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HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHL
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 240115b

Monday 15.01.2024

Audience with members of the “Studium Biblicum Franciscanum”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Studium Biblicum Franciscanum”, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

Academic authorities and students, good morning to you all!

I welcome you to Rome. I greet the Patriarch, Cardinal Pizzaballa. You are in Rome where the apostle Peter came almost two thousand years ago, setting out at the beginning of his following of Jesus, from that house in Capernaum, on Lake Tiberias, before whose remains we can go and pray thanks to the patient work of professors and archaeologists of *the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum*. Now we cannot go there easily because the war zone prevents it.

The *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* was inaugurated in Jerusalem, at the Shrine of the Flagellation, on 7 January 1974, and a few years later it was linked with the College of Saint Anthony in Rome, the current Pontifical University *Antonianum*. I would like to take advantage of the occasion to say there are too many ecclesiastical universities in Rome. You should agree to make some form of unity: unity in study plans. Come to an agreement, talk. Since then, its history has always been linked to the presence of the Friars Minor in the Holy Land. Today, one hundred years on, I would like to recall some aspects of this.

Firstly, the fact that the *Studium*, with its library and museum, has given and continues to give impetus to important archaeological excavations, in various sites, making valuable finds, to the point of obtaining, in 2001, recognition as *Facultas Scientiarum Biblicarum et Archaeologiae*. This determined your peculiarity of combining the study of Sacred Scripture with a stay in the Holy Places and archaeological research; and this has allowed you to considerably broaden and deepen your programmes and methodologies.

Moreover, your love for the biblical texts is for you founded on the same will of Saint Francis, who writes: "Those religious are killed by the letter who will not follow the spirit of the Holy Scripture, but who seek rather to know the words only and to interpret them to others. And they are quickened by the spirit of the Holy Scriptures who do not interpret materially every text they know or wish to know, but who by word and example give them back to God from whom is all good" (*Admonitions*, VII: FF 156). For Francis, knowledge of the Word of God, and also its study, are not matters of simply erudition, but experiences of a sapiential nature, whose purpose, in faith, is to help men to live better the Gospel and to make them good.

A faithful disciple of the Saint of Assisi understood this well: Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, the 750th anniversary of whose death you are about to commemorate. He says in the famous Prologue of the *Breviloquium*, in line with the Franciscan tradition, that to receive the gift of the Word of God it is necessary "to approach the Father of light with simple faith and to pray with a humble heart, so that He, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, may grant us true knowledge of Jesus Christ and, with knowledge, also love".

On the occasion of your centenary, I urge you not to lose sight of this type of approach to the Scripture. Let the rigorous and scientific study of biblical sources, enriched by the most updated associated methods and disciplines, always be for you united with contact with the life of the Holy People of God and aimed at their pastoral service, in harmony with and to the benefit of your specific charism in the Church. Study, meditation, reflection on the Bible and biblical texts, all in the heart of the Church, which is the holy faithful people of God on their way. Outside the body of the Church, these studies serve nothing. What counts is the heart of the Church, of the Holy Mother Church.

Dear friends, in this time, in which the Lord asks us to listen and know better His Word, to make it resonate in the world in an ever more comprehensible way, your discreet and impassioned work is more valuable than ever. Therefore, I encourage you to continue to carry it out and to qualify it in research, teaching and archaeological activity.

The current situation of the Holy Land and of the peoples who inhabit it concerns and pains us. It is very grave from every point of view. It is very grave. I listened to Father Faltas, the things he told me; and every day I communicate with the parish of Gaza, where many people suffer as a result of this situation. They are just two examples, but all this is much greater. The situation is very grave. We must pray and act tirelessly so that this tragedy may end. May this spur you all the more to explore the reasons and the quality of your presence in those martyred places, of your presence there, in the martyrdom of that people, in which the roots of our faith are rooted.

What can I say to the Franciscans? Thank you for your presence in the Holy Land, thank you! And go forward with courage. Thank you for all that you do! I bless you from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
