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Audience with the participants in the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ (Passionists)

At 11.45 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 47th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ (Passionists), taking place in Rome from 6 to 27 October 2018.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers,

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of your General Chapter and I thank the Superior for his words. In these days, your reflections have been guided by the theme "*Renewing our mission: Gratitude, Prophecy and Hope*". These three words: gratitude, prophecy and hope, express the spirit with which you wish to stimulate your Congregation towards a renewal in the mission. Indeed, in addition to electing the government of the Institute, you propose to undertake a new path of ongoing formation for your communities, rooted in the experience of daily life; and you also intend to carry out discernment on pastoral methodology in your approach to the younger generations.

Your Founder, Saint Paul of the Cross, gave to himself and his companions this motto: "May the Passion of Jesus Christ be always in our hearts". His first biographer, Saint Vincent Maria Strambi, said of him: "It seemed that God Almighty had chosen Father Paul, in a special way, to teach people how to look for Him in the interiority of their heart". Saint Paul of the Cross wanted your communities to be schools of prayer, where you could experience God. His holiness was lived in darkness and desolation, but also with joy and peace that touched the heart of those who met him.

At the centre of your life and your mission is the Passion of Jesus, which the Founder described as "the greatest

and most beautiful work of the love of God” (*Letters II*, 499). The vow that distinguishes you, with which you are committed to keep alive the memory of the passion, places you at the foot of the Cross, from which there flows the healing and reconciling love of God. I encourage you to be ministers of spiritual healing and reconciliation, so necessary in today’s world, afflicted by wounds both old and new. Your Constitutions call you to dedicate your whole self to “evangelizing, and where necessary re-evangelizing the faithful, especially the poor in more neglected areas” (Const. 70). Your closeness to people, traditionally expressed through popular missions, spiritual direction and the sacrament of Penance, is a valuable witness. The Church needs ministers who speak with tenderness, who listen without condemning and who welcome with mercy.

The Church today strongly hears the call to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, both geographic and existential. Your commitment to embracing the new frontiers of mission implies not only going to new territories to take the Gospel, but also facing the new challenges of our time, such as migration, secularism and the digital world. This means being present in those situations where people perceive the absence of God, and trying to be close to those who, in any way or form, are suffering.

In this age of change, which is instead an epoch change, you are called to be attentive to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, reading the signs of the times. New situations require new responses. Saint Paul of the Cross was very creative in responding to the needs of his time, acknowledging – as he says in the Rule – that “God’s love is most ingenious, and is shown not so much with words, but rather with deeds and by the examples of those who love” (XVI). A creative fidelity to your charism will enable you to respond to the needs of the people of today, staying close to the suffering Christ so as to take His presence to a world that suffers.

Your Congregation has given many examples of holiness to the People of God: let us think of Saint Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows, a young man whose joyful following of Christ still speaks to the young of today. The witness of the Saints and Blesseds of your religious Family manifest the fruitfulness of your charism and represent models to inspire your apostolic choices. The strength and simplicity of your message, which is God’s love revealed on the Cross, can still speak to today’s society, which has learned no longer to trust in words alone, and to let itself be convinced only by deeds. For many young people who are in search of God, the Passion of Jesus can be a source of hope and courage, showing them that each person is loved personally and fully. May your witness and your apostolate continue to enrich the Church, and may you remain always close to the crucified Christ and His suffering people.

May the apostolic blessing, which I impart to you Capitulars and to all the Passionist family, accompany you on your way. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
