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Audience with the participants in the conference on “Trinitarian International Solidarity”, promoted by the Order of the Holy Trinity (Trinitarians)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the conference on “Trinitarian International Solidarity”, promoted by the Order of the Holy Trinity (Trinitarians).

The following is the Pope’s address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to welcome you, participants in the Convention of “Trinitarian International Solidarity”, an expression of the Order of the Holy Trinity. I thank the Superior General for his words of greeting and introduction.

I was struck by how you have been able to actualise the charism of the Order by giving life to this organization, which defends religious freedom not in a theoretical way, but by taking care of people who are persecuted and imprisoned because of their faith. At the same time, however, there is no lack of study and reflection on your part, which also finds expression in the academic sphere through the course of studies on religious freedom at the Angelicum, a chair named after your founder Saint John of Matha.

I congratulate you for this work you carry out, drawing right from the original charism. We go back more than eight centuries, to the time of Saint Francis of Assisi. The Holy Spirit raised up at that time – as he always does, in every age – witnesses capable of responding according to the Gospel to the challenges of the moment. John of Matha was called by Christ to give his life for the liberation of slaves, both Christian and Muslim. He did not want to do this alone, individually, but founded for this purpose a new Order, an “outbound” order, new also in its form of life, which was to be an apostolate “in the world”. And Pope Innocent III gave his approval and full support.

“Order of the Holy Trinity and of the captives”, that is, of slaves, of prisoners. Even this pairing makes one think: the Trinity and slaves. One cannot help but think of Jesus’ first “sermon” in the synagogue of Nazareth, when he read the passage from the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; / because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor / ... to proclaim release to the captives / [...] to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (*Lk* 4:18; cf. *Is* 61:1-2). Jesus is the envoy of the Father and is moved by the Holy Spirit. In him the whole Trinity is at work. And the work of God-Love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the redemption of man: for this reason, Christ shed his blood on the Cross. As a ransom for us, for each one of us. This work is extended in the mission of the whole Church. But in your Order it has found a singular, peculiar, I would say “literal” expression - a bit like poverty in Francis - that is, the commitment to the redemption of slaves. “To redeem”, And to redeem someone you have to pay, and you pay with your life, the price. This is beautiful.

This charism is flagrantly relevant today, unfortunately! It is so because even in our time, which boasts of having abolished slavery, in reality there are many, too many men and women, even children reduced to living in inhuman conditions, enslaved. And also because, as your conference rightly points out, religious freedom is violated, sometimes trampled upon in many places and in various ways, some crude and obvious, others subtle and hidden. At one time, there was a habit of dividing humanity into good and bad: “This country is good...” – “But it makes bombs!” – “No, it’s good” – “And this one is bad...”. No, today wickedness has pervaded everyone, and in all countries there are good and bad. Wickedness, today, is everywhere, in all states. Even in the Vatican, perhaps!

Dear friends, I thank you for your work and I encourage you to continue, also collaborating with other institutions, ecclesial and otherwise, who share your noble purpose. But, remember, without losing your specific nature, without “diluting” the charism. May Our Lady and Saint John of Matha always accompany the path of the Order and the service of Trinitarian International Solidarity. I bless you from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

[*Blessing*]

After the photo I will greet you, but excuse me, as I have to do so seated, not standing, because of my knee... It is that condition that used to be called “nun’s disease”, because it was the time when the nuns prayed, and they spent so much time praying on their knees that they suffered from this! It will heal, but in the meantime, we need to do things in the right way.
