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The voice of God resonates in the heart, not in the ears, says the Pope to the Italian Federation of Associations for the Deaf

“The presence of God is not perceived with the ears, but with faith”, said Pope Francis this morning as he received in audience, in the Consistory Hall, the members of the Italian Federation of Associations for the Deaf, inviting them to revive their faith to feel ever more the closeness of God, “so that His voice may resonate in the heart of each person, and be heard by all”. In this way, he explained, “you can help those who do not ‘hear’ the voice of God to be more attentive to it”, thus making a meaningful contribution to the vitality of the Church.

Some years ago the Federation incorporated other associations that combat throwaway culture to favour social inclusion in all environments. A necessary task, as the Pontiff observed, to guarantee the best quality of life to people who are deaf and hard of hearing, and to enable them to overcome this disability, valuing all dimensions, including the spiritual, in an integral vision of the human being.

“Deaf people inevitably live a condition of fragility, and this forms part of life and can be accepted positively”, said the Holy Father. “However, what is not good is that these, like so many other people with different abilities and their families, often live situations of prejudice, at times even in Christian communities. ... Cities, towns and parishes, with their respective services, are called upon increasingly to overcome the barriers that prevent the potential of your active presence from being realized, going beyond your limit. You teach us that only by inhabiting limits and fragility can one be builders, along with the heads and all members of the civil and ecclesial communities, of the culture of encounter, in opposition to widespread indifference”.

“More than ever, in today’s cultural and social context, you too, as deaf people, are a gift to the Church”, the Pope emphasized, quoting from his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*: “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples. All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 120). Therefore, also the presence of deaf people among pastoral workers, naturally formed in accordance with their inclinations and abilities, can genuinely represent a resource and an opportunity for evangelization.

The Pope also recalled the many other deaf people throughout the world, especially those who live in conditions

of marginalization or poverty. "I pray for them", he concluded, "and I pray for you, that you may bring your particular contribution to society, being capable of a prophetic outlook, capable of accompanying processes of sharing and inclusion, capable of cooperating in the revolution of tenderness and closeness. Your presence is necessary in the Church too, to contribute to building communities that may be welcoming homes open to all, starting from the last".
