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Video Message of the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church in Verona (Verona, 21 to 24 November 2019)

The following is the text of the video message sent by the Holy Father to participants on the occasion of the inauguration of the ninth edition of the Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church, taking place in Verona at the Cattolica Center, from 21 to 24 November 2019, on the theme “Being present: social polyphony”:

Video Message of the Holy Father

I cordially greet all of you who participate in the ninth edition of the Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church. The theme you have chosen this year is: “Being present: social polyphony”.

Presence is not a theory, it has a physicality, it is tangible. It is expressed in closeness, sharing, accompaniment or simply being close to someone. Presence has a decisive efficacy that we have all experienced because we all know the difference between being alone and having someone next to us. To be present means to take away from the isolation and to let that human heat reach us that enlivens the existence of those we meet. Presence allows us to see the other and to be seen by him, activating a relational dynamic that ignites life. Being present means keeping our eyes open to prevent someone from being excluded from our gaze. Whoever is not seen by anyone, becomes part of the group of the invisible, made up of the marginalized, poor, discarded, and exploited. Not seeing them is the quickest way to avoid problems; yet they are there and, even if we pretend not to see them, they exist. To be present means to take the initiative, to take the first step, to go towards the encounter, to arrive at the crossroads where the many excluded are found. It is nice to think of a widespread presence that inhabits all places, bringing tenderness and functioning as a leaven. Immersed in the dough of humanity ready to take care of the brothers. We can articulate the meaning of presence with three verbs: *see, stop, touch*.

Seeing is the first step that helps us to come out of ourselves, and makes us face life as it presents itself. What we see can also scare us, inducing us to run away and deny what we have seen.

Seeing the other demands that we *stop*: presence is not a race, it is being with the other. When we run we do

not notice many faces and many looks. How many people only very late in life realize they have spent their time rushing, and never had time to stop and play with their children, to talk with their elderly parents, to take care of their affections, to be willing to help. When you love a person you feel a strong desire to be with them and not to run elsewhere.

Finally, presence is also expressed in *touching*, in removing the distance from the other, in transmitting warmth, in taking charge, in taking care.

A presence understood in this way is mild and engages in dialogue, and is within everyone's reach. To solve problems you do not need great managers or strong men, but you need to be united in your commitment not to give in to indifference. Each person, with his or her own qualities and gifts, can become a builder of fraternity. The world changes not if someone works miracles, but if everyone does what they have to do every day. Lasting change always starts from the bottom up, it is never just a top-down operation. Everyone is needed to rebuild the social fabric and perceive the strength of being a people. From this point of view, all are important: the sick, the poor, the child, the elderly person, the worker, the professional, the entrepreneur, the learned and the ignorant.

It is urgent not to curb the freedom to do good. Our country advances because many people in silence live honestly, work, act in solidarity, take care of those in need. I wish all of you who participate in the ninth festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church to be weavers of a social fabric in which presence becomes a gift that makes the beauty of brotherhood shine out.

I renew my cordial greeting to all the participants in the Ninth Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church and in particular to the many volunteers who freely offer their availability. A greeting to the bishop of Verona, Msgr. Giuseppe Zenti, who is hosting this event, and thanks to Don Vincenzi for his service, for the dissemination, knowledge and implementation of the social doctrine of the Church. Thank you!
