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Audience with the Community of the Pontifical Campano Seminary of Posillipo

At 10.50 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Community of the Pontifical Campano Seminary of Posillipo.

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

Holy Father's Address

Dear brother bishops and priests,

Dear seminarians,

I encounter you with joy – I like meeting seminarians – and greet all of you who form the community of the Pontifical Campano Interregional Seminary, accompanied by a number of bishops from the region. I thank the rector for his words and offer a special greeting to you, dear seminarians who, thanks be to God, are numerous.

Your seminary represents a unique case in the current Italian ecclesial panorama. Founded in 1912 at the behest of St. Pius X, as was the case for several educational institutes at the time, it was immediately entrusted to the direction of the Jesuit Fathers, who guided it through the significant transformations that occurred over a period of more than one hundred years, and currently remains the only seminary in Italy directed by the Society of Jesus. In recent decades there has been growing collaboration and interaction with the diocesan Churches which, aside from sending young candidates to the priesthood, have been concerned with identifying among their priests suitable figures for training. I encourage this significant and fruitful path of ecclesial communion, in which the individual dioceses, with their pastors, are investing considerable resources. An interdiocesan educational community is undeniably an opportunity for enrichment by virtue of the different sensitivities and experiences each person brings, and is able to educate future priests to feel part of the one Church of Christ, always broadening one's vocational dream, with an authentic missionary spirit (cf. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, 91), which does not weaken, but rather consolidates and motivates the sense of belonging to the particular Church. In this time, when we all feel "small", perhaps powerless in the face of the challenge of education, walking together in a genuine "synodal" spirit, is a winning choice that helps us to feel

supported, encouraged and enriched by each other. This exercise in communion is further enriched by the encounter with the rich Ignatian spiritual and pedagogical tradition, which has in the Spiritual Exercises a sure point of reference, by which you have been inspired for your training project, thus mediating with “creative fidelity” the indications that come from the Magisterium of the Church.

Dear educators, to form the spirituality of the diocesan priest according to the pedagogy of the Exercises of St. Ignatius is your mission: an arduous but at the same time exciting challenge, with the responsibility of indicating the direction for the future ministry of priesthood. I would like to emphasize here three aspects which I consider important.

Educating according to the Ignatian style means first of all promoting the person’s harmonious integration, starting from the centrality of the relationship of *personal friendship* with the Lord Jesus. It is precisely the primacy given to the relationship with the Lord, Who calls us “friends” (cf. John 15:15), which allows to live a solid, profound but not disincarnate spirituality. That is why it is important to know, accept and continually reform one’s own humanity. Never tire of going ahead, of reforming: always be on the move. In this direction, intellectual formation too tends not to be just learning notions so as to become erudite – you are not a dictionary! – but rather to encourage the acquisition of increasingly refined tools for a critical reading of reality, starting from oneself. “You are the Christ” – “You are Peter” (cf. Mt 16:16,18): the entire vocational journey, as for Simon Peter and the first disciples, revolves around a dialogue of love and friendship. We recognize in Jesus the Messiah, the Lord of our lives, He gives us the “new” name, which encapsulates our vocation and indicates our mission, which the Father has always known and protected. The discovery of our new name, the name that best defines us, the most authentic, passes through our ability gradually to name the various experiences that inspire our humanity. Calling things by name is the first step to self-knowledge and therefore towards knowing the will of God for our life. Dear Seminarians, do not be afraid to call things by name, to look directly at the truth of your life, and to open yourselves with transparency and truth to others, especially to your trainers, avoiding the temptation of formalism and clericalism, which are always at the root of the double life.

Indeed, discernment is the second aspect I would like to underline. Education in discernment is not exclusive to the Ignatian tradition, but it is certainly one of its strengths. Time in the seminary is the quintessential time for discernment, in which thanks to the guidance of those who, like Eli with Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 3), help the young to recognize the voice of the Lord among the many voices that resonate and at times thunder in the ears and in the heart. But in this time, the exercise of discernment must become a truly educational art, so that the priest may be a true “man of discernment” (cf. *Ratio fundamentalis*, 43). Today, more than ever, as the rector said, the priest is called to guide the Christian people in discerning the signs of the times, in knowing how to recognize the voice of God in the often confused chorus of voices that clash, with opposing messages, in our world characterized by a plurality of cultural and religious sensibilities. To be experts in the art of discernment, it is necessary to have, first and foremost, a good familiarity with listening to the Word of God, but also a growing knowledge of oneself, of one’s own inner world of emotions and fears. To become men of discernment, it is then necessary to be courageous, to tell the truth to yourself. Discernment is a choice of courage, contrary to the more comfortable and reductive ways of rigorism and laxism, as I have repeated several times. Educating in discernment means, indeed, fleeing from the temptation to seek refuge behind a rigid norm or behind the image of an idealized freedom. Educating in discernment means “exposing oneself”, coming out of the world of one’s own convictions and prejudices to open up to understanding how God is speaking to us, today, in this world, in this time, in this moment, and how He is speaking to me, now.

Finally, forming oneself in the priesthood according to an Ignatian style means opening oneself always to the dimension of the *Kingdom of God*, cultivating the desire for “*magis*”, of that “something more” in the generosity of giving ourselves to the Lord and to our brothers, that is always in front of us. For this, your formative year, you have chosen as a theme, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33): this will help you to enlarge the scope of your formation, not to content yourselves in attaining role, putting on a robe; it will help you not to be hasty in concluding your journey, but in making your human and spiritual structure increasingly solid. Seeking the Kingdom helps us not to settle for what we have accomplished, not to rest on our laurels, but rather to cultivate that holy restlessness of those who wish first of all to serve the Lord in our brothers. Restlessness enlarges the soul and makes it more able to receive God’s love. Seeking the Kingdom means seeking God’s justice, and striving to enable our relationships, communities and cities to be transformed the merciful and

righteous love of God, Who listens to the cry of the poor (cf. Sal 34:7). The search for true justice must stimulate a growing inner freedom from goods, the honours of this world, in favour of emotions and the vocation itself. Inner freedom from goods: I want to underline this. It is the misstep! Do not forget: the devil enters via the pocket, always, then vanity follows, then pride, haughtiness, and in this way it ends. The young who have chosen to follow the Lord in the way of the priesthood are in fact called upon to cultivate the friendship with God, that manifests itself in a special way in love for the poor, so as to be “witnesses of poverty, through simplicity and austerity of life, to become sincere and credible promoters of a true social justice” (*Ratio fundamentalis*, 111).

By the intercession of Mary, Queen of the Apostles, of the bishop St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori and St. Ignatius of Loyola, master of discernment, may the Lord grant to you to continue with joy and fidelity on your path, following the luminous tradition of which you are a part. Thank you, and I ask you, please, do not forget to pray for me.
