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Audience with participants in the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists)

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience – in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace – the participants in the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists).

After handing out the discourse prepared for the occasion, the Pope delivered an impromptu address to the participants in the meeting.

The following are the discourse prepared by the Holy Father for the circumstance, and his impromptu address to those present at the audience:

Address prepared by the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I joyfully greet all the missionaries and Redemptorists present in the 85 countries where the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer is active. I also greet those who are on the path of formation, the Redemptorist religious sisters, and all the charismatic family and laypersons associated with the mission. I greet you with affection and I thank the new Superior General, Fr. Rogério Gomes, for the words he addressed to me.

To hold a General Chapter is not a canonic formality. It means living a Pentecost, which has the capacity to *make all things new* (cf. *Rev* 21:5). In the Upper Room, Jesus' disciples had doubts, insecurities, fears, and they wanted to stay still and protected; but the Spirit that breathes where he chooses (cf. *Jn* 3.8) causes them to move, to go out, to head for the peripheries to take the *kerygma*, the Good News.

In these days, you are facing five themes that are important for your Congregation: identity, mission,

consecrated life, formation and governance. They are fundamental themes, interconnected, for rethinking your charism in the light of the signs of the times. This community discernment is rooted in the capacity of each one of you to seek the mystery of Christ the Redeemer, the reason for your consecration and your service to the men and women who live in the existential peripheries of today's history. It is rooted in the fruitfulness of the Alphonsian charism, like the sap that feeds the spiritual life and mission of each one and makes it flourish. I encourage you to dare, having the Gospel and the Magisterium of the Church as your only boundary. Do not be afraid to tread new paths, to dialogue with the world (cf. *Const.* 19), in the light of your rich tradition of moral theology. Do not be afraid to get your hands dirty in the service of those most in need and of the people who do not count.

In your Constitutions there is a very fine expression, where it says that the Redemptorists are available to face any trial to bring Christ's redemption to all (cf. no. 20). *Availability*. Let us not take this word for granted! It means giving oneself entirely to the mission, with all one's heart, *dies impendere pro redemptis*, unto the final consequences, with a gaze fixed on Jesus, who "though he was in the form of God ... he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness" (*Phil* 2:6-7), and became a good Samaritan, a servant (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37; *Jn* 13:1-15).

Brothers and sisters, the Church and consecrated life are living a unique historical moment, in which they have the possibility of renewing themselves to *respond with creative fidelity to the mission of Christ*. This renewal passes through a process of conversion of the heart and mind, of intense *metanoia*, and also through a change of structures. At times we need to break the old pots (cf. *Jn* 4:28), inherited from our traditions, which have carried a great deal of water but have now fulfilled their purpose. And breaking our pots, full of affections, of cultural customs, of histories, is not an easy task; it is painful, but it is necessary if we want to drink the new water that comes from the wellspring of the Holy Spirit, the source of all renewal. Those who remain attached to their own securities risk falling into the trap of *sclerocardia*, which hinders the action of the Spirit in the human heart. Instead, we must not set obstacles to the renewing action of the Spirit, first and foremost in our hearts and in our lifestyles. Only in this way can we become missionaries of hope!

Your Constitutions state: "The Congregation must adapt its own structure and institutions to its apostolic needs, and adjust them properly to the different character of each particular mission, always in fidelity to the charism of the Congregation" (no. 96). "New wine is poured into fresh wineskins" (*Mk* 2:22). "A renewal process that cannot affect and change the structures, in addition to hearts, will not produce real and lasting change... It requires the open-mindedness to imagine prophetic and charismatic ways to live the *sequela* of Christ through suitable, and probably unprecedented, frameworks".[1]

In this process of reimagining and renewing the Congregation, three fundamental pillars must not be forgotten: *the centrality of the mystery of Christ, community life, and prayer*. The witness and teachings of Saint Alphonsus require to continually to "remain in the love" of the Lord. Without him we can do nothing: remaining in him we bear fruit (cf. *Jn* 15:1-9). The abandonment of community life and prayer is the door to barrenness in consecrated life, the death of the charism and closure towards brethren. Instead, docility to the Spirit of Christ drives you to *evangelize the poor*, following the proclamation of the Redeemer in the synagogue of Nazareth (cf. *Lk* 4:14-19), made tangible in the congregation of Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori. This mission, carried forward by your saints, martyrs, blessed and venerables, leads the Redemptorists throughout the world to give the life for the Gospel and to write stories of redemption on the pages of our time.

