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Audience with participants in the Plenary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Plenary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminences,
Dear brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Brothers and sisters!

I greet all of you at the end of your Plenary Assembly. In particular, I greet the Prefect and the other superiors, the officials and the members of the Dicastery. To all of you, I offer my gratitude for your valuable work.

As the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* stipulates, “The task of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith is to help the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world by promoting and safeguarding the integrity of Catholic teaching on faith and morals. It does this by drawing upon the deposit of faith and seeking an ever deeper understanding of it in the face of new questions” (Art. 69).

To achieve these ends, the *Motu proprio Fidem servare* (11 February 2022) created two distinct sections within the Dicastery: the Doctrinal and the Disciplinary Section. In the letter I sent to the Prefect on 1 July 2023, on the occasion of his appointment, I referenced this provision in order to define better his role and the current mission of the Dicastery. I also emphasized the importance of having skilled professionals in the Disciplinary Section, to ensure care and rigor in the application of current canonical legislation, especially in the handling of cases of abuse of minors by clerics, and to promote canonical formation initiatives for the Ordinaries and for legal practitioners. At the same time, I insisted on the urgency of giving greater attention to the particular work of the Doctrinal Section in which there is no shortage of trained theologians and qualified staff. The same is true for the Marriage Office and the Archive. I particularly recall the twenty-fifth anniversary of the opening of the Archives to the public by Saint John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation, in the period leading

up to the Great Jubilee of 2000.

The Dicastery is engaged in the work of understanding the faith as it faces the epochal change that characterizes our time. In this vein, I would like to share some thoughts with you, which I will base upon three words: sacraments, dignity and faith.

Sacraments. In these days, you have reflected on the theme of the validity of the sacraments. Thanks to them, the life of the Church is nourished and grows. For this reason, special care is required on the part of those who administer them and unveil to the faithful the treasures of grace they communicate. Through the sacraments, believers become capable of prophecy and witness. In our time, there is a particularly urgent need for prophets of new life and witnesses of charity: let us, therefore, love and help others love the beauty and the salvific power of the sacraments!

The second word: *dignity*. Inasmuch as we are Christians, we must not tire of insisting “on the primacy of the human person and the defense of his or her dignity beyond every circumstance” (Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, 39). I know that you are working on a document on this matter. I hope that it may help us, as a Church, always to be close “to all those who, without fanfare, in concrete daily life, fight and personally pay the price for defending the rights of those who do not count” (*Angelus*, 10 December 2023), and to ensure that, “in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words” (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 6).

The third word is *faith*. In this regard, I would like to recall two events: the recent ten-year anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and the forthcoming Jubilee, in which we will renew our faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man, hope of history and the world. We cannot, however, hide the fact that, in vast parts of the world, faith, as Benedict XVI said, no longer continues to be “a self-evident presupposition for life in society ... but is often openly denied, mocked, marginalized and ridiculed” (Apostolic Letter issued Motu proprio *Porta fidei*, 2). It is time, therefore, to reflect anew and with greater passion on certain themes: the proclamation and communication of the faith in today’s world, especially to the younger generations; the missionary conversion of ecclesial structures and pastoral workers; the new urban cultures with their particular challenges, not to mention an unprecedented search for meaning; finally and most importantly, the centrality of the *kerygma* in the life and mission of the Church.

In this regard, the Dicastery is expected to help. For “preserving the faith” in our day is manifested in a commitment to reflect and discern, so that the entire community strives for a real pastoral and *kerygmatic* missionary conversion, which could also help the ongoing synodal journey. What is essential, most beautiful, most attractive and at the same time most necessary for us is faith in Jesus Christ. God willing, we will solemnly renew our faith in the forthcoming Jubilee, and each one of us is called to proclaim it to every man and woman on earth. This is the fundamental task of the Church, which I expressed in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

In this context of evangelization, I would like to mention the recent Declaration *Fiducia supplicans*. The intention of “pastoral and spontaneous blessings” is to demonstrate concretely the closeness of the Lord and of the Church to all those who, finding themselves in various situations, ask for help to continue – sometimes to begin – a journey of faith. I would like briefly to underline two things: the first is that these blessings, outside of any liturgical context and form, do not demand moral perfection in order to be received; the second, that when a couple approaches spontaneously to ask for a blessing, one does not bless the union, but simply the people who have requested it. The union is not blessed, but the people. Of course, one must take into account the context, the sensibilities, and the place in which one lives, as well as the most appropriate way to give the blessing.

Dear friends, I reiterate my gratitude for your service, and I encourage you to press forward with the Lord’s help. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
