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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis to Morocco (30 to 31 March 2019) – Visit to the “Centre Rural des Services Sociaux” of Témara and Meeting with the Clergy, men and women religious, and the Ecumenical Council of Churches of the Cathedral of Rabat

Private visit to the “Centre Rural des Services Sociaux” of Témara

Meeting with the Clergy, men and women religious, and the Ecumenical Council of Churches of the Cathedral of Rabat

Lunch with the bishops of Morocco and some members of the papal entourage

Private visit to the “Centre Rural des Services Sociaux” of Témara

At 9.30 this morning (10.30 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis, after leaving the apostolic nunciature, transferred by car to the “Centre Rural des Services Sociaux” of Témara, a centre managed by the Daughters of Charity, which functions in the social sector thanks to the nuns and to numerous volunteers.

Upon arrival, the Pope was received at the entrance by the four nuns who work in the Centre, and by two children who offered him the gift of some flowers. While the Holy Father greeted the young patients, a choir of 150 children sang a hymn.

Before leaving the Centre, the Pope took leave of the nuns and the volunteers, and finally greeted the parents of the children assisted, while they sang. He then transferred by car to the Cathedral of Rabat for the meeting with the clergy, men and women religious, and the Ecumenical Council of Churches.

Meeting with the Clergy, men and women religious, and the Ecumenical Council of Churches of the Cathedral of

Rabat

At 10.20 today (11.20 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis arrived at the Cathedral of Rabat for the meeting with the clergy, men and women religious, and the Ecumenical Council of Churches.

Upon arrival he was received at the entrance to the Cathedral by the parish priest and three priests in charge of pastoral care who consigned to him the crucifix and the holy water for aspersion. He then passed through the centre nave while the choir sang. After a moment of silent prayer before the Sacrament, introduced by brief testimonies and the greetings of two priests and two women religious, Pope Francis gave his address. He then led the recitation of the Angelus.

At the end, while a Marian hymn was sung, the Pope greeted the three leaders of the Ecumenical Council of Churches that brings together the five Christian Churches present in Morocco: Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical, Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox. He then returned by car to the apostolic nunciature.

The following is the Holy Father's address to the clergy, men and women religious, and the Ecumenical Council of Churches:

Discorso del Santo Padre

Dear Brothers and Sisters, *bonjour à tous!*

I am very happy to have this opportunity to be with you. I especially thank Father Germain and Sister Mary for their testimonies. I would also like to greet the members of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, a clear sign of the communion experienced here in Morocco between Christians of different confessions along the path to unity. Christians are a small minority in this country. Yet, to my mind, this is not a problem, even though I realize that at times it can be difficult for some of you. Your situation reminds me of the question asked by Jesus: "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? ... It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (*Lk 13:18.21*). Paraphrasing the Lord's words, we can ask ourselves: What are Christians like, in these lands? To what can we compare them? They are like a little yeast that Mother Church wants to mix in with a great quantity of flour until all of it is leavened. For Jesus did not choose us and send us forth to become more numerous! He called us to a mission. He put us in the midst of society like a handful of yeast: the yeast of the Beatitudes and the fraternal love by which, as Christians, we can all join in making present his kingdom. In this context I recall the counsel of Saint Francis to his brothers as he sent them out: "Go out and preach the Gospel: and if necessary, also with words".

This means, dear friends, that our mission as baptized persons, priests and consecrated men and women, is not really determined by the number or size of spaces that we occupy, but rather by our capacity to generate change and to awaken wonder and compassion. We do this by the way we live as disciples of Jesus, in the midst of those with whom we share our daily lives, joys and sorrows, suffering and hopes (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1). In other words, the paths of mission are not those of proselytism. Please, these paths are not those of proselytism! Let us recall Benedict XVI: "the Church grows not through proselytism, but through attraction, through witness". The paths of mission are not those of proselytism, which leads always to a cul-de-sac, but of our way of being with Jesus and with others. The problem is not when we are few in number, but when we are insignificant, salt that has lost the flavour of the Gospel – this is the problem – or lamps that no longer shed light (cf. *Mt 5:13-15*).

I believe we should worry whenever we Christians are troubled by the thought we are only significant if we are the flour, if we occupy all the spaces. You know very well that our lives are meant to be "yeast", wherever and with whomever we find ourselves, even if this appears to bring no tangible or immediate benefits (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 210). For being a Christian is not about adhering to a doctrine, or a temple or an ethnic group. Being Christian is about an encounter, an encounter with Jesus Christ. We are Christians because we have been loved and encountered, and not as the result of proselytism. Being Christian is about knowing that we have been forgiven and knowing that we are asked to treat others in the same way that God treated us. For "by this

everyone shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*Jn* 13:35).

Dear brothers and sisters, in thinking of this setting in which you are called to live your baptismal vocation, your ministry and your consecration, I recall the words of Pope Saint Paul VI in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*: “The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which she lives. She has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make” (No. 65). To say that the Church has to enter into dialogue is not to follow a fashion – dialogue is in vogue today but that is not the reason for dialogue – or much less a strategy for increasing her membership, no, it is not a strategy. The Church has to enter into dialogue out of fidelity to her Lord and Master, who from the beginning, moved by love, wished to enter into dialogue as a friend and asks us to enter into friendship with him (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 2). As disciples of Jesus Christ, from the very day of our baptism we have been called to be a part of this *dialogue of salvation and friendship*, from which we are the first to benefit.