I wish the new General Government, the first body to inspire the apostolic life of the Congregation, humility, unity, wisdom and discernment to guide your Institute at this beautiful and challenging time in our history. The work is the Lord's, we are only servants who have done what we had to do (cf. *Lk* 17:10). Those who appropriate the function of leadership for personal interest do not serve the Lord who washed the disciples' feet, but the idols of worldliness and selfishness.

Dear brothers, I entrust your Congregation to the protection of the Mother of Perpetual Help, that she may always accompany you as she accompanied her Son at the foot of the cross (cf. *Jn* 19:25). You are not alone, be beloved and cherished children. I pray to the Lord that you may be faithful and persevering in your mission,

never forgetting the poorest and most abandoned whom you serve, and to whom you proclaim the Good News of the Redemption. From my heart I bless you, the sisters and the lay faithful who share your charism. And I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you!

[1] Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, *New Wine in New Wineskins*. The consecrated life and its ongoing challenges since Vatican II (6 January 2017), no. 3.

Impromptu address of the Holy Father

I would like to say a few more words spontaneously.

Going on the mission, going out on the mission, that is, the missionary dimension, which you mentioned in your speech. I was struck by a phrase you said: "Leave your comfort zones and go out on the mission". I wonder, what are the comfort zones that a congregation has, that a province has, that a community has and that each one of us has? Ask yourselves that question, because it was said that each person accommodates the vows as he pleases. And so, you can practise poverty with a bank account, you can practise chastity with a companion, and you can practise obedience by talking and deciding what you want. These are very distorted forms. But the one that always produces a distortion in the three vows is comfort. That is where the evil comes in, in trying to be comfortable, to be at ease, to live a bourgeois life, without going out, and going out on the mission, on the mission, on the mission. Each one of us must analyse our own temptation to be comfortable. We all have that temptation; we all face that temptation.

Just now, for example, when they told me: "There are lots of priests you have to go and talk to", I thought: "Ugh, I want to go and eat...". Comfort, right? [laughs]. I mean, we all have the temptation of comfort, but each one of us has his own identity. Look for the root of comfort in each one of you, and that will help you to let go and look out to the horizon of the mission. A Redemptorist without this horizon of mission, even if he has to sit at a desk all his life, does not make sense. The horizon of mission. And, for that, the ability to leave one's comfort zone. So, I suggest that, as a fruit of this Chapter, in your prayer during these days, each one of you should ask yourself: "How am I tied down, what is my comfort zone, that which does not allow me to be free, that prevents me from flying? Try to answer that question.

The second thing that characterizes Redemptorists is that they are moral teachers, and I thank them for that. Above all, I want to thank the *Alphonsianum* here in Rome. I think the rector is here somewhere... He is not here. Give him my regards, because I wanted to tell you that he is doing very well, very well. You are rendering a service to a mature, serious, Catholic moral theology. And with an impressive stature, a very great academic stature. So, I thank you, as Father General, that this Institute continues to help the Church. Teachers of morals, but also teachers of morals in the children's catechism, in the confessionals...

That people understand what is right and what is wrong, that they know that mercy covers everything, but that they know that this is right and this is wrong, because the mercy of God is one thing but "*manganchismo*" is another. Steering clear, saying, "everything is fine"... not distinguishing, not having a moral culture, and that is so important, without reductionism. Today, with great sadness, we have to say that there are commandments that are not fulfilled, are not upheld, in the face of these social injustices that exist. For example: people who squander their money on travel, tourism, parties, luxury restaurants; and people who do not have enough to eat a loaf of bread. So, there is an immorality of thought there. Who keeps the eighth commandment today? Nowadays, if you can cheat others, take away what is fair, underpay them... there are fewer and fewer fair wages - how much work is needed! People accept whatever they can get. In other words, they go against justice, against the truth. Please, teach strong morals there, go on. Charge your conscience. Well, all the commandments. Idolatry, for example, what is it? "No, I don't worship any idol". You are full of idols yourself, but teach them: "This is idolatry".

I tell you to continue with this, because it is what you are doing, and very well, but don't forget that you are formers of conscience. This is what I mean: formers of moral conscience. And this is a charisma that you have, that you inherited from the Founder, who dedicated himself to these things as well, among others.

Well, I thank you for what you do in the Church, truly. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I thank you for your thirteen years here... Surviving in Rome is not easy! Thank you. And to you, when it's a little difficult, a little *cachaça* to lift your spirits (laughs).

Now, I want to give you my blessing.

[Blessing]

"And don't forget to think, what is my comfort zone?"...
