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SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

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Audience with participants in the meeting of the Families of the Precious Blood

At 11.55 this morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the meeting organized by the Families of the Precious Blood.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

On the eve of the month of July, in which Christian piety turns in a special way to the Blood of Christ, I am glad to meet with the Societies of Apostolic Life and the male and female religious Institutes, with their respective lay aggregations, who are inspired by the spirituality of the Blood of Jesus. I greet you all with affection and I thank Fr. Terenzio Pastore and Sister Nicla Spezzati for the words with which they introduced this meeting, sponsored by the *Sanguis Christi* Union.

Since the beginnings of Christianity, the mystery of the Blood of Christ has fascinated many people. Your founding Saints too cultivated this devotion, placing it at the basis of your Constitutions, because they understood in the light of faith that the Blood of Christ is the source of salvation for the world. God chose the sign of blood, because no other sign is so eloquent to express the supreme love of life given for others. This donation is repeated in every Eucharistic celebration, in which alongside the Body of Christ, His precious blood is made present; the Blood of the new and eternal Covenant, shed for all for the redemption of sins (cf. *Mt 26: 26*).

The meditation of Christ's sacrifice leads us to perform works of mercy, giving our life for God and for our brothers, without sparing. Meditation of the mystery of the Blood of Christ shed on the cross for our redemption drives us, in particular, towards those who could be cured from their moral and physical sufferings, and who instead are left to languish on the margins of a society of consumption and indifference. It is from this perspective that your service to the Church and to society becomes evident in all its importance. For my part, I

suggest to you three aspects that may help you in your activity and in your witness: the *courage of the truth*, *attention to all, especially to the most distant*, and *the ability to fascinate and to communicate*.

The courage of the truth. It is important to be brave people, build courageous communities that are not afraid to stand up to affirm the values of the Gospel and the truth about the world and man. It is a matter of speaking plainly and not turning away in the face of attacks on the value of human life from conception to its natural end, on the dignity of the human person; before social ills, and before the various forms of poverty. The witness of the disciples of Jesus is called to touch the lives of the parishes and neighbourhoods, not to leave indifferent but to affect, transforming people's hearts and lives.

The second aspect is *attention to all, especially to those who are distant*. In your mission you are called to reach out to everyone, to make yourselves understood by all, to be "popular" by using a language through which everyone can understand the message of the Gospel. The recipients of the love and goodness of Jesus are all: neighbours, but above all those who are most distant. Therefore, we need to identify the most suitable ways of being able to bring together a multiplicity of people in homes, in social environments and on the street. To do this, you have before you the example of Jesus and of the disciples who walked the streets of Palestine announcing the Kingdom of God with the many signs of healing that confirmed the Word. Strive to be an image of a Church who walks the street, among the people, even running personal risks, sharing the joys and hardships of those you meet.

The third aspect that I suggest for your witness is the *ability to fascinate and communicate*. This is aimed especially at preaching and catechesis, the itineraries for a deeper understanding of the Word of God. It is a question of inspiring ever greater involvement in order to offer the contents of the Christian faith and to allow it to be savoured, encouraging new life in Christ. The Gospel and the Holy Spirit evoke words and gestures that enflame hearts and help them to open up to God and to others. For this ministry of the Word, we can draw inspiration from the attitude with which Jesus dialogued with people so as to reveal His mystery to all, to fascinate ordinary people with lofty and demanding teachings. The strength of this attitude is hidden in "the way Jesus looked at people, seeing beyond their weaknesses and failings: 'Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom' (Lk 12: 32)" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 141). Imitating the style with which Jesus preached, He helps us to approach others by making them perceive God's tenderness. I think we are living in a time in which it is necessary to bring about the revolution of tenderness.

Here are three characteristics that can be useful for your journey of faith and your apostolate. But let us not forget that the true strength of Christian witness comes from the Gospel itself. And this is where the centrality of the Blood of Christ and its spirituality emerges. It is a question of relying above all on the "superabundance of love" expressed in the Blood of the Lord, which brought to light the Church Fathers and the great saints and mystics of Christian history, from Saint Bonaventure to Saint Catherine of Siena, up to a Saint especially dear to you: Saint Gaspar del Bufalo. This Roman priest, founder of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, endeavoured to keep alive the ardour of faith in the Christian people by travelling through the regions of central Italy. With the example of his love for God, his humility, his charity, he was able to bring reconciliation and peace everywhere, tending to the spiritual and material needs of the most fragile people who lived on the margins of society.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is in Christ that we find the sure principle of our existence: He is our fundamental and definitive hope. In the journey of your communities, priority goes to prayer, to listening to the Word of God, to contemplation, and to docile obedience to the voice of the Holy Spirit. May communion and collaboration grow among you, indispensable conditions for the apostolic mandate received from the Lord to bring abundant spiritual fruits for the benefit of the whole people of God.

I accompany these wishes with my prayerful remembrance for you and for your mission and, as I ask you to pray for me, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you.
