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Audience with the superiors and students of the Pontifical Urban College “de Propaganda Fide”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the community of the Pontifical College “de Propaganda Fide”, on the occasion of the fourth centenary of its founding.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers, dear sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the rector for his words and I greet the formators and all you students. As students of the *Urban College* you are part of the living river of a rich and ancient tradition that, since 1627, the year in which Pope Urban VIII decided to found in Rome a seminary intended for the formation of the clergy for the so-called “mission” territories. It was an important intuition, which still retains its validity to this day, and which you are required to welcome and interpret in a creative way, letting yourselves be challenged by the many needs and questions of the time in which we live. Indeed, all the Church is called today to a “pastoral and missionary conversion” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 25), also in the formation of future priests^[1], and from this perspective you can be an inspiration and a help to many others.

This year, the four-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the *de Propaganda Fide* Congregation, on your journey you are reflecting on the theme of the *living and personal relationship with Jesus as the spiritual source of every mission*, inspired by the motto “To be with him, and to be sent out to preach” (Mk 3:13). Therefore, I would like to dwell briefly on this issue with you. We can ask ourselves: what are the most important characteristics to nurture and strengthen at the time of initial formation, so as truly to be missionary disciples close to God and to our brothers?

The first characteristic I would like to highlight is the *courage of authenticity*, the courage to be authentic. Indeed, our closeness to God and to our brothers is achieved and strengthened to the extent that we have the courage

to take off the masks we wear, perhaps in order to appear perfect, impeccable and obsequious, or simply better. Masks are of no use, dear brothers and sisters, they are of no use! Let us present ourselves to others without screens, for what we are, with our limits and our contradictions, overcoming the fear of being judged because we do not correspond to an ideal model, which often only exists in our mind. Let us cultivate “the sincerity and humility of the heart that give us an honest outlook on our frailties and our inner poverty” (*Angelus*, 23 October 2022). Let us remember that missionaries are credible not because of a robe they wear or their external attitudes, but rather for a style of simplicity and sincerity. This is transparency.

The credibility acknowledged to Jesus by the people who met him (cf. *Mk* 1:22) came from the harmony that was seen in him between what he proclaimed and what he did. Harmony, consistency. So, please, do not be afraid to show yourselves for what you are, especially to those elder brothers the Church places beside you as formators. At times there is the temptation of formalism, or the appeal of the “role” as if it could assure you full realization. Do not be deceived by these solutions, so close at hand, but false. Saint John Henry Newman, a former student of your College, speaking of authenticity, warned against the attitude of those who “wish to act with dignity, and they cease to be themselves” [2]. Dignity must come from yourselves. Let us remember that between the Pharisee, who prayed to himself, and the publican who did not even dare to look up, only the latter “went down to his home justified” (*Lk* 18:14).

A second characteristic I would like to remind you of is the *capacity to come out of yourselves*. The life of faith is a continuous “exodus”, an exit from our mindsets, from the enclosure of our fears, from the small certainties that reassure us. Otherwise, we risk worshipping a God that is only a projection of our needs, and therefore an “idol”, and of not even living authentic encounters with others. Instead, it is good for us to accept the risk of coming out of ourselves, like Abraham, Moses, and the fishermen of Galilee called to follow the Master (cf. *Mk* 1:16-20).

And you have the opportunity of doing so in this time in community life, especially in a formative community as rich and variegated as yours, with many cultures, languages and sensibilities. This is a great gift, from which you can be enriched to the extent to which each person succeeds in coming out of his own enclosure in order to open up to others, to their world and their culture. For this reason, I encourage you to live fearlessly the challenge of fraternity, even when it demands hardships and renunciations. Your world and the Church too need witnesses of fraternity: may you be such, now and then when you return to your dioceses and countries, often marked by divisions and conflicts. And also witnesses of joy: “the Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 21); the “missionary joy” that “always has the drive to go forth and give” (*ibid.*): the joy of giving.

Finally, I would like to emphasize one last characteristic that is important for the disciple-missionary: openness to dialogue. First of all, to dialogue with God, in prayer, which is also an exodus from our ego to welcome him, while he speaks in us and listens to our voice. And then to fraternal dialogue, in a radical openness to the other. Saint John Paul II taught us that dialogue must be the style proper to the missionary (Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, 55-56). And Jesus showed us this by making himself man, embracing the dramas, questions and expectations of suffering humanity in search of peace. Dear brothers and sisters, the world needs dialogue, it needs peace. And it needs men and women who bear witness to it. I urge you to put yourselves in the school of those “martyrs of dialogue” who, even in some of your own countries, have courageously travelled this road to be builders of peace. Do not be afraid to walk it too, to the end, going against the tide and sharing Jesus, communicating the faith that he has given you (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 176).

Dear brothers, dear sisters, may the intercession of Mary our Mother, and of many alumni, saints and blessed, accompany you on this journey. I bless you from my heart, and I keep you in my prayer. And you too, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

[1] Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, 19 March 1985,

Introduction, no. 3.

[2] *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. V, no. 3.
