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Message of the Holy Father to the participants at the 26th Solemn Public Session of the Pontifical Academies

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants at the 26th solemn Public Session of the Pontifical Academies, the text of which was read by the Secretary of State Pietro Parolin:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear Brother

Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça

Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education

President of the Pontifical Academies Coordination Council

On the occasion of the 26th Solemn Public Meeting of the Pontifical Academies, I am pleased to address to you, Mr Cardinal, my best wishes for your service as President of the Council for Coordination between Pontifical Academies. Indeed, with your appointment as prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, you have also assumed this task, to be carried out in the spirit and according to the approach of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (cf. Art. 162). At the same time, I wish to express my gratitude to Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, who for fifteen years chaired the Coordination Council, giving considerable impetus to the life of the Pontifical Academies and enhancing the value of the Public Sessions. I therefore greet with deep gratitude the distinguished Presidents and Members present, as well as the distinguished Authorities and all those taking part in the traditional meeting, in which, in turn, each Academy presents a theme relevant to its own sphere of activity.

This Public Session was led by the Pontifical Academy of Fine Arts and Letters of the *Virtuosi al Pantheon*, the

oldest of the institutions represented on the Council. For this edition of the Award, the President, Professor Pio Baldi, and the Academicians, solicited the proposals of those who, in various capacities, are involved in sacred architecture, and therefore in the design, layout, liturgical adaptation, renovation and reuse of spaces destined for worship, taking into account the new requirements and contemporary architectural language.

The theme is more relevant than ever, since debate is always alive, sometimes even lively, regarding proposals for the renewal of sacred architecture, which has the arduous task of creating, especially in new areas, both in the outskirts of cities and in small urban centres, suitable spaces where the Christian community may celebrate the holy liturgy in a worthy way in accordance with the teachings of Vatican Council II.

We are well aware that the celebratory environment is important to promote prayer and a sense of communion: space, light, acoustics, colours, images, symbols, and liturgical objects constitute fundamental elements of that reality, of that event, human and divine at the same time, which is the liturgy.

Therefore, I would like to refer to the recent Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*, dedicated precisely to the liturgical formation of the People of God, to emphasize two aspects that can certainly apply also to architectural and artistic issues. First of all, it is essential to rediscover the symbolic language and to be capable of understanding it. "To have lost the capacity to grasp the symbolic value of the body and of every creature renders the symbolic language of the Liturgy almost inaccessible to the modern mentality. And yet there can be no question of renouncing such language. It cannot be renounced because it is how the Holy Trinity chose to reach us through the flesh of the Word. It is rather a question of recovering the capacity to use and understand the symbols of the Liturgy" (no. 44).

Another essential aspect is that of the inspiration of artistic and architectural creativity, which in the Christian vision springs precisely from the liturgical life, from the action of the Spirit and not only from human subjectivity: "It is necessary to know how the Holy Spirit acts in every celebration. The art of celebrating must be in harmony with the action of the Spirit. Only in this way will it be free from ... subjectivisms [and] ... cultural elements. ... For an artisan, technique is enough. But for an artist, in addition to technical knowledge, there has also to be inspiration, which is a positive form of possession. The true artist does not possess an art but rather is possessed by it" (nos. 49-50).

Accepting now the proposals that the Pontifical Academies have put forward for the Prize of the present edition, I am pleased to award, with the Gold Medal of the Pontificate, the Prize of the Pontifical Academies to the OPPS Studio, for an intervention of liturgical renovation and adaptation of the chapel of the Saints Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena Foundation in Rome.

I am also pleased to award the Silver Medal of the Pontificate to the architect Federica Frino, for the project of the new church of Saint Thomas in Pontedera.

Dear Brother, I wish to you, and every one of the Academicians, fruitful engagement in your respective fields of research and service and, entrusting you to the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, Temple and Ark of the New Covenant, I commend myself to your prayers and wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and to all present.

From the Vatican, 14 March 2023

FRANCIS