Christians, here in these lands, learn to be a living sacrament of the dialogue that God wants to initiate with each man and woman, wherever they are. A dialogue that we are nonetheless called to take up following the example of Jesus himself, who is meek and humble of heart (cf. *Mt* 11:29), with fervent and disinterested love, without calculations and limitations, and with respect for the freedom of others. In this spirit, we can find elder brothers and sisters who show us the way, for by their lives they testify that this dialogue is possible; they point to a “high standard” that challenges us and spurs us on. How can we fail to think of Saint Francis of Assisi, who at the height of the Crusades went to encounter Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil? Or Blessed Charles de Foucault, so deeply impressed by the humble and hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth, whom he silently adored, that he wished to be a “brother to all”? Or again, those of our fellow Christians who chose to live in solidarity with another people, even to the point of giving their lives? When the Church, in fidelity to the mission she has received from the Lord, *enters into dialogue with the world and gives her message*, she takes part in the advent of that fraternity whose deepest source is not in ourselves but in the fatherhood of God.

As consecrated persons, we are invited to experience this dialogue of salvation above all as intercession for the people entrusted to us. I remember once speaking with a priest who, like yourselves, lived in a land where Christians were a minority. He told me that “Our Father” had taken on a particular meaning for him because, praying in the midst of people of other religions, he felt the power of the words, “Give us this day our daily bread”. His intercessory prayer, as a missionary, expanded to that people which was in some way entrusted to him, not to govern but to love, and this led him to pray this prayer with special feeling. Consecrated persons and priests bring to the altar and to their prayer the lives of all those around them; they keep alive, as if through a small window, the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. How beautiful it is to know that, in different parts of this land, through your voices, all creation can constantly pray: “Our Father”.

Dialogue, then, becomes prayer. We can carry it out daily in the name “of the human fraternity that embraces all human beings, unites them and renders them equal. In the name of this fraternity, torn apart by the policies of extremism and division, by systems of unrestrained profit or by hateful ideological tendencies, that manipulate the actions and the future of men and women (*Document on Human Fraternity*, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019). A prayer that does not distinguish, separate or marginalize, but embraces the life of our neighbour. A prayer of intercession that says to the Father, “Thy kingdom come”. Not by violence, not by hatred, not by ethnic, religious or economic supremacy, and so forth, but by the power of the compassion poured out on the cross for all mankind. This is the experience of the majority of you.

I thank God for all that you are doing as followers of Jesus Christ here in Morocco, daily discovering through dialogue, cooperation and friendship the way to sow a future of hope. In this way, you will unmask and lay bare every attempt to exploit differences and ignorance in order to sow fear, hatred and conflict. For we know that fear and hatred, nurtured and manipulated, destabilize our communities and leave them spiritually defenceless.

I encourage you, then, with no other desire than to make visible the presence and love of Christ, *who for our sake became poor in order to enrich us by his poverty* (cf. *2 Cor* 8:9): continue to be neighbours to those who are often left behind, the little ones and the poor, prisoners and migrants. May your charity be ever active and thus a path of communion between Christians of every confession present in Morocco: the ecumenism of charity. May it be also a path of dialogue and cooperation with our Muslim brothers and sisters, and with all men

and women of good will. Charity, especially towards the vulnerable, is the best opportunity we have to keep working to build of a culture of encounter. May it also be a way for those who experience pain, struggles and exclusion to realize that they are members of the one human family, under the banner of fraternity. As disciples of Jesus Christ, may you, in that same spirit of dialogue and cooperation, be ever concerned to serve the advancement of justice and peace, the education of children and young people, and the protection and accompaniment of the elderly, the vulnerable, the disabled and the oppressed.

Once again, I thank all of you, brothers and sisters, for your presence and your mission here in Morocco. Thank you for your humble and discreet service, following the example of our forebears in consecrated life, among whom I want to greet your dean, Sister Ersilia. Through you, dear Sister, I offer a cordial greeting to the elderly sisters and brothers who, for reasons of health, are not physically present here, but are united to us in prayer.

All of you are witnesses of a glorious history. A history of sacrifices, hopes, daily struggles, lives spent in service, perseverance and hard work, for all work is hard, done “by the sweat of our brow”. But let me also tell you that “you have a glorious history to remember and recount, but also a great history to be accomplished! Look to the future – envisage the future – where the Holy Spirit is sending you” (*Vita Consecrata*, 110). In this way, you will continue to be living signs of that fraternity to which the Father has called us, without intransigence or passivity, but as believers who know that the Lord always goes before us and opens spaces of hope wherever something or someone appeared hopeless.

May the Lord bless each of you and, through you, the members of all your communities. May his Spirit help you to bear abundant fruit: the fruit of dialogue, justice, peace, truth, and love, so that here in this land which God loves, human fraternity may grow ever stronger. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

[Four children go up beside the Pope. He says: “Voici le futur! Le maintenant et le future!”

And now, let us place ourselves under the protection of the Virgin Mary by reciting the Angelus.

Lunch with the bishops of Morocco and some members of the papal entourage

At 11.50 local time (12.50 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis arrived in the apostolic nunciature of Rabat for lunch with the bishops of Morocco and some members of the papal entourage.

Before lunch the Pope blessed the seat of the apostolic nunciature, recently renovated and extended. The lunch was attended by the secretary of State, the prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State, the secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the two bishops of Morocco and the apostolic prefect.
