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The Pope to the Italian Association for Organ, Tissue and Cell Donation (AIDO): Donation is an act of social responsibility and an expression of universal fraternity

This morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the volunteers of the Italian Association for Organ, Tissue and Cell Donation (*Associazione Italiana per la Donazione di Organi, Tessuti e Cellule*, AIDO).

After an introductory greeting from Dr. Flavia Petrin, president of AIDO, the Pope addressed the following words to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

I am pleased to welcome you all, volunteers of the Italian Association for Organ, Tissue and Cell Donation, gathered here to represent the thousands of people who have chosen to bear witness to and disseminate the values of sharing and donation, without asking for anything in return. I greet you all cordially and thank your president, Dr. Flavia Petrin, for the words with which she introduced this meeting.

The developments in transplant medicine have made it possible to donate organs after death, and in certain cases in life (as, for example, in the case of the kidney), so as to save other human lives; to conserve, recover and improve the state of health of many sick people who have no other alternative. Organ donation responds to a social need because, despite the development of many medical cures, its usefulness is never exhausted, since these are profoundly human experiences filled with love and altruism. Donation means looking to and going beyond oneself, beyond individual needs, and opening up with generosity towards a broader good. From this perspective, organ donation is not only an act of social responsibility, but also an expression of the universal fraternity that links all men and women to each other.

In this regard, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “Organ donation after death is a noble and meritorious act and is to be encouraged as a expression of generous solidarity” (2296). By virtue of the intrinsic relational dimension of the human being, each one of us realizes himself also through participation in the

realization of the good of others. Every subject represents a good not only for himself, but for society as a whole; from this there derives the meaning of commitment for the achievement of the good of our neighbour.

In the Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, Saint John Paul II reminded us that, among the gestures that contribute to nurturing an authentic culture of life, “A particularly praiseworthy example ... is the donation of organs, performed in an ethically acceptable manner, with a view to offering a chance of health and even of life itself to the sick who sometimes have no other hope” (86). Therefore it is important to maintain organ donation as a freely and unpaid act. Indeed, any form of commodification of the body or any part of it is contrary to human dignity. In donating blood or an organ of the body, it is necessary to respect the ethical and religious perspective.

As for those who do not have religious faith, the gesture towards brothers in need demands to be performed on the basis of an ideal of selfless human solidarity. Believers are called to live it as an offering to the Lord, Who identified with those who suffer as a result of disease, road accidents or accidents at work. It is good, for Jesus’ disciples, to offer one’s own organs, according to the terms consented by law and morality, as it is a gift made to the suffering Lord, Who said that whatever we do to a brother in need, we do also to Him (cf. *Mt 25: 40*).

It is therefore important to promote a culture of donation that, through information, awareness-raising and your constant and appreciated effort, promotes this offering of a part of one’s own body, without risk or disproportionate consequences, in donation by the living, and of all organs after death. From our own death and from our gift, there may spring life and health for others, the sick and suffering, contributing to strengthening a culture of help, of giving, of hope and of life. Faced with threats against life, which we unfortunately witness almost daily, as in the case of abortion and euthanasia, society needs these concrete gestures of solidarity and generous love.

I encourage you to continue in your efforts to defend and promote life, through the wonderful methods of organ donation. I like to recall Jesus’ words: “Give, and it will be given to you: A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap” (*Lk 6: 38*). We shall receive our recompense from God according to the sincere and concrete love we have shown towards our neighbour.

May the Lord support your good works. For my part, I accompany you with my blessing.
