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## **“Second-class citizens” are those who reject people, says the Pope to Rom and Sinti communities**

Around five hundred people, members of Rom and Sinti populations, took part in a prayer meeting in the Vatican this morning, presided at by the Holy Father and organized by the Migrants Foundation of the Italian Episcopal Conference. The meeting was also attended by pastoral workers, accompanied by the president of the Italian Episcopal Conference, Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, the prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, the vicar of His Holiness for the diocese of Rome, Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, and the president of the Italian Episcopal Conference for Migrations and the Migrants Foundation, H.E. Msgr. Guerino Di Tora.

During the meeting, various representatives of Rom and Sinti communities spoke in front of the Pope about their experiences of life, and prayed together.

The Migrants Foundation also invited Roman citizens to a meeting taking place from 15.30 to 18.00 at the Auditorium of the Shrine of Divine Love, to know better the Rom and Sinti people who live in Italy, sharing with them a moment of cultural exchange, celebration, art and music.

In his brief address, the Pope said that many of the things he had heard during the meeting touched his heart, and spoke first in response to the words of a mother who said that she “read” and “saw” hope in the eyes of her children.

“Hope can disappoint if it is not true hope, but when hope is concrete, as in this case, in the eyes of her children, it never disappoints!” exclaimed Pope Francis. “When hope is concrete, in the true God, it never disappoints. The mothers who read hope in the eyes of their children fight every day for concrete things, not for abstract things, no: to raise a child, feed him, educate him, integrate him into society... They are concrete things. And mothers too – I would dare say – are hope. A woman who brings a child to the world is hope, she sows hope, is capable of going ahead, of creating horizons, of giving hope”.

Another element common to both testimonies was “the bitter pain of separation: something one feels on the skin, not something you hear with the ears. They cast you aside, they say to you: ‘Yes, yes, pass on by, but stay there, don’t touch me’ [addressing the young priest who gave his testimony]. In the seminary, they asked you if

you begged, if you went to Termini ... Society lives on fairytales, these things... 'No, Father, those people are sinners!'. And you, are you not a sinner? We all are, all of us. We all make mistakes in life, but I cannot wash my hands of it, looking at the true or false sins of others. I must look to my own sins, and if the other is in sin, and is taking the wrong path, I must reach out and give him my hand to help him come out".

"One thing that makes me angry is that we are used to speaking about people with adjectives", continued the Pope. "We do not say, 'This is a person, this is a mother, this is a young priest', but, 'This person is like this, like that'. We use an adjective. And this destroys, because it does not let the person emerge. This is a person, this is another person, this is another person. Children are people. All of them. We cannot say: they are like this, they are ugly, they are good, they are bad. The adjective is one of those things that creates distance between the mind and the heart. ... This is the problem today. If you say to me that it is a political problem, a social problem, that it is a cultural problem, a problem of language: they are secondary matters. The problem is that of distance between the mind and the heart. This: it is a problem of distance. 'Yes, yes, you are a person, but far from me, far from my heart'. Social rights, healthcare service: 'Yes, yes, but I wait in line... No, first this one, then that one'. It is true, there are second class citizens, it is true. But the real second class citizens are those who reject people: these are second class, because they do not know how to embrace. They always through you out with an adjective, they reject, they live by rejecting, they live with a broom in their hand, sweeping out others, or with chatter or with other things. Instead the real path is that of brotherhood. 'Come, then we'll talk, but come, the door is open'. And we must all collaborate".

You can have a danger – we all have a danger – a weakness, let's say, the weakness perhaps of letting rancour grow. It is understandable, it is human. But I ask you, please, the bigger heart, the broader still: no rancour. And to go ahead with dignity: the dignity of the family, the dignity of work, the dignity of earning bread every day – it is this that will make you go ahead – and the dignity of prayer. Always looking ahead. And when the rancour comes, let it go, as history will do justice. Because rancour makes everyone sicken: it makes the heart sicken, the head, everything. It makes the family sicken, and that is no good, because rancour leads you to revenge. ... But I do not think you invented vengeance. In Italy there are organizations that are masters of the vendetta, of living in *omertà*, in silence: this is a group of delinquents, not people who want to work".

"You go ahead with dignity, with work... And when you see difficulties, look up and you will find that there, they are watching you. He watches you. There is One Who watches you first, Who cares about you, One who has had to live on the margins, as a child, to save His life, hidden, a refugee: One Who has suffered for you, Who gave His life on the cross. It is One, as we heard in the reading you gave, that is searching for you to console you and to encourage you to go on. This is why I say to you: no distance, to you and to everyone: the mind with the heart. No adjectives, no: all people, each person deserves his own adjective, but no general adjectives, according to the life you lead. We have heard a beautiful noun that includes mothers: it is a beautiful noun, this one: 'mum'".

"Thank you very much", the Holy Father concluded. "I pray for you, I am close to you. And when I read something bad in the newspaper, I tell you the truth, I suffer. Today I read something bad and I suffer, because this is not civilization, this is not civilization. Love is civilization, so onwards with love".

"May the Lord bless you. And pray for me!"

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