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Audience with members of the Saints Peter and Paul Association

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Saints Peter and Paul Association on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its founding.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends of the Saints Peter and Paul Association!

I join with you in thanking the Lord for the fifty years of your Society, reborn thanks to the farsighted intuition of Saint Paul VI.

I greet the President, Dr. Stefano Milli, and I thank him for his words; I greet the spiritual assistant, Msgr. Joseph Murphy, and the other leaders, and all the members with their families. Thank you!

It is good to see that, in this half century of life, you have passed from being "Guards of Honour at the palace" to the honour of being "in the service" of pilgrim humanity, thus bearing special witness to Christian life, the apostolate, and fidelity to the Apostolic See.

What do your fifty years of history represent? We can answer this question with the title of your journal: "*Incontro*". Indeed, your history is made up of continual "encounters".

In an encounter there is always movement. If we all stand still, we will never meet. "Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter" (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 215). But life is this: the art of encounter. Encounter is like the oxygen of life. This is why we need a culture of encounter, because "we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone"

(*ibid.*, 216). This is the criterion that gives meaning to your daily commitment - and I thank you very much! Through your daily services you become artisans of encounter, bringing the warmth of Jesus' kindness to those who enter Saint Peter's Basilica, to those who need guidance, to those who need a smile to feel at home. Thank you for having received this smile; I think it is part of your mystique. Always a smile, which promotes encounter. The smile is a bridge, The smile is a bridge.

The words of Saint John XXIII come to mind: "I put my eyes in your eyes, I put my heart close to your heart". This expression conveys well the Christian meaning of encounter.

And now I would like to leave you with a few pointers for the future, so that your valuable service may continue to be a witness to those you meet, in a context that will still feel the effects of the pandemic. I will summarise them in this exhortation: "Let us begin again with more humanity, looking to Jesus, with hope in our hearts".

"Let us begin again with more humanity, looking to Jesus, with hope in our hearts". This would be the programme I would give you: something of a "homely plan", isn't it? But I think it can inspire you.

Let us begin again. Certainly, by treasuring what we have experienced, bearing in mind that we have all changed a little and, I hope, improved, but always ready to serve according to the motto of your Association: "*Fide constamus avita*": "Let us steadfastly persevere in the fidelity of our fathers".

With more humanity. If we have all changed a little, it is because we have realised, through what we have experienced, that what really counts in life are human relationships. We all feel the need to love one another, to live more united, to hear good and encouraging words spoken to us and, in turn, to give them with a hopeful lifestyle. I encourage you to continue to show this face, with more humanity.

And *looking at Jesus.* Your Association has always proposed the life of Jesus as the fully human way of life, the point of reference and the foundation for the people of all times, and therefore also for the people of today. But even more so now, we must bear witness to our faith by proclaiming that our real life finds its root in the humanity of Jesus. Therefore, knowing him better, knowing how he led his existence, what he said, how he related to others, is the foundation for discovering how to live in a human way today. Looking at him, we feel called more and more to a daily service made up of welcoming, sharing, fraternal listening, human closeness. I believe that in this way we can show, with facts, the beauty and strength of the Gospel.

And finally: With hope in our hearts. Dear brothers and sisters, hope must never be lacking in the believer's journey, that hope that never disappoints; it never lets us down. We belong to Christ, we are joined to him through Baptism; in us there is his presence, there is his light, there is his life. Let us therefore walk sustained by his Word: it is the Word of life. Let us walk with joy and hope, knowing that the Lord will never cease to support our commitment to good. I say this in a special way to young people: I encourage you to give your energies to those in need, and to become adults capable of true and sincere encounters.

I commend to Mary, *Virgo Fidelis*, you dear Members, your families - to whom you take time out of your busy schedules to devote it generously to the Holy See - and all your loved ones. May the Blessed Virgin with her maternal love watch over each of you.

Therefore, before the blessing, let us recite together the *Prayer of the Association*:

Holy Virgin and our most tender Mother, who was always faithful to God in the heroic fulfilment of your sublime mission, please obtain for us that, following your example, we too may remain faithful in all the events of life to our Christian vocation and to the signs of divine grace.

We have made sacrosanct commitments to our God: you implore us that our faith, undermined and fought against on every side, may never waver.

We are children of the Church: grant that, steadfast in our ardent love for the Church herself and in devout obedience to her visible Head, it may be our glory to work hard and suffer generously. Thus, with your help, O Virgin Mary, having fulfilled our earthly day, we shall merit the immortal crown in heaven. Amen.

Virgo Fidelis, ora pro nobis.

And now I give you the Blessing, which I extend to your families, remembering especially the children and the sick. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
