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Audience with leaders of the International Federation of Catholic Pharmacists

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the leaders of the International Federation of Catholic Pharmacists, to whom he addressed the following greeting:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear friends, good morning and welcome!

This audience should have taken place in the Apostolic Palace, but because of this knee, it is here. I am sorry. I thank your president for his kind words, and I am pleased to meet you as representatives of the world of pharmacists. You are the leaders of the International Federation of Catholic Pharmacists, but we are aware that our ecclesial associations are always open to all and at the service of all, naturally with respect to the principles of Christian morality, based on the dignity of the human person.

The Covid-19 pandemic has placed pharmacists on the front line, so to speak. Citizens, often confused, have found in you a point of reference for assistance, advice, information, and also – as we well know – to perform rapidly the tests necessary for daily life and activities. I think this situation of crisis has also provoked in your professional environment the need to pull together, to support each other. And this should be an incentive to associate. I congratulate your Federation, as it has been able to interpret this crisis as an opportunity, and has relaunched the value of associative commitment, typical of the Catholic tradition.

I would like to return to your *social role*. Pharmacists are like *a bridge between citizens and the healthcare system*. This latter is very bureaucratic, and in addition the pandemic has put it to the test, slowing down procedures, indeed at times paralyzing them. This leads, in a practical sense, for those who are sick, more discomfort, greater suffering and, unfortunately, further damage to health. In such a context, the category of pharmacists offers a dual contribution to the common good: it eases the burden on the healthcare system and it relieves social tension. Naturally this role must be carried out with great prudence and professionalism, but for the people, the aspect of proximity – I emphasize this, proximity – the aspect of advice, of the familiarity that

should be inherent in “people-friendly” healthcare is very important. This is true. In neighbourhoods, pharmacists are part of home, they are available. One has to go to the doctor, but you can go to the pharmacist, ring the bell and find him or her there. “Take this...” - it is closer and more familiar.

Another aspect I would like to point out, which also has social and cultural value, is the contribution pharmacists can make to the conversion to an *integral ecology*. We are all required to learn a style of life that is more respectful towards the environment where God has placed us, our common home. And this lifestyle also includes a healthy way of eating and living in general. I think that pharmacists can form the culture in this area, promoting greater awareness of how to lead a healthy life. In this regard, you can be inspired by the centuries-long tradition that here in Europe, goes back to the ancient monastery pharmacies. But today, thank God, these roots can be enriched with the knowledge and practices of other cultures, such as those of the East, or those of the native peoples of America. I would say that you pharmacists can help us to unmask the deceptions of a false well-being and to educate in truly “living well”, which should not be the privilege of a few but within the reach of all. Living well, not in the sense of the good life, but living in harmony with the environment, in harmony with the universe, with everyone.

Dear friends, I wish you all the best in your work and in your associative journey. I bless you from my heart, and entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and your patron, Saint John Leonardi. And please, do not forget to pray for me.
