with light met the poor, simple children. As in all God's great deeds, the scene is characterized by *poverty* and *humility*. We too – all humanity – are represented in those shepherd children, fragile and small, and we might even say a little bewildered and frightened in the face of events that occur in life and which at times we are unable to understand, because these events overtake us and throw us into crisis.

In this context, marked by weakness, one must wonder: what made Mary strong? What gave strength to the shepherd children to do what she asked of them? What is the secret that transformed those fragile and small people into authentic witnesses of the joy of the Gospel? Dear sisters, the secret of all *discipleship* and *readiness for mission* lies in cultivating this *union*, a *union from within*, with the "sweet host of the soul" that accompanies us always: the love of God and staying joined to him, like the branches of the vine (cf. *Jn 15:1-11*), to live – like Mary – the fullness of being women with the awareness of feeling chosen and agents in God's salvific work.

But this alone is not enough. This *inner union* with Jesus must manifest itself externally, it must manifest itself in *communion* with the Church, with my family or my organization, which help me to mature in faith. It is this that gives value to all the initiatives we carry out. We must "pray" deeds and put prayer "to work". In this way we will be in tune with the mission of the entire Church. This is also the essence of synodality, what makes us feel protagonists and co-responsible for the wellbeing of the Church, to know how to integrate differences and work in ecclesial harmony.

Thank you for all that you do, and I encourage you to go forward with enthusiasm in your projects and activities in favour of evangelization, following the inner voice of the Spirit, docile to his inner touches. May Jesus bless you, and the Virgin of Fatima keep you and your families. I pray for the fruits of the Assembly: speak clearly, discuss, quarrel a little because it is good, it keeps you going forward. And I ask you, please, to continue to accompany me with your prayers. Thank you.

