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Audience with participants in the General Chapter of the Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Chapter of the Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, good morning and welcome!

I greet the Superior General and all of you, in this meeting that is taking place in the course of the twenty-sixth General Chapter of your Institute.

On 8 December 1854, in Issudun, France, Father Jules Chevalier founded the *Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, a foundation that would be followed in time by those of the *Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart* and the *Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart*, joined by lay associates known as the *Laité of the Chevalier Family*.

He thought of you from the very beginning as missionaries, engaged in making God's love known in the world to obtain an answer of love from mankind. And it is beautiful, from this perspective, that you have chosen to be guided, in the Chapter journey, by the Gospel pericope of Emmaus (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35). We can derive three fundamental attitudes from it, to reflect on your charismatic identity and your missionary commitment: to know the Heart of Jesus through the Gospel; to deepen your understanding of its message in fraternal sharing; to proclaim it to all in the joy of mission.

First: *to know the heart of Jesus through the Gospel*, that is, by reflecting on his life. It is there, in fact, that he still continues to this day to be our travel companion (cf. vv. 25-27). Fr. Chevalier loved to define the Gospel as the

book “of the Sacred Heart”, while he invited everyone to contemplate the charity with which the Saviour let himself be touched by every kind of poverty, happy to pour out the tenderness and compassion of his heart onto the small and the poor, the suffering, sinners and all the miseries of humanity. Besides, the explanation of the Scriptures Jesus offers to the disciples of Emmaus along the journey is not of a theoretical type: it is the direct witness of He who has fulfilled what he spoke of, loving the Father and his brothers up to the cross, receiving in his flesh the wounds of the nails and letting his Heart be pierced out of pure charity. The Risen One, who lets Himself be known in the breaking of the Bread, is He who defeated death by giving his life, who demonstrated to men the love of the Father, loving them without measure with his divine and human Heart, and therefore knows how to say words that enflame the breast! In this way one knows the Heart of Jesus: by contemplating in the Gospel his immense mercy, like Mary, whom you venerate with the title of “Our Lady of the Sacred Heart”, and who knows how to show us the Heart of her Son precisely because she “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). This, then, is the first invitation: to know the Heart of Jesus by reflecting on the Gospel. And for this, do not be afraid of silence, do not be afraid!

For this powerful experience to become light for the journey, it is necessary also to pass through the enrichment of sharing. Here is the second element: *deepening and understanding the Word in fraternal sharing*. In Emmaus, the disciples, immediately after recognizing Jesus, ask each other with astonishment about what they have experienced (cf. v. 32). It is an invitation for us too to make a gift to each other of the wonder that is born in the heart when one encounters the Lord. Before meeting him, the two companions discuss failures and disappointments; afterwards they rejoice at having seen the Risen One! Sharing was important in the life of Fr. Chevalier too. In the seminary, he transmitted his fervour and his dreams to some sensitive companions, who used a play on words to define the knights (*chevaliers*) of the Sacred Heart. And it was indeed in reuniting with one of them after years of distance, inspired by the same zeal, that he saw the sign he awaited to begin the foundation. Therefore, in the work of this Chapter, as in the ordinary discernment of your communities, I invite you too to always put fraternal sharing of your encounter with Christ, in the Word, in the Sacraments and in life, at the basis of everything and before everything else. You will then be able to address even the most pressing problems constructively. Sharing among yourselves.

And we come to the final aspect: *the joyful proclamation of the mission*. The disciples in Emmaus set out without hesitation, they return to Jerusalem, and they tell what happened (cf. vv. 33-35). For the work of your Chapter, you have chosen the motto “From the ego to the echo”, that is, from oneself to the common home, the family, the community, creation. It is a powerful expression and a commitment for your future, especially for the discernment of new types of ministry to which you should open yourselves. There is no shortage of challenges: witness the Martyrs of your congregation and the many areas of charity in which you have already been called to work on all continents. The poor, the migrants, the many miseries and injustices that continue to renew themselves in the world urgently question us. Faced with them, do not be afraid to allow yourselves to be engulfed by the compassion of the Heart of Christ; as your Founder said, allow Him to love through you and to manifest his mercy through your goodness. And do so courageously, like he did – for example, when he accepted the mission in Melanesia and Micronesia, despite limited strength – allowing the irresistible tenderness of the Sacred Heart to shape, modify and even upturn, if necessary, your plans and projects. Please, do not be afraid of tenderness! God’s style can be summed up in three words: proximity, compassion and tenderness. God is like this: He is close, compassionate, and tender. Be like this with others. But you will receive this proximity, this compassion, this tenderness, in dialogue with Jesus. Prayer is so important to bring this about. Without prayer, things do not work, they do not go forward.

Thank you, dear brothers, for what you are and for what you do! Continue your work enthusiastically. Flee from sadness, which is a blight on personal life and consecrated life! That sadness that brings you down, not the good sadness of repentance, that is something else; but that daily sadness is a blight that ruins. I bless you from my heart. And I urge you to pray for me, for I need it, this job is not so easy! Thank you.
