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Mercy Friday: the Pope visits a children's "SOS village" in Rome

Yesterday afternoon the Holy Father lunched with the residents of a children's village in Rome. The SOS Children's Villages are an international non-profit intergovernmental organisation which, following a family model, provide a home for children in situations of risk due either to the loss of their parents or other conditions of personal, family and social hardship. The children are received in the Villages upon indication by the Social Services or the courts.

The Village visited by the Pope, in the Boccea area of Rome, is made up of five houses, each one of which is inhabited by a maximum of six children up to the age of 12, with a carer or "SOS mother". The Village is structured so as to support children during their growth, accompanying them like a real family through the various phases of development and integration in society. The children are accompanied to school, attend the local parish church and participate in sports activities. The professionals who work in the centre – resident, non-resident and volunteers – follow the children for a period of several years, contributing to the creation of stable human relationships, which help them arrive at a suitable level of autonomy. Older boys and girls are also present, having chosen to stay close to the centre to continue to have support and a point of reference, as well as to lend a hand in daily activities.

The SOS Village follows the pedagogical and organisational model of the first SOS Village founded in Austria in 1949 by Hermann Gmeiner, a medical student who, profoundly affected by the situation of hundreds of children orphaned by the war, opened the first of these villages in Austria, developing an educational model close in terms of humanity and warmth to a true family, unlike the model of the orphanage, widespread at that time. The directors of the Rome Village, Paolo and Maria, explained the history of the SOS Villages to the Pope.

During the visit the children of the centre led the Pope to the green area available to the Village, which also hosts a football pitch and a small playground. They then showed their bedrooms and toys to the Holy Father, who listened to their stories and paused for a small snack with them.

After the visit to the children of the SOS Village in Rome, Pope Francis visited Cardinal Andrea Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo, hospitalised in the "Villa Betania" Clinic, and returned to the Vatican at around 5.30 p.m.

