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The Pope greets the participants in the Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church with a video message

The sixth edition of the Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church is being held in Verona, Italy from 24 to 27 November, on the theme: “In the midst of the people”, and for this occasion the Holy Father has sent a video message to the participants, transmitted this afternoon. The following is the full text of the message.

“A warm greeting to all of you attending the Sixth Festival of the Social Doctrine of the Church. The theme this year is: “In the midst of the people”. This expresses the great truth – we are made to be with others – that I reiterated in the aftermath of my election as bishop of Rome. Our humanity is greatly enriched if we are with all other people, whatever their situation. It is isolation, not sharing, that harms. Isolation develops into fear and distrust, and prevents us from enjoying fraternity. It must be said that we run greater risks when we isolate ourselves than when we open ourselves up to others: the possibility of harming ourselves resides not in encounter but in narrow-mindedness and denial. The same is true when we take responsibility for another person: I think of the sick, the elderly, immigrants, the poor, the unemployed. When we take care of another person, we complicate our lives less than when we concentrate only on ourselves.

To stay in the midst of the people does not only mean being open and encountering others, but also letting ourselves be encountered. We need to be looked at, called, touched, challenged; we need others so we can participate in all that which only others can give to us. Relationships demand this exchange between people: experience teaches us that usually we receive more from others than we give. Among our people there is a genuine human richness. There are innumerable stories of solidarity, of help, of support, experienced in our families and in our communities. It is impressive to see how some people bear, with dignity, economic hardship, pain, hard work and difficulties. Meeting these people, you touch their greatness with your hand, and receive almost a light by which it becomes clear that hope for the future can be cultivated; it can be believed that good is stronger than evil, because they are there. In the midst of the people, we have access to the teaching of facts. To provide an example: I was told that recently a girl died, aged just nineteen. It was immensely painful, and many people attended the funeral. What struck all those present was not only the absence of desperation, but the perception of a certain serenity. After the funeral, those who were there expressed their wonder at leaving the celebration with the sense of being relieved of a burden. The mother of the girl said, “I have received the

grace of serenity". Daily life is woven of these facts, that mark our existence: they never lose their effectiveness even though they never make the headlines. It happens just like that: without speeches or explanations one understands what does or does not have value in life.

Being in the midst of the people also means being aware that each one of us is part of a population. Real life is possible because it is not the sum of many individualities, but rather the articulation of many people who work together to constitute the common good. Being together helps us to see the whole. When we see the whole, our outlook is enriched and it becomes evident that the roles that each person fulfils within social dynamics can never be isolated or rendered absolute. When the people are separated from those in command, when decisions are made by power and not by popular sharing, when those who command are more important than the people and decisions are made by the few, or anonymously, or always dictated by real or presumed emergencies, then social harmony is endangered, with serious consequences for the people: poverty increases, peace is jeopardised, money takes control and the people suffer. Being in the midst of the people therefore is good not only for the life of individuals, but is good for all.

Being in the midst of the people highlights the plurality of colours, cultures, races and religions. People enable you to touch the richness and beauty of diversity. Only by great violence can variety be reduced to uniformity, the plurality of thoughts and actions to a sole way of acting and thinking. When you are with the people you touch humanity: there is never just the head, there is always the heart too; there is more concreteness and less ideology. To resolve the problems of the people, it is necessary to start from the ground, to get our hands dirty, to be courageous, to listen to others. I think that it comes naturally to us to ask, how can one do this? We can find the answer by looking to Mary. She is a servant, humble and merciful, she journeys with us, she is concrete. She never takes centre stage but hers is a constant presence. If we look to Her, we find the best way of being in the midst of the people. Looking to Her, we can all follow human paths without fear or prejudice, and with Her we can become capable of not excluding anyone. This is my hope for all of you.

Before bidding farewell, I would like to thank the bishop of Verona for his welcome, all the volunteers for their willingness and generosity, and Don Adriano Vincenzi for his work in the study and implementation of the social doctrine of the Church. And may I remind you, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you".
