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Audience with participants in the Plenary of the Congregation 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 Assembly of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Cardinals,

dear brothers in the episcopate and in the priesthood,

dear brothers and sisters!

I am pleased to welcome you at the end of the work of your Plenary Assembly. I thank the prefect for his introduction and I greet all of you, superiors, officials and members of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I renew my gratitude for your valuable service to the universal Church in promoting and safeguarding the integrity of Catholic doctrine on faith and morals. Fruitful integrity.

On this occasion, I would like to share with you some reflections based on three words: *dignity*, *discernment* and *faith*.

The first word: *dignity*. As I wrote at the beginning of the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, it is my strong desire that “in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity” (8). If fraternity is the destination that the Creator designated for the path of humanity, the main road remains that of the recognition of the dignity of every human person.

In our age, however, marked by so many social, political and even health-related tensions, there is a growing temptation to consider the other as a stranger or enemy, denying him or her real dignity. Therefore, especially in this time, we are required to recall, “whether the time is favourable or unfavourable” (2 *Tim* 4.2), and faithfully following a two-thousand-year-old Church teaching, that the dignity of every human being has an intrinsic character and is valid from the moment of conception until natural death. It is precisely the affirmation of such dignity that is the inalienable prerequisite for the protection of a personal and social existence, and also the necessary condition for fraternity and social friendship to be realised among all the peoples of the earth.

The Church, from the very beginning of her mission, has always proclaimed and promoted the intangible value of human dignity. Humanity is indeed the masterpiece of creation: wanted and beloved by God as a partner in his eternal plans, and for our salvation Jesus gave his life to the point of death on the cross, for every person, for each one of us.

I therefore thank you for the reflection you have undertaken on human dignity, taking into account the challenges that the current situation poses in this regard.

The second word is *discernment*. Increasingly, nowadays, the art of discernment is asked of believers. In the epoch change we are going through, while on the one hand believers find themselves faced with unprecedented and complex questions, on the other, there is an increasing need for spirituality that does not always find its point of reference in the Gospel. Thus it is not infrequent to deal with alleged supernatural phenomena, for which the people of God must be given sure and firm indications.

The exercise of discernment then finds a field for its necessary application in the fight against abuses of every type. The Church, with God’s help, is resolutely pursuing her commitment to bring justice to the victims of abuse by her members, applying with particular care and rigour the relevant canonical legislation. In this light, I have recently updated the *Norms on offences reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, with the intention of making legal action more incisive. Judicial action alone cannot be sufficient to stem the phenomenon, but it is a necessary step towards re-establishing justice, repairing the scandal and emending the offender.

Similar commitment to discernment is also expressed in another area with which you are concerned on a daily basis: the dissolution of the marriage bond *in favorem fidei*. When, by virtue of Petrine power, the Church grants the dissolution of a non-sacramental marriage bond, it is not just a question of putting a canonical end to a marriage, which has already failed in fact, but, in reality, through this eminently pastoral act I always intend to foster the Catholic faith - *in favorem fidei!* - in the new union and in the family, of which this new marriage will be the nucleus.

And here I would like to pause also on the need for discernment in the synodal process. One might think that the synodal journey means listening to everyone, carrying out a survey and giving the results. Many votes, many votes, many votes... No. A synodal journey without discernment is not a synodal journey. It is necessary – in the synodal process – to continually discern opinions, points of view, reflections. One cannot set out on the synodal journey without discerning. This discernment is what makes a Synod a true Synod, in which the most important figure – let’s say – is the Holy Spirit, and not a parliament or a survey of opinions, which the media can do. Therefore, I emphasize: discernment is important in the synodal process.

The last word is *faith*. Your Congregation is required not only to defend but also to promote faith. Without faith, the presence of believers in the world would be reduced to that of a humanitarian agency. Faith must be the heart of the life and action of every baptized person. And not a generic or vague faith, as if it were diluted wine that loses its value, but a genuine, pure faith, as the Lord demands when he says to the disciples: “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed...” (*Lk* 17.6). For this reason, we must never forget that “a faith that does not trouble us is a troubled faith. A faith that does not raise questions is a faith that has to be questioned. A faith that does not rouse us is a faith that needs to be roused. A faith that does not shake us is a faith that needs to be shaken” (*Address to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2017).

Let us not be satisfied with a lukewarm, habitual, textbook faith. Let us cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and let us cooperate with each other, so that the fire that Jesus came to bring into the world may continue to burn and inflame the hearts of all.

Dear friends, I thank you so much for your work and I encourage you to go forward with the Lord's help. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
