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**HOLY MASS ON THE OCCASION OF THE XXV PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE
(St. Peter's Basilica – 27 February 2019)**

HOMILY

**(Wednesday of the Third Week of Ordinary Time Year C: Sir 4:12–22; Psa 118;
Mk 9:38–40)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we bring to a close the 25th Plenary Assembly, we have the joy of celebrating Holy Mass together in this Basilica, so dear to all of us Catholics, as it reminds us of our vital link with Peter, Christ's Vicar. I would like to let the Word of God that has just been proclaimed suggest to us some thoughts to direct our path.

As part of the Pontifical Academy for Life and all your activities, studies and reflection are oriented to defending and promoting life. This is at times an arduous commitment that can only be sustained by a great love for life.

Today, the Word of God helps us understand that this passionate love for life descends directly from divine wisdom, loved, sought, and lived. In the first reading from the Book of Sirach, we have listened to these words: "Those who love Wisdom love life" (Sir 4:13).

The text intends to imply that those who love divine wisdom truly desire the fullness of life because all who decide to seek the wisdom that comes from above and live according to its teachings, will receive happiness, blessing, and both spiritual and

material prosperity. The Book of Proverbs says in a similar way that wisdom “is a tree of life for those who grasp it, and those who hold it fast are blessed” (Prov 3:18).

The first reading also states that it is not always easy to follow wisdom: it will sometimes “inspire fear,” it calls for “discipline” that can be a “torment,” and speaks of “winding streets” on which we must walk. Yet, whoever accepts to be subjected to this trial will, in the end, be gladdened by Wisdom who, the text says, “will reveal her secrets to him and enrich him with science and true knowledge” (cf. Sir 4:18–19).

Pope in his address last Monday spoke to us of the difficulties we are faced with in our world today and the challenges we are faced with as we seek to promote and defend human life.

When humanity possesses the scientific and technical capacities to achieve a justly distributed well being, in accordance with how it was delivered by God, we observe an exacerbation of conflicts and an increase in inequality.

The evolution of technical capacity – instead of delivering the tools that improve the care of human life – are used to destroy life or devalue it in every way.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Word of God proclaimed today, therefore, makes us understand that the option for divine wisdom is an option for life, for a full life, and that love for divine wisdom is nothing other than the love for life. Seeking wisdom, in fact, is simply seeking God, wishing to know and to implement His plans for the good of each one of us and for the whole of humanity. But God is the author of Life—the Book of Wisdom also defines Him as “a lover of Life” (Wis 11:27)—and that is why those who love God love life. Putting yourself on the side of God always means siding with life. In the language that the Holy Father used with you last year, we can say that, in the final analysis, any opposition between the “beautiful work of life” and the “dirty work of death” (*Speech to the PAV*, 25 June 2018), is an

opposition between God and nothingness, between the Author of life and the denial of life. Choosing God always means choosing life.

It is important, therefore, that the “sense of God” never diminishes in us. That living perception of His holiness and His greatness, a personal love for Him, who in His Son Jesus was revealed to us as Father. If the “sense of God” were to diminish, “the interest in life” would immediately be weakened. The loss of the sense of God in the human heart inevitably leads to a dangerous insensitivity to life, as we can sadly witness in many secularized societies. This makes us realize that the passionate love for life and the desire to devote all our efforts to its promotion and its defense, in every person, in every aspect, in every phase, cannot derive only from an “institutional commitment”, or from vague humanitarian aspirations, but they can only be supported by a sincere love for God.

If we were to ask ourselves: What do we believers bring in the global commitment of all men of goodwill to the defense of life? What is our specific contribution? I think we should answer: The living sense of God! Fortunately, among the unbelievers, there are today many men and women with a righteous conscience and great intellectual honesty, who participate with conviction in this global work of the defense of life, in the common effort for the construction of that “universal fraternity” of which Pope Francis spoke (*Letter for the 25th Anniversary of the PAV*, 6 January 2019).

These are our precious allies and “fellow travelers.” In today’s Gospel Jesus says: “The one who is not against us is for us,” and we can say “whoever is not against life, is with us to support life.” But we believers can make a unique contribution. The experience of the love of God that, in Jesus Christ, has reached and “touched” our existence and led us to discover the beauty, the dignity and the value of our lives. This makes us sensitive to the dignity, beauty, and gift that every life

represents, even the most fragile and the most defenseless, even the life of the last and the “forgotten.” Therefore, even if we are not the only ones in the world to promote life, we faithful, we disciples of Jesus Christ, can bring to this common cause the lucidity, the tenacity, the spirit of sacrifice, which come only from the love of God.

Keeping the “heart’s gaze” turned to God also allows us to broaden our horizons, to know that life cannot be assessed only from an earthly horizon, and, therefore, from its usefulness and efficiency in human society, but only in its ultimate reorientation towards God. Pope Francis, in the speech he addressed to you last year, strongly insisted on the “the ‘serious question’ of life’s ‘ultimate destination’,” recalling that “each person is gratuitously called to communion with God himself as a son and to participate in his own happiness” and that “Christian wisdom must re-propose, with passion and boldness, that *the human race is destined to life in God*, who has promised to open to the love of life, beyond death” (*Address to the PAV*, 25 June 2018).

Let us pray that the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit giver of life, may enlighten our minds and inflame our hearts so that we love the Lord, seek His wisdom, and love our brethren, as we serve with veneration the priceless gift of life.

Amen.