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Audience with participants in the 86th General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 86th General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

I am happy. I remember your brethren in Buenos Aires: good confessors. Those Basques that Franco had driven out, they came there. Good confessors, good. And one of them is still alive, an Argentine: I have made him a cardinal now. He forgives everything! He told me this: that at times he is worried about forgiving too much – he always forgives – and one day he went before the Lord, in the chapel, to apologize: “I am sorry, Lord, I have forgiven too much... but it was you who set the bad example!”. This is how this good cardinal of yours prays.

Welcome! I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of your 86th General Chapter. I greet you and, in particular, the Minister General, Brother Roberto Genuin.

What you are living is an important moment for you and for the Church. Indeed, the Chapter brings together brethren from different countries and cultures, who meet in order to listen to each other and to talk to each other in the one language of the Spirit. It is an extraordinary opportunity to share the “great things” (cr. *Ps* 126:3) that God continues to do through you, sons of Saint Francis, all over the world. I therefore hope that, as you thank God for the development of the Order, especially in the young Churches, you will take the opportunity of this exchange to consider what the Lord is asking of you, so as to be able to continue, today, to proclaim the Kingdom of God with passion, following the footsteps of the *Poverello*.

I would therefore like to recall with you three dimensions of Franciscan spirituality, which I think can help you in discernment and the missionary apostolate: *fraternity*, *readiness*, and *commitment to peace*.

Fraternity. The motto of your Chapter is: “*The Lord has given me brothers (Test. 14) to go out into the world*” (*Regula Bullata*, RB, 3:10). It refers to Francis’ experience, emphasizing that the mission, according to his

charism, stems from fraternity to promote fraternity (RB 3:10-12; cf. *Letter to members of the Franciscan family on the eighth centenary of the approval of the Regula Bullata*, 9 November 2023). At its root there is, we might say, a “mysticism of collaboration”, whereby no one, in God's plan, can consider himself an island, but each person is in relation with the others in order to grow in love, coming out of himself and making his own uniqueness a gift to his brothers and sisters. One of you who cares for his own uniqueness, but without turning it into a gift to his brothers, has not yet begun to be a Capuchin!

So you have not come together to optimize – as unfortunately we sometimes hear said – the “human resources” of the Order, nor to improve its performance or to preserve its structures. Rather, you are here to recognize yourselves, in faith, as chosen brothers, brought together and accompanied in the provident charity of the Father, and to allow yourselves to be challenged by that truth, especially with regard to the field of formation, which you have been working on for some time. And you are right to do so, because without formation there is no future.

Therefore, in your meetings, I invite you to be mindful that economic resources, human calculations and other such realities are never placed at the centre: they are all useful tools, which you must also be concerned about, but always as means, never as ends. Let people be at the centre: those whom the Lord sends you and those he gives you to live with, their good, their salvation. In a word: at the centre let there be fraternity, which I encourage you to promote in your formation houses, in the great Franciscan family, in the Church and in all the spheres in which you work, even at the cost of renouncing, in favour of fraternity, projects and achievements of another kind. Fraternity comes first. You are friars. “But I am a priest!”. Yes, yes, but that comes after. The important thing is the friar. You are a priest, a deacon, whatever you may be, but a friar: this is the basis.

And this leads us to the second aspect of our reflection: *readiness*. Fraternity and readiness. You Capuchins are famous for being willing to go where no-one else wants to go, and this is very good. Indeed, your open style shows everyone that the most important thing in life is charity (cf. 1 Cor 13:13), and that it is always worth the effort to spend your existence for this.

In this way, you represent a sign for the entire Christian community, called to be together as a whole, always and everywhere, missionary and “outgoing” (cf. *Vatican Ecumenical Council II*, Decree *Ad gentes*, 2; Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 20). An important sign, especially in times like ours, marked by conflict and closed-mindedness, where indifference and selfishness seem to prevail over readiness, respect and sharing, with grave and evident consequences, such as the wicked exploitation of the poor and environmental devastation.

In this context, your readiness to get involved in person in the needs of your brothers and to say, with humble courage, “Here I am. Send me!” (*Is* 6:8) is a charismatic gift to be valued and nurtured. Try to be like this always: simple, free and willing, ready to leave everything (cf. *Mk* 1:18) in order to be present wherever the Lord calls you, without seeking recognition or making demands, with an open heart and arms. And this will be your poverty.

And so, we come to the third value you embody: *commitment to peace*. Be peaceful. Indeed, your ability to be with everyone, in the midst of the people, to the point of being commonly considered the “brothers of the people”, over the centuries has made you expert “peacemakers” (cf. Mt 5:9), capable of creating opportunities to meet, to mediate the resolution of conflicts, to bring people together and to promote a culture of reconciliation, even in the most difficult situations.

At the basis of this charism, however, there is, as we have said, a fundamental condition: to be, in Christ, close to all (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37), especially the poorest, rejected and desperate, without ever excluding anyone. Saint Francis himself, as we know, came to be the “man of peace” that the whole world recognizes, starting from the encounter with the lepers, in whose embrace he discovered and accepted his deepest wounds, and in whose presence he encountered Christ, his Saviour. Thus, from forgiven he became a bearer of forgiveness, from beloved a dispenser of love, from reconciled a promoter of reconciliation. He was forgiven, loved, and reconciled, and he brings forgiveness, and he brings love and brings reconciliation. And you must be like this, men of love, of forgiveness, of reconciliation. It is faith that has made him on so many occasions an instrument

of peace in God's hand, and for him as for us, faith has had and will always have a vital link with closeness to the least, let us not forget this (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 49).

In conclusion, dear brothers, I invite you to persevere on your journey, with confidence, and with hope. May Our Lady accompany you. And I thank you for all the good you do in the Church. From my heart I bless you and the great Capuchin family. And I ask you to please pray for me - for, not against!
