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Audience with members of the Chemin Neuf Political Fraternity

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the *Chemin Neuf* Political Fraternity, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends!

I am very pleased to welcome you, the young members of the “Political Fraternity” of *Chemin Neuf*. When we met last year, you had asked me to pray for your participation in the *Changemakers* event in Budapest. There you experienced moments of encounter and learning, as well as activities, along with local groups. The way you participated in this event strikes me as a good method of putting into practice the genuine meaning of politics, especially for Christians. *Politics is encounter, reflection, action*.

Politics is, first and foremost, an art of *encounter*. Certainly, this encounter consists of being open to others and accepting their differences as part of a respectful dialogue. For Christians, however, there is more. Because the Gospel demands that we love our enemies (cf. *Mt 5:44*), we cannot rest content with superficial and formal dialogue, along the lines of the often hostile negotiations between political parties. Instead, we are called to see political encounters as fraternal encounters, especially with people who disagree with us. That means regarding our dialogue partner as a true brother or sister, a beloved son or daughter of God. The art of encounter, then, begins with changing the way we look at others, with showing them unconditional acceptance and respect. Without such a change of heart, politics often risks turning into a violent confrontation, where people try to impose their own ideas and pursue particular interests over the common good, contrary to the principle that “unity prevails over conflict” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 226-230).

From a Christian standpoint, politics is also *reflection*, that is, the devising of a common project. An eighteenth-century political leader, Edmund Burke, thus told the electors of Bristol that as a Member of Parliament he would not be limited to defending their particular interests, but sent in their name to pursue along with other members

of Parliament the interest of the entire country, the general good. As Christians, we recognize that politics is practiced not only through encounter, but also through shared reflection in the pursuit of this general good, not simply through the clash of differing and often opposed interests. In a word, “the whole is greater than the part” (cf. *ibid.*, 234-237). Our own compass for advancing this common project is the Gospel, which brings to the world a profoundly positive vision of humanity as loved by God.

Finally, politics is also *action*. I am pleased that your Fraternity is not satisfied to be merely a forum for discussion and exchange, but is also directing you to concrete forms of commitment. As Christians, we must always be realistic, confronting our ideas with hard reality, lest we build on sands that sooner or later end up shifting. Let us not forget that “realities are more important than ideas” (cf. *ibid.*, 231-233). In this regard, I encourage your efforts on behalf of migrants and ecology. I have also learned that some of you have chosen to live together in a working-class quarter of Paris, in order to listen to the voices of the poor: that is a Christian way of engaging in political life! Don’t forget these things, that realities are more important than ideas: politics cannot be practiced with ideology. That the whole is greater than the part, and that unity prevails over conflict. Always seek unity and do not get lost in conflict.

Encounter, reflection, action: this is a political programme in the Christian sense. I believe that you are already doing this, especially in your Sunday evening meetings. From joining in prayer to the Father from whom all things proceed, from imitating Jesus Christ, and from listening attentively to the Holy Spirit, your concern for the common good gains a powerful interior incentive. For in this way, politics can be practiced as “the highest form of charity”, as it was defined by Pope Pius XI.

I would like to take up on something that our Brazilian friend said: he spoke about memory, hope and *asombro* (wonder). The Christian life is not possible without this *asombro*, without this *wonder*. Wonder is what make me feel that I am in Jesus, with Jesus. The wonder of seeing the grandeur of the Lord, of his person and his plan, to take the grandeur of the Beatitudes as a programme for our lives. And that other word: *memory*. Memory, hope and wonder. The past, the future, the present: there is no future without the present and there is no hope without wonder. Cultivate prayer with the Gospel in order to feel the wonder of the encounter with Jesus Christ.

My prayers are with you on this journey. I thank you for your attention and I give you my blessing. And please, do not forget to pray for me!

Now, all together in prayer, let us ask the Lord to bless us.

Lord Jesus, bless all of us who work close to you. Bless our vision, bless our hearts, bless our hands. Amen.
