



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE
SOCIETY OF AFRICAN MISSIONS**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 17 May 2019*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer my welcome to you, members of the Society of African Missions, on the occasion of your General Assembly which is being held in Rome. This meeting allows me to thank the Lord for the great work of evangelization that you are carrying out in Africa, especially among the most distant rural populations, where the Christian community is still fragile, or nonexistent. I am also pleased with your willingness to develop new forms of presence among the populations of African origin in other parts of the world, with particular attention to migrants.

These new pastoral horizons are a sign of the vitality of the Holy Spirit who lives in you and urges you to respond to the “ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization ... in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel” (*[Evangelii Gaudium](#), 20*). I thank you for the missionary zeal, steeped with courage, that draws you to *go out to offer to all the life of Jesus Christ*, at times putting your own at risk, in the footsteps of your founding fathers, the Servant of God Melchior de Marion-Brésillac and Fr Augustin Planque. In this regard, I would like to join in your prayers for your confrere Fr Pierluigi Maccalli, who was abducted some months ago in Niger, and to assure the concern and attention of the Holy See regarding this worrying situation.

This year you wished to emphasize the fact that your apostolic community forms a family, with the Missionary Sisters and associated lay people. A joyful family, growing thanks to the many vocations in Africa and Asia. This familial character is certainly a richness that you do well to emphasize and develop.

Indeed, Evangelization is always done by a community that operates “by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others” (*ibid.*, 24). I also encourage you to persevere in your task, in close cooperation with members of other religions and institutions, at the service of children and of the most fragile people, victims of war, of disease, of human trafficking. Because the choice of those who are least, those whom society rejects and sets aside, is a sign that concretely shows the presence and concern of the Merciful Christ. In this way, spurred by the Holy Spirit, you can be servants of a *culture of dialogue and encounter*, which takes care of the little ones and the poor, in order to contribute to the advent of true human fraternity.

Faithful to your roots, you are called, as a family and because you are a family, to witness to the Risen Christ through the love that unites you to each other, and with the radiant joy of an authentic fraternal life. Therefore, I invite you to constantly seek the means to renew the personal encounter with Christ within each of you, in listening to the Word of God, in sacramental life and in service to brothers and sisters. Indeed, “the primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. [...] we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life” (*ibid.*, 264).

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you once again for your visit, as well as for the witness you give. I encourage you to continue, with enthusiasm and ever renewed dynamism, along the path travelled by the Society of African Missions, which has produced many fruits of conversion to Christ. In listening to the Holy Spirit, do not be afraid to open new paths, to show that “God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 135). With this hope, I entrust your missionary family to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, asking her to support your efforts. I bless you and I pray for you. And you, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.