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Audience with the Community of the Pio Romanian College

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Community of the Pio Romanian College, on the occasion of the 85th anniversary of its founding.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the founding of the Pio Romanian College. I greet you all, superiors of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, priests, students and employees of the College, and I thank the rector, Fr. Gabriel, for the words he has addressed to me on your behalf.

Two years ago, during the Divine Liturgy at which I presided in Blaj, in the Liberty Field, I encouraged resistance to the new ideologies that seek to impose themselves and to detach peoples, at times in an insidious way, from their religious and cultural traditions. During that celebration, I proclaimed Blessed seven martyr bishops, indicating them as examples to all the Romanian people. Here in Rome, in the city that preserves the witness of Peter, Paul and many other martyrs, you can fully *rediscover your roots*, through study and meditation. It is a valuable opportunity to reflect on *how those roots were formed*. During the Second World War, when the Romanian Greek Catholic Church no longer had any active bishops, as they had been killed or imprisoned, Bishop Ioan Ploscaru of Lugoj, who was imprisoned for fifteen years, wrote in his diary: "The priests and bishops of the Greek Catholic Church considered this period as the most precious of their existence. It is a grace to be able to offer to God one's sufferings and the testimony of one's faith, even at the cost of one's life". Those who give their lives for the Gospel think in this way, embrace God's response to the evil of the world: they surrender

themselves, they imitate the meek and gratuitous love of the Lord Jesus, who offers himself for those near and far. This is the source that allowed the roots to bury themselves into the earth, to grow strong and bear fruit. And you are that fruit.

Dear friends, without *nourishing the roots*, every religious tradition loses its fruitfulness. In fact, a dangerous process occurs: as time goes by, one focuses more and more on oneself, on one's own belonging, losing the dynamism of the origins. Then one focuses on institutional, external aspects, the defence of one's own group, history and privileges, losing, perhaps without realizing it, the flavour of the gift. In keeping with the metaphor, it is like pausing to look at the trunk, the branches and the leaves, forgetting that everything is supported by the roots. But only if the roots are well watered does the tree continue to thrive; otherwise it folds in on itself and dies. This happens when one becomes complacent and gets affected by the virus of spiritual worldliness, which is the worst evil that can happen in the Church: spiritual worldliness. Then one withers into a mediocre, self-referential life of careerism, climbing, seeking personal satisfaction and easy pleasures. The attitude of trying to climb, to have power, to have money, to have fame, to be comfortable, to get ahead. This is wanting to grow without roots. It is true that there are others who go to the roots to hide there, because they are afraid of growth. It is true. One goes to the roots for replenishment, get the sap and keep growing. You cannot live in the roots and you cannot live in the tree without the roots. Tradition is to an extent the message that we receive from the roots: it is what gives you the strength to go on, today, without repeating the things of yesterday, but with the same strength of the first inspiration.

Here in Rome, besides deepening your roots, you have the opportunity to think about how to actualize them, so that your ministry is not a sterile repetition of the past or a maintenance of the present, but that it may be fruitful, that it may look ahead. And this is the *secret of fruitfulness*, the same as that of those bishops and priests: namely, the *gift of life*, the Gospel to be put into practice with a pastor's heart. I think of Cardinal Mureşan, who in a few days will be 91 years old: years of service in the priesthood, which began almost sixty years ago in a humble basement, after the surviving bishops were released from prison. Pastors who were materially poor, but rich in the Gospel. Be like this, joyful apostles of the faith you have inherited, willing to keep nothing for yourselves and ready to reconcile with all, to forgive and to weave unity, overcoming all animosity and victimhood. Then your seed will also be evangelical and bear fruit. Without forgetting the past but living in the present, with fruitfulness.

After the roots, I would also like to say something about the *soil*. As you study, do not forget the good soil of faith. It is that which was tilled by your grandparents, your parents, that of God's faithful people. As you prepare to pass on the faith, think of them and remember that the Gospel is not proclaimed in complicated words, but in the language of the people, as Jesus, Wisdom Incarnate, taught us: it is transmitted "in dialect", in the dialect of God's people, the dialect that the people understand, with simplicity. Please, be careful not to become "state clerics" - be shepherds of the people, in proximity to the people from whom you come. Paul said to Timothy: "Remember your mother and grandmother". Your roots, the people to whom you belong. And the prophet Samuel said to King David: "Remember that you were elected from the flock: do not forget the flock from which you were elected", it is your first belonging. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews advises us: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God". Remember your ancestors, those who proclaimed the Word of God to you. Please do not forget the people from whom you come. Do not be theological laboratory priests, no. Priests from the people, with the smell of the people, with the smell of the flock. I said that the Gospel is not proclaimed with complicated words, but "in dialect". The good soil is also that which makes you touch the flesh of Christ, present in the poor, the sick, the suffering, the small and the simple, in those who suffer and in whom Jesus is present, in the discarded, in this throwaway culture in which we have to live. I am thinking in particular of the many refugees from neighbouring Ukraine whom Romania is also welcoming and assisting.

I would like to say a word to you too, dear Arabic-speaking students belonging to the former Saint Ephrem College. For around a decade you have all formed a single community. Your sharing of life must not be felt as a diminution of your respective distinctive traits, but rather as a fruitful promise for the future. National colleges, Eastern and Latin, must not be "enclaves" to return to after a day of studies, so as to live as if you were in your homeland, but rather than should be laboratories of fraternal communion, where you can experience authentic Catholicism, the universality of the Church. This universality is the *good air* you must breathe, so as not to be pulled into the particularisms that hold back evangelization.

The roots, the soil, good air. I hope that in this way you may cultivate your vocation during your yeras in Rome. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. I will now heartily bless you and your loved ones. Thank you!
