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## **Pope Francis: to Spanish laity, the Church is not an “NGO”. Europe needs lay people “engaged in the world of culture, politics, industry”. Say no to “clericalism and careerism”**

“We are not an association, nor an NGO, but the family of God gathered around the same Lord”. Pope Francis insisted on this point in a message in Spanish addressed to Card. Ricardo Blázquez Pérez, president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, on the occasion of the National Congress of the Laity taking place in Madrid, until 16 February, on the theme “The People of God going forth”. In his message, Pope Francis focused on the category of the “People of God” and on the word “Synod”, which means “to walk together, sharing ideas and experiences from different realities, to enrich the community in which one lives and make it grow”. The Pope cited the example of Saints Cyril and Methodius, patrons of Europe, who “promoted great evangelization in this continent, bringing the message of the Gospel to those who did not know it, making it understandable and close to the people of their time, with a new language”. “With their ingenuity and their witness - the Pope said, paying tribute to them - they were able to bring the light and joy of the Gospel to a complex and hostile world”. Thus a “community” was born. “A portion of the People of God began to walk in that wide region of the continent”. “This emerging People of God - Pope Francis explained - lives in a concrete history, which is like a blank page on which to write”. There is no need for “prefabricated answers”, the Pope warned, but for “incarnated and contextualized ones, in order to make understandable and accessible the Truth that, as Christians, moves us and makes us happy”. Hence we need to “let ourselves be touched by the reality of our time”, and to make the “voice of the Gospel resound ever new in this world in which we live, particularly in this old Europe, where the Good News is suffocated by so many voices of death and despair”. We need “men and women engaged in the world of culture, politics, industry”, the Pope exhorted, “may you live your own vocation immersed in the world, listening, with God and with the Church, to the heartbeat of your contemporaries, of the people”. And say “no” to the “temptations” of the laity within the Church: “clericalism, which is a plague” that encloses us in the sacristy, as well as “competitiveness and ecclesial careerism, rigidity and negativity, which suffocate the specific call to holiness in today’s world”.

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