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## Audience with the Community of the Pontifical Lombard Seminary in Rome

Today, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Community of the Pontifical Lombard Seminary in Rome.

The following is the Pope's address to those in attendance:

### Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I thank the Rector for his words and I welcome you. I am glad that together with you priests there are the people who through their service inspire the life of the Seminary and form the great "Lombard" family. We meet again today, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the election of Pope Pius XI, a former pupil of yours – and one of the first pupils! – who always had at heart his "dear" seminary, for which he provided the area in which you are located, in the shadow of the *Salus populi romani*. It is good that you are there and it is also an opportunity for me to think of you often. From these roots linked to Pius XI let us try to draw some inspiration: not to cultivate nostalgia for the past and close ourselves to the newness of the Spirit, who invites us to live today, but to trace prophetic signs for your ministry and your mission, particularly in the service of the Church and the Italian people.

As soon as he was elected, Pius XI chose no longer to appear inside Saint Peter's Basilica, but from the external *loggia*. He wanted his first blessing to be addressed *Urbi et Orbi*, to the city of Rome and to the whole world. And with this gesture – I think they worked for more than forty minutes to open up that balcony that had not been opened for years, and also to empty the space, that had become a storage deposit; and he waited – with this gesture he reminds us that we need to open up, to expand the horizon of ministry to the dimensions of the world, to reach out to every child of God whom he wishes to embrace with his love. Please, let us not remain barricaded in the sacristy and cultivate small closed groups where we can indulge ourselves and be undisturbed. There is a world waiting for the Gospel, and the Lord desires his shepherds to be conformed to him, carrying in

their hearts and on their shoulders the expectations and burdens of the flock. Open, compassionate, merciful hearts; and this leads me to think of the experience there is among you, with the confessors of Saint Mary Major: “Go to this one, or that one – but that one there, no! Please, he’ll make your life impossible!”: Seek out merciful priests for us, and we will be merciful with others. Just we want mercy when we go to ask for forgiveness for our sins, and we look for the most merciful, be merciful. With everyone. Do not forget that God never tires of forgiving. We are the ones who tire of asking for forgiveness, but he never tires of forgiving. That openness of forgiveness, without creating too many problems: forgiveness. Open, compassionate, merciful hearts, I was saying, and hard-working, generous hands, which get dirty and wounded for love, like those of Jesus on the cross. In this way, ministry becomes a blessing from God to the world.

That gesture of Pius XI was worth more than a thousand words. In general, Pius XI’s gestures were worth more than a thousand words, because he was a pope with personality, to put it mildly. In these years you are studying and advancing, and this is a gift from God. But your knowledge must never become abstract from life and history. A church that has much to say, but whose words do not anoint and touch the flesh of the people, does not serve the Gospel. To have words of life it is necessary to bend science to the Spirit in prayer, and then to inhabit the concrete situations of the Church and of the world. The witness of life is needed: be priests with an ardent desire to bring the Gospel to the streets of the world, of neighbourhoods and homes, especially in the poorest and most forgotten places. Witness, gestures, like that first gesture of Pius XI.

A second point. In his first solemn homily, Pope Ratti spoke about missions and, rather than giving answers, invited people to ask themselves the question: “What can I offer the Lord?” (Homily on the 300th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation *Propaganda Fide*, 4 June 1922). It is a good question, which you can apply to everything you are doing now to prepare for the mission. What can I offer is a question that does not revolve around you, your desire for that cathedral, that parish, that position in the curia; no, it is a question that asks you to open your heart to readiness and service. It is a question that defends us from careerism. Beware of careerism, please! In the end it serves nothing; it does not help.

Let us ask ourselves, “What can I offer?”, at the beginning of every day. Often, even here in Italy, ecclesial discourses are reduced to sterile internal dialectics between innovators and conservators, those who prefer this policy or that one, and the central point is forgotten: being a Church to live and spread the Gospel. Let us not concern ourselves with our domestic gardens: there is a whole world thirsting for Christ. Be pastors of the flock, not groomers of the most beautiful. I urge you to cultivate with enthusiasm in these years, and in this city, in the universal dimension of Rome and Lombardy, an open heart, a ready heart, a missionary heart!

My last inspiration comes from one of Pius XI’s many social encyclicals. I will read some words written nearly a century ago, yet still relevant: “It is obvious that not only is wealth concentrated in our times but an immense power and despotic economic dictatorship is consolidated in the hands of a few... This dictatorship is being most forcibly exercised by those who, since they hold the money and completely control it ... regulate the flow, so to speak, of the life-blood whereby the entire economic system lives, and have firmly in their grasp the soul, as it were, of economic life” (Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, 105-106). It is harsh!

How true, and how tragic this is now, when the gap between the few rich and the many poor is ever wider. In this context of inequality, which the pandemic has increased, you will find yourselves living and working as priests of the Second Vatican Council, as signs and instruments of the communion of people with God and with one another (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1). Therefore, be weavers of communion, correctors of inequalities, pastors attentive to the signs of suffering of the people. Also, through the knowledge you are acquiring, be competent and courageous in raising prophetic words in the name of the voiceless.

Great tasks await you. In order to accomplish them, I invite you to ask God to *dream of the beauty of the Church*. The Church is beautiful! Dream of the Italian Church of tomorrow that is more faithful to the spirit of the Gospel, freer, more fraternal and joyful in bearing witness to Jesus, animated by the ardour of reaching out to those who have not known the “God of all consolation” (2 Cor 1:3). An Italian Church that cultivates a communion stronger than any distinction and is even more passionate about the poor, in whom Jesus is present. May Saint Ambrose and Saint Charles accompany you and may the *Salus populi* protect you. I bless you and ask you, please, to

pray for me. Thank you!

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