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## **“Discrimination based on efficiency is no less deplorable than that based on race, census or religion”, says the Pope to the Capodarco Community**

The Capodarco Community, the organisation that for fifty years has sought to respond to the problems of the poor and the marginalised, with special attention to the disabled, is currently celebrating the anniversary of its founding. Today the Pope received in audience several of its members accompanied by founder Fr. Franco Monterubbianesi and the president Fr. Vinicio Albanesi. Francis thanked them for their “service to people with disabilities, children, people living in a situation of dependency and hardship, and their families”. He commented, “You have chosen to take the side of these less protected people, to offer them hospitality, support and hope in a dynamic exchange. In this way you have contributed and contribute to improving society”.

“The quality of life within a society”, explained the Pontiff, “is measured in large part by the ability to include the weakest and most in need, respecting their dignity as men and women. And maturity is reached when this inclusion is perceived not as extraordinary, but normal. Even a person with a disability or physical, mental or moral fragility must be able to participate in the life of society and help realise its potential in various dimensions. Only when the rights of the weakest are recognised can it be said that a society is founded on law and justice. A society that allowed space only to fully functional, completely autonomous and independent people would not be a society worthy of man. Discrimination based on efficiency is no less deplorable than that based on race, census or religion”.

The Pope praised the approach of the Community, which strives to respond to the needs of people taking into account their capacities and limits, without “pietistic attitudes or offering merely social assistance, so as to promote instead, the role of people in a community context open to society”. “I encourage you to continue on this path, which brings personal action and direct participation of disabled people to the forefront”, he said. “In the face of economic problems and the negative consequences of globalisation, your Community seeks to help those who live through difficulties not to feel excluded or marginalised, but rather to walk on the front line bearing the witness of personal experience. It is about promoting the dignity of and respect for each individual, enabling “life’s losers” to feel the tenderness of God, the loving Father of every creature”.

Likewise, “institutions, associations and various social development agencies are called to promote the effective inclusion of these people” said Francis, reiterating that the Capodarco Community, which is supported by the collaboration of families and volunteers, recognises that these “little people” afflicted with physical or mental

impediments or by wounds of the soul, are “the special witnesses of God’s tenderness, from whom we have much to learn, and who occupy a privileged place in the Church too”.

“Your association originated in the pilgrimages to the shrines of Lourdes and Loreto, where Don Franco sensed how to value the human and spiritual resources inherent in every person who is differently able”, the Holy Father said. “In your activity, priceless for the Church and for society, the Virgin Mother has always accompanied you and continues to do so, helping you to find new energies and always to maintain the style of the Gospel - tenderness, kindness, closeness, and Courage, the spirit of sacrifice, because it is not easy to work in the field of personal and social malaise”. Francis concluded by inviting those present to pray to “our Mother, who gives strength to mothers, to women, to you, to all of us who work. Hail Mary”.

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