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Audience with the Clerics Regular of Saint Paul (Barnabites) and the spiritual family of Saint Antonio Maria Zaccaria

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Clerics Regular of Saint Paul (Barnabites), and the spiritual family of Saint Antonio Maria Zaccaria, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of his canonization.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I am pleased to share this moment of encounter with you, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Antonio Maria Zaccaria, and as you prepare for two important General Chapters. You are fathers, sisters and laypeople, gathered in three “colleges”, as your founder defined them; all animated by the apostolic spirit of Saint Paul, who gives inspiration to your origins and under whose protection you work in various parts of the world.

I will take as a starting point a characteristic expression of Saint Antonio Maria. He used to say to his followers: “You must run like crazy! Run towards God and towards others”. Run like crazy, not to be crazy people who run: that is something else. Of this typically Pauline exhortation, I would like to underline three aspects: the relationship with Christ, apostolic zeal, and creative courage.

In Zaccaria's experience, at the basis of the mission there is “running towards God”, that is, a strong relationship with the Lord Jesus, cultivated since his youth in a serious journey of growth, in particular by contemplating the Word of God with the help of two good religious brothers. It was this that led him first to be occupied with catechism, then to the priesthood and finally to the religious foundation. This type of relationship with Christ is

fundamental for us too, so as to say to everyone, having personally experienced it, that life is not the same with or without the Lord (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 266), and this is why we continue to “run towards the destination”, as Saint Paul used to say, and to involve all the people entrusted to us in this race (cf. *1 Cor* 9:24-27). Our missionary proclamation is not proselytism – I stress this a strongly – but rather the sharing of a personal encounter – if you want, the Lord is like this, this is life, but not proselytism – that has changed our life! Without this, we have nothing to proclaim, nor do we have a goal to walk towards together. I had a bad experience in this, in a youth meeting, some years ago; I was coming out of the sacristy and there was a woman, very elegant, and you could see she was wealthy too, with a boy and a girl. And this lady, who spoke Spanish, said to me: “Father, I am happy because I have converted this two: this one comes from such-and-such, that one from such-and-such”. I was angry, you know, and I said, “You haven’t converted anyone, you lack respect for these people: you have not accompanied them, you have proselytized, and this is not evangelizing”. She was proud to have *converted*! Be careful to distinguish apostolic action from proselytism: we do not proselytize. The Lord never proselytized.

“Run towards others”: this is the second indication. This too is fundamental. Indeed, if we lose sight, in our life of faith, of the objective of proclamation, we end up closing up in ourselves and withering in the arid deserts of self-absorption (cf. *General Audience*, 11 January 2023). This happens to us as it does to an athlete who continues to prepare for the great race of his life without ever setting out: sooner or later he ends up feeling depressed and starts to let himself go, his enthusiasm wanes. And in this way, we become sad disciples. We do not want to become sad disciples! But here too I ask a question: is that worm of sadness within me? At times do I, religious, layperson, let that worm enter? Someone used to say that a sad Christian is a bad Christian: it is true. But for us, consecrated persons, sadness must not enter, and if someone feels that sadness, he or she should go straight away to the Lord and ask for light, and ask some brother or sister to help them come out of it. Therefore, Jesus places at the very roots of the Church the mandate, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (*Mk* 16:15), and Saint Paul confirms this when he says, speaking of his apostolate, “necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (*1 Cor* 9:16). There was no place for sadness, he wanted to keep going. Woe to us if we do not preach the Gospel! Therefore, I encourage you to go ahead in the direction indicated by your charism: “Bring the living Spirit of Christ everywhere”. The “living” Spirit of Christ is that which conquers the heart, that does not let you remain seated in your armchair, but which makes you go out towards your brethren, with your pack light and your gaze filled with charity. Bring the Spirit *everywhere*, excluding no-one and opening up also to new forms of apostolate, in a changing world that needs flexible minds and open minds, and shared paths of research, to identify suitable ways of transmitting the one and only Gospel.

And with this, we come to the third point: “run like crazy”, which is not the same as being crazy people who run, it is different – that is, *creative courage*. It is not so much a question of devising sophisticated techniques of evangelization, but rather, as Saint Paul says, of being “all things to all men, that I might be all means save some” (*1 Cor* 9:22), of not stopping when faced with difficulties and of looking beyond the horizons of habit and a quiet life, of “it has always been done this way”. Saint Antonio Maria had this courage, creating institutions that were new for his time: a congregation of reform of the clergy at a time when so many clerics had become accustomed to a comfortable and privileged life; a non-cloistered female religious congregation, dedicated to evangelization, at a time when for women, consecrated life was cloistered; a congregation of lay missionaries actively involved in proclamation, at a time when a certain clericalism dominated. They were all new realities – he was creative, but with fidelity to the Gospel. These realities were not there before: the founder understood that they could be useful for the good of the Church and for society, and therefore he invented them and defended them before those who did not understand their meaning and usefulness, to the point of coming to Rome to account for them. And in this, there is an important teaching, because he did not exercise his creativity outside the Church: he did so within, accepting corrections and rebukes, seeking to explain and illustrate the reasons for his choices and preserving communion in obedience.

I will conclude by recalling a last important value for your “colleges”: the importance of *doing things together*. Doing things together. Communion in life and in the apostolate is indeed the first witness you are called to render, particularly in a world divided by battles and selfishness. It is inscribed in the DNA of Christian life and of the apostolate: “that they may all be one” (*Jn* 17:21), as the Lord prayed. Besides, the very word “college” indicates just this: *chosen to be together*, the college, to live, to work, to pray, to suffer and to rejoice together, as a community. And then, dear brothers and sisters: “run like crazy, towards God and towards others, but

together!" And may Our Lady, who went in haste to help Elizabeth, accompany you. I bless you from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
