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Audience with participants in the pilgrimage organized by the Sisters Disciples of Jesus in the Eucharist

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the pilgrimage organized by the Sisters Disciples of Jesus in the Eucharist, on the occasion of the centenary of the founding of the Institute.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet the Superior General, the Council, and all the consecrated sisters and laypeople associated with the Disciples of Jesus in the Eucharist. I am pleased to meet you on the centenary of the founding of the Congregation, on 4 October 1923, by the Venerable Bishop Raffaello Delle Nocche and two courageous and generous young women, Linda Machina and Silvia Di Somma.

The Holy Spirit inspired their action through the concrete and pressing appeal of a local Church: that of Tricarico, in the heart of Lucania. A Church of living and suffering stones, tried by centuries of misery, for a long time deprived of a pastor and marked, like so much of Europe and the world in those years, by the scars of the First World War and a devastating pandemic - the “Spanish flu”, as it was called. The Spirit sent to that land a bishop who loved God and the people, with a sound inner life and great sensitivity to the needs of the people.

And when, faced with the many needs encountered in his diocese, Bishop Delle Nocche found no male or female religious congregation willing to come and work there, he was not discouraged: accepting the invitation of Pope Pius XI, he himself founded a new institute that could help him in his service to the poor.

Thus, the Sisters Disciples of Jesus in the Eucharist were born; poor servants of a poor people, sharing their labours in solidarity, and prophetic in promoting their human and religious redemption. At the centre of the Sisters' lives was the Eucharist: "a Sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47), as the Second Vatican Council teaches us.

Love, unity and charity. What does this mean? To *adore*, *serve* and *repair*, that is, to fill with tenderness. Let us not forget that tenderness is one of God's traits: God's style is closeness, compassion and tenderness. Let us not forget this. Let us fill with tenderness the wounds and voids produced by sin in man and society, beginning by kneeling before Jesus in the consecrated Host, and remaining there for a long time, as the good bishop recommended to do, even when we seem to feel nothing, in quiet and trusting abandonment, because "Magister adest", "the Teacher is here!" (*Jn* 11:28), to repeat an expression particularly dear to him.

According to worldly criteria, this strategy of action appeared absurd: faced with immense needs and with almost no resources available, what sense could there be in telling religious sisters to kneel and to "adore and repair"? And yet, as always, also in this case the way of faith and self-giving worked!

Indeed, the prayer of those courageous women generated a contagious force, which soon led them to embark on and promote works of material, cultural and spiritual redemption far exceeding all expectations. They reawakened the faith and commitment of families and parish communities, they founded schools of various orders and levels, and they rekindled devotion and the sense of self-dignity in many people, men and women, young people, adults and the elderly, too often and for too long oppressed by inhuman living conditions and the contempt and indifference of the surrounding world, which saw them as nothing more than the rejects of society. This is also the case today: how often are there people who are thought of as rejects of society! And so, the Lord continues to call you, to go out there, like the first sisters. They unleashed a different "war": that against poverty, against injustice; and they spread a different epidemic: that of love. As opposed to the First World War, a different war against poverty and injustice; against the epidemic - the "Spanish flu" - the epidemic of love. This has been your path.

Dear sisters, you are witnesses and heirs to all this, but also successors, with your presence on the five continents, with your Eucharistic centres, schools, missions, and all the services you provide. Today, too, there is no lack of challenges! Therefore, beginning by standing before Jesus in the Eucharist, broken Bread and the Master who washes the feet of his disciples (cf. *Jn* 13:13-15), you also learn how to look at your brethren through the magnifying glass of the consecrated Host. The Eucharist, "focal point, dazzling and illuminating" (Saint Paul VI, *General audience*, 31 May 1972) of every Christian vision of man and the world, urges you to care, as Bishop Delle Nocche and the young Linda and Silvia did, especially for the *poorest, most despised and marginalized members of the Body of Christ*, it inspires you to promote paths of inclusion and redemption of the dignity of persons in the works entrusted to you.

Bishop Raffaello asked the Sisters Disciples to be *vasa Domini*, that is, "chalices and patens" in which the humble offering of the poor could be received and presented to God. This seems to me a beautiful image of your mission: to divest yourselves of self, having "your purse always empty", as your founder often repeated, so as to be open and spacious "chalices", ready to welcome everyone and to bring everyone in your heart before God, so that each in turn can make a gift of his or her life.

Be like this, sisters: *vasa Domini*, "welcoming vessels", kneeling before the Tabernacle and with your arms always wide open towards your brothers and sisters! May Our Lady guide you always on this path, and may my blessing accompany you. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
