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Audience with the participants in the meeting organised by the Italian Institute of Donation for the Day of the Gift

At 12 o'clock this morning in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the meeting organised by the Italian Institute of Donation on the occasion of the *Day of the Gift* 2017.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you on the *Day of the Gift* and I greet you all with affection, starting with the Chairman of the Italian Institute of Donation, the organisation promoting this event, whom I thank for his words.

The greatest gift God has made to each of us is *life*; and life is part of another original divine gift that is *creation*. We should all feel the great responsibility to properly guard creation and to care for it, protecting it from various forms of degradation. We have the task of preserving and delivering to the future generations the planet which we received as a free gift from the goodness of God. In the face of the ecological crisis we are experiencing, the prospect of the gift received and delivered to those who will come after us is a reason for commitment and hope.

The gift of life and the gift of creation come *from God's love* for humanity; indeed, through these gifts God *offers us* this love. And to the extent that we open and welcome Him, we can become in turn a gift of love for our brothers. Jesus reminded us of this during the Last Supper, when He left His disciples the "*new commandment*" of love. Knowing that His hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, the hour of His Easter of death and resurrection, He took leave of the Apostles with the delivery of love, as if it were a testament. And He says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (*Jn* 13,34).

In what sense can Jesus define His commandment as “new”? The novelty of His gift lies in the fact that it is not about any love, but about the *very love of Jesus* Who gave His life for us. A love that translates into service to others: shortly before, in fact, Jesus had washed His disciples’ feet. A love that can stoop to the level of others, which refuses every form of violence, respects freedom, promotes dignity, rejects any discrimination. A disarmed love, stronger than hatred. This is the rule of love for those who want to follow Jesus: to let themselves be captivated by Him, to love with Him, to model their own actions on His infinite generosity.

The “gift”, which is celebrated in Italy on 4 October, is not an abstract concept, a generic appeal to the “gift” – so many gifts can be “partial” and not free – but rather an attitude and an action that have their own *roots in the message of the Gospel*. Everyone, especially the children and young people, is called to have the wonderful experience of giving. It is an educational experience that promotes human and spiritual growth, opening the mind and heart to the ample spaces of fraternity and sharing. In this way the civilization of love is built!

For these reasons, the *Day of the Gift* is a stimulating opportunity, primarily for the young: for they may discover that the gift is a part of ourselves that is freely given to the other, not to be lost but rather to increase its value. Giving brings greater happiness to ourselves and others; giving creates bonds and relationships that strengthen hope in a better world.

I encourage you to continue your journey with joy. Be men and women, boys and girls, who are defenders of life, guardians of creation, witnesses of the love given that generates good fruits for the community. I accompany you with my prayer. And you, too, please pray for me. I heartily bless you.
