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Audience with a delegation of French public administrators from the diocese of Cambrai, France

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, a delegation of French public administrators, accompanied by Archbishop Vincent Dollmann of Cambrai.

The following is the address the Pope delivered to the participants in the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome your delegation of public administrators and representatives of the French state, from the North of France, and also to greet, through you, your citizens. I rejoice at the initiative of your journey to Rome, which Archbishop Vincent Dollmann of Cambrai welcomed favourably, in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration between the civil and religious authorities of your region, for the good of all.

Your region, once rich in coal mines, a strong metallurgical industry and renowned textile factories, suffered a terrible setback with the closure of the mines and factories developed during the industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century. Unfortunately, economic crisis also means the impoverishment of the populations of these regions. I know that it is the challenge you have been facing for some decades. Besides your overriding concern for the social aspect, I know you also have at heart the cultural dimension of your region, aware of the fact that man does not live by bread alone, but also the pride of his roots that culture highlights, thus contributing to reminding each person of his or her own dignity.

It is precisely in these field of social and cultural action that you can find yourselves, regardless of your political affiliation. By prioritizing the essential needs of your citizens, very often neglected in favour of more fashionable

topics that have less to do with their daily life, you can demonstrate the desire to be at the service of those who have elected you and who have placed their trust in you. The democratic and representative method should also permit you to bring to the attention of the highest authorities the aspirations and real needs of the population of your territory, far from any ideology or media pressure.

In the social field, which is so vast, I would like only to encourage you with two words linked to current events: welcome and care.

First and foremost, the *welcome* of the most disadvantaged, primarily migrants – and you know how crucial this matter is, and how close it is to my heart – but I am thinking also of persons with disabilities. They are in need of more structures to facilitate their lives and those of their loved ones, and above all, to demonstrate the respect that is due to them. May the provisions for their inclusion enable many of them to have a place in the world of work. It is necessary, more than ever, to continue to propose access to work for all as a priority aim (cf. *Laudato si'*, 127).

With regard to *care*, I think in particular of the attention to be paid to the elderly in care homes, and people at the end of their lives who must be accompanied by palliative care. Healthcare workers, by nature, have the vocation to provide *care* and *relief*, even though they may not always be able to cure, but we cannot ask these practitioners to kill their own patients! If we kill with justification, we end up killing more and more (cf. *Press Conference on the return journey from Kazakhstan*, 15 September 2022). I dare hope that, on such essential matters, the debate may be conducted in truth to accompany life to its natural end.

The cultural field is, in turn, an important factor of unity insofar it is presented as the fruit of a common past, a history lived out in lands that are yours, that you love and where the Church has never been absent. Your region has been the theatre of events that shaped them, and it is up to you to enhance this to transmit this legacy to the future generations. Indeed, the events of the past have contributed to history and literature, as well as the political and economic prospects of the entire country.

Finally, I repeat to you that for me it is a joy to see how you, with responsibilities in the economic and social sphere, are interested in the Church's message on issues we share, and how you are aware of the role you must play through commitment to the service of your citizens. By virtue of her faith in Christ who made himself poor, the Church has always been concerned with the integral development of the most abandoned in society (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 186), and you can count on her help. Together with you, she endeavours to reach out to migrants, the elderly and the sick; in other words, to all those who have been "left behind", whose greatest poverty is without doubt exclusion and the ensuing loneliness.

Thank you again for your visit. I ask God to inspire your plans and initiatives for the common good of your region and to assist you in their realization. God bless you!
