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Audience with members of the “Giorgio La Pira” Foundation

At 12.25 today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Giorgio La Pira” Foundation, on the occasion of the Fifth National Convention, currently taking place in Rome at Villa Aurelia, from 22 to 23 November 2018.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is with joy that I meet all of you who are taking part in the national convention of associations and groups dedicated to the Venerable Giorgio La Pira. I address my greetings to each one of you and I thank the president of the Giorgio La Pira Foundation for his words. I hope that your meeting for study and reflection can contribute to increasing commitment to the integral development of people in the Italian communities and regions where you are present.

At a time when the complexity of Italian and international political life requires lay faithful and statesmen of great human and Christian importance for the service of the common good, it is important to rediscover Giorgio La Pira, an exemplary figure for the Church and for the contemporary world. He was an enthusiastic witness of the Gospel and a prophet of modern times; his attitudes were always inspired by a Christian perspective, and his action was often ahead of its time.

His activity as a university professor was varied and multiform, especially in Florence, but also in Siena and Pisa. Alongside this, he gave life to various charitable works, such as the “*Messa del Povero*” at San Procolo and the Saint Vincenzo “Beato Angelico” Conference. From 1936 he lived in the convent of San Marco, where he studied the patristics, and edited the magazine *Principi*, in which there was no lack of criticism of fascism. He was sought by the police of the regime and took refuge in the Vatican, where for a period he stayed in the house

of the Substitute Msgr. Montini, who had great esteem for him. In 1946 he was elected to the Constituent Assembly, where he contributed to the drafting of the Constitution of the Italian Republic. But his mission in the service of the common good reached its peak in the period when he was mayor of Florence in the fifties. La Pira assumed a political line open to the needs of social Catholicism and always sided with the last and with the most fragile sectors of the population.

He also undertook a major program to promote social and international peace, with the organization of international conferences “for peace and Christian civilization” and with vibrant calls against nuclear war. For the same reason he made a historic trip to Moscow in August 1959. His political-diplomatic commitment became more and more incisive: in 1965 he convoked a symposium for peace in Vietnam in Florence, then went personally to Hanoi, where he was able to meet Ho Chi Min and Phan Van Dong.

Dear friends, I encourage you to keep alive and to spread the patrimony of ecclesial and social action of the Venerable Giorgio La Pira; in particular his integral witness of faith, his love for the poor and the marginalized, his work for peace, his implementation of the Church’s social message and his great fidelity to Catholic teachings. These are all elements that constitute a valid message for the Church and society today, supported by the exemplary nature of his gestures and words.

His example is valuable especially for those who work in the public sector, who are called to be vigilant towards those negative situations that Saint John Paul II defined as “structures of sin” (see Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 36). They are the sum of factors that act in the opposite direction to the realization of the common good and respect for the dignity of the person. One yields to such temptations when, for example, one seeks exclusive personal or group profit rather than the interest of all; when clientelism prevails over justice; when the excessive attachment to power effectively blocks generational change and access to new recruits. As Giorgio La Pira said: “politics is a commitment of humanity and holiness”. It is therefore a demanding path of service and responsibility for the lay faithful, who are called to inspire temporal realities in a Christian way, as Vatican Council II teaches (cf. Decree on the lay apostolate *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 4).

Brothers and sisters, the legacy of La Pira, which you keep in your various associative experiences, constitutes for you a “handful” of talents that the Lord asks you to make fruitful. I urge you therefore to extol the value of the human and Christian virtues that are part of the ideal and also the spiritual patrimony of the Venerable Giorgio La Pira. In this way you will be able, in the territories in which you live, to be operators of peace, architects of justice, witnesses of solidarity and charity; to be a leaven of evangelical values in society, especially in the sphere of culture and politics; you will be able to renew enthusiasm for giving oneself for others, for giving them joy and hope. In his address, your president twice used the word “springtime”: today we need a “springtime”. Today there is a need for prophets of hope, prophets of holiness, who are not afraid of getting their hands dirty, to work and to go forward. Today there is a need for “swallows”: be thus.

With these wishes, which I entrust to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, I warmly bless all of you, your loved ones and your initiatives. And I ask you, please, to remember to pray for me. Thank you.
