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Audience with the members of the Confraternity of the Mother of God of Montserrat, Spain, on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of its founding

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Confraternity of the Mother of God of Montserrat, Spain, on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of its founding.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Bon dia a tots!

Welcome. I cordially greet His Eminence, Cardinal Omella, Father Abbot of Montserrat Manel Gasch, the other bishops, priests and religious present, and all the faithful who are participating in this pilgrimage. Thank you, thank you for this visit. I am happy to welcome you and to see you on this day when we celebrate our heavenly Mother under the title of Our Lady of the Rosary. To celebrate Mary is to celebrate the closeness and tenderness of God who meets His people, who does not leave us alone, who has given us a Mother who cares for us and accompanies us. It is to celebrate God's closeness because God's style is proximity, compassion and tenderness. This is how God is, Dios and seeing Mary, one understands God's proximity, God's compassion in a Mother, and God's tenderness.

You have come to Rome precisely as pilgrims, to celebrate and to thank the Lord for the presence of Mary, who has been so close to you for eight hundred years, accompanying you on the path of Christian life. Let us now evoke her image: the Virgin of Montserrat, the beloved "Moreneta", is seated and holds the Child on her lap – she is the "*Mare de Déu*" – and in her right hand she holds a sphere symbolizing the universe –she is the "Queen and Mistress of all creation".

Keeping in mind Mary's dual vocation as the mother of God and as our mother helps us to reflect on the theme chosen for this pilgrimage: "Popular piety, social friendship and universal fellowship". We know that Marian

devotion means a great deal in the manifestations of piety of God's holy and faithful people. She is the Mother. Let us think, in these eight hundred years of presence in Montserrat, how many faithful have visited her sanctuary, praying the rosary, and asking the Moreneta with humility and simplicity for her intercession for them and for their loved ones! And how many, how many manifestations of filial affection, supplications and thanksgiving! When the People of God go to visit their Mother, they express themselves, they express themselves in a way that perhaps they do not do so much in other types of prayer. In front of the Mother, the noblest feelings of a person are awakened. And when Mary hears our prayers, she makes this gesture, which is the most Marian gesture. She points to Jesus: "Do whatever He tells you". That is the typical Marian gesture. No, she doesn't do it like this. She doesn't do it like that, no. She points the way and speaks to her Son so that He understands.

The evangelizing power of popular piety creates favourable conditions for the bonds of friendship and fraternity between peoples to grow and become stronger (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* nos. 122-126). Saint Paul VI had already understood this, and changed its name from "popular religiosity" to "popular piety". In his *Evangelii nuntiandi*, there are very clear paragraphs on this grace – it is a grace that people have – of popular piety.

And also in this aspect, Marian devotion has a privileged place. Mary is an advocate, but these days the word advocate is too functional. It is better to say that she is a "facilitator". Mary is a facilitator when conflicts and problems arise, such as the lack of wine at the wedding. She helps us to "untie the knots" that can be created in us and between us. In other words, Mary also paves the way for friendship between peoples, inviting us to turn our gaze to the origin and goal of our existence, which is Jesus Christ, and encourages us to follow His example, walking the paths of peace, kindness, listening and patient and trusting dialogue.

Brothers and sisters, Our Lady of Montserrat, with the world in her hands, invites us to live that universal brotherhood, without frontiers, without exclusions, which dispels the shadows of a closed environment. She cares not only for Jesus 'but also for the rest of her children' (*Rev 12:17*). In the power of the risen Lord, she wants to give birth to a new world, where all of us are brothers and sisters, where there is room for all those whom our cities discard, where justice and peace are resplendent (cf. Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, no. 278). For her there is no rejection, she is the Mother of the rejected, of those we reject, because she goes there to look for them. She does not know the attitude of rejecting anyone. Because she is our Mother, she knows how to listen to so many things, so many requests, even when they come from a duplicitous heart, from a heart that is not coherent with itself, an unjust heart that does harm. She listens, she listens even to the criminal son.

It is good to reflect on these themes, and to be able to experience together the joy of proclaiming Christ, held by the hand of Mary, Mother of the living Gospel and Star of the new evangelization (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 284-288). I encourage you to go forward in this mission, which is a gift and a task. May Jesus bless you, may Our Lady take care of you (she is a good caregiver, she knows how to take care) and may she help you to continue walking together. And please, by the way, I ask you not to forget to pray for me. Thank you.
