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Audience with members of the Society of Swiss Students

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Society of Swiss Students on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Nicholas of Flüe, Patron of Switzerland and of the Association.

The following is the Pope's greeting to those present at the meeting:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear friends, good morning and welcome!

I thank the President for his kind words. You are part of the largest student association in Switzerland, which brings together people of different generations – this is very positive, the encounter and dialogue between generations – and also with different study pathways. This too is important: you are not a corporation, what you have in common is the fact of being, or having been, *students*.

So, first of all, along with you, I would like to give thanks to God for this opportunity that he has given you. It is not something to take for granted! We are well aware that in the world there are many people who do not have access to education; and others – especially women – who are limited only to lower levels or to certain types of studies; and others still who are instead obliged to receive a forced education. So, let us thank God for having been able to study, and for having been able to do so freely.

Therefore, I would like to make you a proposal: that your Association may take on board some concrete situations to promote the realization of the right to study. Perhaps this is an aim that is already part of your activities. If so, I congratulate you and encourage you to continue this with renewed commitment.

Dear friends, this year you celebrate the 75th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Nicholas of Flüe, the

Patron of Switzerland and also of your Association. And this circumstance has prompted you to make a pilgrimage to Rome. I am pleased to note that there is a nice analogy between being students and being pilgrims. Studying is a journey. And your association reminds us that students, in a certain broad sense, are students for life. A specific study, naturally, can and must have determined, well-defined times and objects, so you do not end up being eternal students who never leave university. But study as a human attitude can be cultivated always. On the contrary, it is all the more noble and pleasurable when it is free, gratuitous, and not subject to purposes of utility. In this sense, being a student means having the desire to learn, to know, not to consider oneself to have already "arrived". Being on the move. Having the spirit of the disciple, always, at every age.

This makes me think about a beautiful consideration by Romano Guardini, who says: "We must always presuppose one thing: the mystery of birth... Everything that is defined as education only means serving, helping, liberating, remaining within this mystery". To educate is to accompany a man, a woman in his or her "birth" as a person, in "coming into the world", in "coming into the light". Jesus Christ is the greatest educator in history: with the love of the Father and the action of the Holy Spirit, he brings us to birth "from above", as he said to Nicodemus (cf. *Jn* 3:3). He brings the new man out of the shell of the old man. He frees us from the slavery of the ego and opens us to the fullness of life in communion with God, with others, with creatures, and also with ourselves. Because - as Augustine shows us well in his *Confessions* - we are not at peace with ourselves until we surrender to the love of God in Christ Jesus. This love that persecutes us, which is always disturbing and peaceful at the same time.

And here, dear friends, I cannot but ask you a question: you, who are students, and you are, let's say, by statute, you are also "students" of the Word of God – do you dedicate a little of your time to reading the Bible, the Gospels? If, as I was saying, you are people on the move, seeking, do you also feel you are seekers of God? Do you take that for granted? Do you feel you are Jesus' disciples, eager to listen to him, to ask him questions, to meditate on his words and gestures?

This, it seems to me, also means being pilgrims: not being satisfied with "getting by", but wanting to live. And Jesus is the one whose Father sent him to give us life "in abundance" (*Jn* 10:10). He alone can give us birth to eternal life, because he has "the words of eternal life" (*Jn* 6:68). He knows us better than we know ourselves, because he is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves (cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, 3, 6, 11). Think of Jesus, read the Gospels, so that Jesus can enter into your memory as a point of reference, and in your hearts, because he knocks on the heart of each one of us.

Thank you for coming, and I wish you all the best for your association. May Saint Nicholas of Flüe intercede so that you may always be impassioned seekers of what is true, good and beautiful. I heartily bless you and your families. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
