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Audience with participants in the annual Meeting with the Moderators of associations of the faithful, ecclesial movements and new communities, promoted by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life

This morning, in the Synod Hall in the Vatican, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the annual Meeting with the Moderators of associations of the faithful, ecclesial movements and new communities, promoted by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, on the theme “*The challenge of synodality for the mission*”.

The following is the Holy Father’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence,

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome to everyone!

I am pleased to meet with you and take this opportunity to reflect with you on *synodality*, which you have chosen as the theme for your meeting. I have often emphasized that the synodal journey requires a spiritual conversion because without an interior transformation, lasting results cannot be achieved. My hope is that following this Synod, synodality may endure as a permanent mode of working within the Church, at all levels, permeating the hearts of all, pastors and faithful alike, until it becomes a shared “ecclesial style”. However, achieving this demands that a change must occur within each of us, a true “conversion”.

This has been a long journey. Think about the fact that the first person who saw the need for synodality in the Latin Church was Saint Paul VI when, following the Second Vatican Council, he established the Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops. The Eastern Churches had preserved synodality, yet the Latin Church had lost it. Saint Paul VI opened this path. Today, almost sixty years later, we can say that synodality has entered into the

Church's way of acting. The most important element of the Synod on synodality is not so much the treatment of this or that problem. The most important element is the parochial, diocesan and universal journey we make together in synodality.

In the light of this spiritual conversion, I wish to highlight some attitudes, some "synodal virtues," which we can derive from the three announcements of the Passion in the Gospel of Mark (cf. *Mk* 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34): *thinking as God thinks, overcoming exclusiveness, and cultivating humility*.

First: *thinking as God thinks*. Following the initial announcement of the Passion, the evangelist recounts how Peter rebukes Jesus. He, who should have been an example by helping the other disciples to be fully at the service of the Master's work, opposes God's plans by rejecting his passion and death. Jesus tells him, "For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (*Mk* 8:33).

This is the primary interior change that is asked of us: to move beyond "merely human thought" to embrace the "thought of God." Before making any decision, before starting any programme, any apostolate, any mission within the Church, we should ask ourselves: what does God want from me, what does God want from us, at this moment, in this situation? Is what I envision, what we as a group have in mind, truly aligned with the "thought of God"? Let us remember that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of the synodal journey, not we ourselves: he alone teaches us to listen to the voice of God, individually and as a Church.

God is always greater than our ideas, greater than prevailing mindsets and the "ecclesial fashions" of the day, even the charism of our particular group or movement. Therefore, let us never presume that we are "in tune" with God: rather, let us continually strive to rise above ourselves and embrace God's perspective, not that of men and women. This is the first great challenge. Thinking as God thinks. Let us recall that Gospel passage when the Lord announced his Passion and Peter opposed him. What did the Lord say? "You are not acting according to God, you are not thinking as God thinks".

Second: *overcoming exclusiveness*. Following the second announcement of the Passion, John objects to a man who was casting out demons in Jesus' name but was not of their group of disciples: "Teacher", he said, "we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us" (*Mk* 9:38). Jesus disapproves of this attitude and tells him, "Whoever is not against us is for us" (*Mk* 9:40); then he invites all the apostles to be attentive so as not to be a stumbling block to others (cf. *Mk* 9:42-50).

Please, let us be wary of the temptation of the "closed circle". Though chosen to be the foundation of the new people of God, open to all nations of the earth, the apostles fail to grasp this expansive vision. They withdraw into themselves, seemingly intent on safeguarding the gifts bestowed on them by the Master, such as healing the sick, casting out demons, proclaiming the Kingdom (cf. *Mk* 2:14), as if they were privileges.

The following are also challenges for us: limiting ourselves to what our "circle" thinks, being convinced that what we do is right for everyone, and defending, perhaps inadvertently, positions, prerogatives, or the prestige of the "group". Alternatively, we could also be impeded by the fear of losing our sense of belonging and identity by opening up to other people and differing viewpoints, which stems from failing to recognize diversity as an opportunity rather than a threat. These are "enclosures" in which we all risk imprisonment. Let us be attentive: our own group, our own spirituality are realities that help us journey with the People of God, but they are not privileges, for there is the danger of ending up imprisoned in these enclosures.

Synodality instead asks us to look beyond the barriers with magnanimity, to see the presence of God and his actions even in people we do not know, in new pastoral approaches, in uncharted mission territories. It asks us to let ourselves be moved, even "hurt", by the voice, the experience, and suffering of others: of our fellow believers and all those around us. Be open, with an open heart.

Thirdly and finally: *cultivating humility*. Following the third announcement of the Passion, James and John ask for positions of honour next to Jesus, who instead responds by inviting everyone to consider true greatness as not in being served, but in serving, in being a servant of all, for that is what he himself came to do (cf. *Mk* 10:44-

45).

Here we understand that the starting point of spiritual conversion must be humility, the gateway to all virtues. It saddens me when I encounter Christians who boast: because I am priest from this place, or because they are lay people from that place, because I am from this institution... This is a bad thing. Humility is the door, the beginning. It compels us to scrutinize our intentions: what do I really seek in my relationships with my brothers and sisters in faith? Why do I pursue certain initiatives within the Church? If we detect a hint of pride or arrogance within us, then let us ask for the grace to rediscover humility. Indeed, only the humble accomplish great things in the Church for they have a solid foundation in the love of God, which never fails, and therefore they do not seek further recognition.

This phase of spiritual conversion is also fundamental for building a synodal Church: only the humble person esteems others and welcomes their contribution, advice, inner richness, bringing out not their own "I", but the "we" of the community. It pains me when we meet Christians..., in Spanish we say "*yo me mí conmigo para mí*", that is, "I, me, with me, for me". These Christians put themselves "at the centre". It is sad. It is the humble who safeguard communion in the Church, avoiding divisions, overcoming tensions, knowing how to set aside their own initiatives in order to contribute to joint projects. In serving, they find joy and not frustration or resentment. Living synodality, at every level, is truly impossible without humility.

I want to say once again, in order to emphasize the role of ecclesial movements: ecclesial movements are for service, not for ourselves. It is sad when we feel that "I belong to this one, to another, to another", as if this had to do with superiority. Ecclesial movements are meant to serve the Church, they are not a message in themselves, an ecclesial centrality. They are for service.

I hope these reflections assist you on your journey, within your associations and movements, in your relationships with pastors and with all aspects of ecclesial life. I hope that this meeting along with similar gatherings will help you to appreciate your respective charisms through an ecclesial lens, enabling you to make a generous and invaluable contribution to the mission of evangelization, to which we are all called.

Always think about this: my membership in an ecclesial movement, is it in the association or is it in the Church? It is in my movement, in my association *for* the Church, as a "step" to help the Church. Movements closed in on themselves, however, should be eliminated, they are not ecclesial.

I bless you, go forward! And I ask you to pray for me. Please!

Now I will impart the blessing. First, though, let us pray together to Our Lady.

Recitation of the Hail Mary

Blessing

About praying for me: I say this thinking about something that happened to me once. I was concluding the General Audience and there was little elderly lady, you could tell she was from the countryside, a humble woman, but she had beautiful eyes. And she was signalling me, she was twenty metres away. I went over to her. "How old are you?" "Eighty-seven", she told me. "But what do you eat that keeps you so well?" "I eat ravioli, I make them", and she explained her recipe for ravioli. And at the end I told her, "Pray for me". She said, "I do, every day". "But tell me, madam, do you pray for me or against me?" The answer of a simple person, "Your Holiness, you understand! In there, they pray against you!" That is why I asked you to pray for me. That lady made me laugh.
