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Audience with members of the Italian Association of Teachers and Practitioners of Liturgy

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Italian Association of Teachers and Practitioners of Liturgy, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I am delighted to meet you in these days in which you celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Association of Teachers and Practitioners of Liturgy. I join you in giving thanks to the Lord. First of all, let us give thanks for those who, fifty years ago, had the courage to take the initiative and give life to this body; then, let us give thanks for those who have taken part in this half-century, offering their contribution of reflection on the liturgical life of the Church; and let us give thanks for the contribution that the Association has made to the reception in Italy of the liturgical reform inspired by Vatican II.

This period of life and commitment corresponds, in fact, to the ecclesial season of this liturgical reform: a process that has undergone several phases, from the initial one, characterized by the publication of the new liturgical books, to the articulated phases of its reception in the following decades. This work of acceptance is still ongoing and sees us all engaged in deepening, which requires time and care, passionate and patient care; it requires spiritual intelligence and pastoral intelligence; it requires formation, for a celebratory wisdom that cannot be improvised and must be continually refined.

Your study and research activity has also been placed at the service of this task, and I hope it will continue to be, placed with renewed impetus. I therefore encourage you to pursue it in dialogue among yourselves and with others, because theology too can and must have a synodal style, involving the various theological disciplines and the human sciences, "networking" with institutions that, also outside Italy, cultivate and promote liturgical studies.

In this sense we understand - and it is indispensable - your intention to keep listening to the Christian communities, so that your work is never separated from the expectations and needs of the people of God. This people - of which we are a part! - always needs to be formed, to grow, and yet within itself it possesses that sense of faith - the *sensus fidei* - that helps it discern what comes from God and truly leads to Him (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 119), also in the liturgical sphere.

The liturgy is the work of Christ and of the Church, and as such it is a living organism, like a plant, which cannot be neglected or mistreated. It is not a bronze or marble monument; it is not a museum piece. The liturgy is living, like a plant, and should be cultivated with care. Furthermore, the liturgy is joyous, with the joy of the Spirit, not of a worldly feast, with the joy of the Spirit. That is why, for example, a liturgical with a funereal tone does not make sense. It is always joyous, because it sings the praises of the Lord.

For this reason, your work of discernment and research cannot separate the academic dimension from the pastoral and spiritual one. "One of the main contributions of the Second Vatican Council was precisely seeking a way to overcome this divorce between theology and pastoral care, between faith and life" (Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, 2). We need, today more than ever, a lofty vision of the liturgy, such that it is not reduced to disquisitions of rubrical minutiae: a liturgy that is not worldly, but one that raises our eyes to heaven, to feel that the world and life are inhabited by the Mystery of Christ; and at the same time a liturgy with its "feet on the ground", *propter homines*, not distant from life. Not with that worldly exclusiveness, no, that has nothing to do with it. Serious, close to the people. The two things together: turning your gaze to the Lord without turning your back on the world.

Recently, in the Letter *Desiderio desideravi* on liturgical formation, I emphasized the need to find suitable channels for a study of the liturgy that surpasses the academic environment and reaches the people of God. Starting from the liturgical movement, much has been done in this regard, with valuable contributions from many scholars and various academic institutions. I would like to recall with you the figure of Romano Guardini, who was distinguished for his capacity to disseminate the achievements of the liturgical movement beyond the academic field, in an accessible, approachable way, so that every believer - starting from the young - was able to grow in living and experiential awareness of the theological and spiritual meaning of the liturgy. May his figure and his approach to liturgical education, as modern as it is classical, be a point of reference to you, so that your study may unite critical intelligence and spiritual wisdom, biblical foundation and ecclesial rootedness, openness to interdisciplinarity and pedagogical aptitude.

Progress in understanding and also in liturgical celebration must always be rooted in tradition, which always takes you forward in that sense that the Lord wants. There is a spirit that is not that of true tradition: the worldly spirit of "backwardness", fashionable today: thinking that going to the roots means going backwards. No, they are different things. If you go to the roots, the roots take you up, always. Like the tree, which grows from what comes to it from the roots. And tradition is precisely going to the roots, because it is the guarantee of the future, as Mahler said. Instead, backwardness means taking two steps back because "it is always has been done this way". It is a temptation in the life of the Church that leads you to a worldly restorationism, disguised as liturgy and theology, but it is worldly. And backwardness always is worldliness: that is why the author of the Letter to the Hebrews says: "We are not among those who shrink back". No, you go forward, according to the line that tradition gives you. To go backwards is to go against the truth and ask against the Spirit. Make this distinction clearly. Because in liturgy there are many who say they go "according to tradition", but is not the case: at most they will be traditionalists. Another person used to say that tradition is the living faith of the dead, whereas traditionalism is the dead faith of some of the living. They kill that contact with the roots by going backwards. Beware: the temptation today is backwardness disguised as tradition.

And finally, the most important thing: that your study of the liturgy be imbued with prayer and the living experience of the Church it celebrates, so that a "considered" liturgy might always flow, like living sap, from the lived liturgy. Theology is done with an open mind and "kneeling" in prayer (cf. *Veritatis Gaudium*, 3). This applies to all the theological disciplines, but especially for yours, which has as its object the act of celebrating the beauty and greatness of the mystery of God who gives himself to us.

With this wish, I heartily bless all of you and your journey. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
