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Audience with participants in the 25th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Dehonians)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 25th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Dehonians), to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, good morning!

I greet Father Carlos Luis Suárez Codorniú, your Superior General, confirmed for a second term, you did not do too badly if you got re-elected! I offer my cordial good wishes for his ministry. I also greet the new Councillors and all of you who are taking part in the XXV General Chapter of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

You have chosen, as a guide for your work, the motto: *Called to be One in a Changing World*. “*So that the world may believe*” (Jn 17:21). This theme is closely aligned with your charism, in both its mystical and apostolic dimensions.

Venerable Léon Gustave Dehon taught you to “make union with Christ, in his love for the Father and for all, the principle and centre of [your] life” (*Constitutions*, 17); and to do so by closely linking your religious consecration and ministry to the reparation offered by the Son, so that everything, through his Heart, may return to the Father. Let us focus, then, on these two aspects of your present Chapter: *to be one, so that the world may believe*.

To be one: *unity*. We know how insistently Jesus, in his prayer to the Father at the Last Supper, asked this for his disciples (cf. Jn 17:23). He did not simply propose it to them as a project or a goal to be achieved. Before all else, he prayed that it would be given to them as a gift; the gift of unity. It is important to remember this. Unity is

not our work; we cannot attain it on our own. We can do our part, and we have to strive to do it, but we need God's help. It is he who brings us together and inspires us, and the more united we are with him, the more united we become with one another. If you want to grow in communion, then, I would urge that, in your Chapter's decisions, you give priority to the sacramental life, prayerful meditation on the Word of God, the vital role of personal and communal prayer, particularly adoration – never forget adoration – as means of personal and fraternal growth and “service to the Church” (*Constitutions*, 31).

In your religious houses, the chapel should be, for each and all, the place most often visited, a place of humble and receptive silence and hidden prayer, enabling the beating of Christ's heart to set the rhythm of your days, to modulate the tone of your conversations, and to sustain the zeal of your charity. Jesus' heart eternally beats with love for us, and its beating can join with ours in restoring our calm, harmony, energy, unity, especially in times of difficulty. We all, both personally and communally, had and will have difficult times: do not be afraid! Even the Apostles had many. Remain close to the Lord so that unity is maintained in times of temptation. Yet for this to happen, we must make room for him, faithfully and perseveringly, silencing vain words and futile thoughts, and bringing everything into his presence. On this point, I would like to add a few words about gossiping. Please, gossiping is a plague, it seems small, but it destroys from within. Be careful and never gossip about one another, never! There is a good remedy for gossiping: bite your tongue, so that it hurts and will not let you talk. Please, never gossip about others. We need to pray! Let us never forget that without prayer, we neither progress nor stand firm, either in religious life or in the apostolate! Without prayer, nothing will be accomplished.

And so, we come to our second point: to be one, *so that the world may believe*. Unity has this ability to evangelize. This is a challenging goal, which gives rise to many questions. How do we go about being missionaries today, in an age marked by immense and complex challenges? In the various areas of apostolate in which you work, how can you say “something meaningful to a world that seems to have lost its heart” (cf. *General Audience*, 5 June 2024)? So many times, we have seen that this world appears to have lost its heart.

Venerable Léon Gustave Dehon can help us to answer this question. In one of his letters, meditating on the Lord's Passion, he observed that “the scourges, the thorns, the nails” have written a single word in the flesh of the Saviour: love. He then added, “Let us not be satisfied with reading and admiring only the exterior of this divine writing. Let us penetrate to the heart and we shall see a much greater marvel: an inexhaustible and unfailing love that suffers willingly and gives itself without tiring” (*The Love of the Sacred Heart II*, 1905).

Herein lies the secret of a credible and effective proclamation: allowing, like Jesus, the word “love” to be written upon our flesh, that is, in the concreteness of our actions. And to do this with tenacity, steadfast in the face of searing judgments, distressing problems and the malice that pains our hearts; to do so tirelessly, with inexhaustible affection for every brother and sister, in solidarity with Christ the Redeemer in his desire to make reparation for the sins of all humanity. In solidarity with the Lord, crucified and risen, who, in the face of those who suffer, those who err, and those who do not believe, calls not for judgment but for “love and tears for those who have strayed, [in order] to trust completely in God” (*Homily, Chrism Mass*, 28 March 2024). In this way, he promises us a “calm that shields us from the storms raging all around us” (*ibid.*). Venerable Dehon understood this teaching and practised it to the end, as witnessed by the final words, touching in their simplicity, that he bequeathed to you on his deathbed: “For him I have lived, for him I die. He is my everything, my life, my death, my eternity”.

Dear brothers, may you persevere in your mission with that same faith and generosity! I thank you for all that you do, the world over. I bless you and all your confreres, I accompany you with my prayers and I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me. Thank you.
