



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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Audience with members of the National Association of Italian Municipalities (Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani, ANCI)

At 11.45 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the National Association of Italian Municipalities (Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani, ANCI).

The following is Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you with pleasure and I thank your president for his kind words, and I also thank the mayor of Prato for his words.

In the first pages of the Bible we find the story of Babel (cf. *Gen 11: 1-9*), the *incomplete city*, destined to remain in the memory of humanity as a symbol of confusion and loss, presumption and division, that incapacity for understanding that makes any joint endeavour impossible.

The Bible also closes with a city (cf. *Rev 21: 10-27*). On the contrary to Babel, the *new Jerusalem* has the perfume of heaven and recounts a renewed world. Not that this is to be taken for granted: living there remains a gift; one enters there to the extent that one contributes to generating relations of fraternity and communion.

It is meaningful that the Sacred Scripture, to indicate to us the ultimate reality of the universe, resorts to this icon. The image of the city – with the suggestions it inspires – expresses how human society can hold up only when it rests on true solidarity, whereas when jealousy, unfettered ambition and the spirit of adversity grow, this is condemned to violence and chaos.

The city I would like to talk to you about summarises in one the many that are entrusted to your responsibility. It is a city that does not admit the single meanings of an exasperated individualism, that dissociated private from public interest. Nor does it tolerate the blind alleyways of corruption, where the scourges of disintegration set in. It does not know the walls of the privatisation of public spaces, where “we” is reduced to a slogan, to artificial rhetoric that masks the interest of the few.

Building this city requires from you not a pretentious upward momentum, but humble, daily grassroots commitment. It is not about raising the tower even higher, but broadening the square, making space, giving to each person the possibility of the realisation of the self and the family, and of opening up to communion with others.

To embrace and serve this city, a good and great heart is needed, in which *the passion for the common good* is conserved. It is this outlook that leads to the grown in the person of the dignity of being citizens. Promoting social justice, and therefore work, services, opportunities. Creating countless initiatives for inhabiting the territory and taking care of it. Educating in co-responsibility.

Because the city is a living organism, a great animated body where, if one part struggles to breathe, it is also because it does not receive enough oxygen from the others. I think of the realities in which the availability and quality of services is lower, and new pockets of poverty and marginalisation are formed. It is there that the city moves along in two lanes: on one side, the motorway of those who travel, hyper-guaranteed, and on the other the alleys of the poor and the unemployed, large families, immigrants, those who have no-one they can count on.

We must not accept these mindsets that separate and that ensure that the life of one is the death of another, and the struggle ends up destroying any sense of solidarity and human brotherhood.

To you, mayors, may I say to you, as a brother: it is necessary to frequent the peripheries: urban, social and existential. The point of view of the last is the best school – it enables us to understand what the truest needs are and to lay bare those solutions that merely appear that way. As it takes the pulse of injustice, it also shows us the way to eliminate it: building communities where each person feels recognised as a person and as a citizen, a holder of rights and duties, in the indissoluble logic that binds the interest of the individual to the common good. Because all that contributes to the good of all contributes also to the good of the individual.

To move according to this perspective, we need politics and an economy newly centred on ethics: an ethics of responsibility, relations, community and the environment. Likewise, we need an authentic “we”, in the form of solid and lasting citizenship. We need a politics of welcome and integration, that does not leave at the margins those who arrive in our territory, but rather that makes efforts to render fruitful the resources that each person bears.

I understand the unease of many of our citizens in the face of the arrival of many migrants and refugees. This can be explained by the innate wariness towards the “foreigner”, a wariness aggravated by the wounds caused by the economic crisis, the unpreparedness of local communities, the inadequacy of many measures adopted in a climate of emergency. Such unease can be overcome by offering spaces for personal encounter and mutual knowledge. Therefore, all those initiatives that promote the culture of encounter, the reciprocal exchange of artistic and cultural riches, and the knowledge of places and communities of origin of the new arrivals, are all welcome.

I rejoice in the knowledge that many local administrations represented are among the main advocates of good reception and integration practices, with encouraging outcomes that deserve to be widely disseminated. I remember the arrival of Albanians in Bari, as an example. I hope that many will follow your example.

In this way politics can perform its fundamental task of helping to look to the future with hope. It is the hope in tomorrow that brings out the best energies of each person, and of the young, first and foremost. May they not remain only as the recipients of noble projects, but also become their protagonists; then you will also reap the

benefits.

I hope you will be able to feel supported by the people to whom you dedicate your time – that familiarity of the mayor with his people, that closeness – your competence, and your availability. On your part, may the loftiness of your effort and the importance of what is at stake mean you are always generous and unbiased in your service to the common good.

In this way, the city will become a forerunner and reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem. It will be a sign of God's goodness and tenderness in the time of mankind. A mayor must have the virtue of prudence for governing, but also the virtue of courage to move ahead and the virtue of tenderness to draw closer to the weakest.

Thank you for this meeting. I pray for you, and please, do not forget to pray for me, as I am in need. Thank you.
