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Audience with the members of the Don Gnocchi Foundation

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Don Gnocchi Foundation.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

I welcome you and thank your President, and your friend, for the words of greeting and presentation of this beautiful association for welfare and social assistance, the Don Carlo Gnocchi Foundation, which sprang from the mind and heart of this distinguished Ambrosian priest. In his homily for the Beatification, which took place in Milan ten years ago, Cardinal Tettamanzi pointed out to the Church that he was “a restless seeker of God and a courageous seeker of man, who has spent his life searching for the face of Christ imprinted in the face of every man”. How beautiful!

Indeed, Blessed Don Carlo Gnocchi, an apostle of charity, served Christ heroically in children, young people, the poor and the suffering, from the beginning of his priestly ministry, as a passionate educator. Then, as a military chaplain, he encountered the cruelty of the Second World War, first on the Greek-Albanian front, then, with the Alpines of the “Tridentine” Division, in the dramatic Russian campaign. During the disastrous retreat from the front, he worked tirelessly for the wounded and dying, and developed the plan for an organization to assist orphans and children mutilated by explosives. Returning to Italy, he implemented this wonderful project; his was not only a social enterprise, but was also moved by Christ's charity. A work, a fruit of Christ's charity.

Many years later, you carry forth his legacy and, like a precious talent, you are multiplying it with the same apostolic zeal and fidelity to the Gospel. For this I am grateful to each of you: directors and managers of the Centres, doctors and workers, volunteers and friends. And you are here today, together with patients, guests

and their families, to confirm your commitment to be close to the sufferings of the most fragile people, in the style of the Good Samaritan and following the example of your Blessed Founder. Never tire of serving the least on the difficult frontier of infirmity and disability: together with the most advanced therapies and techniques for the body, offer to those who confidently turn to your structures the medicines of the soul, that is, God's consolation and tenderness.

Inspired by the care, delicacy and sensitivity of Blessed Carlo Gnocchi as a priest, you are called to combine social and health service with evangelizing action in the concrete aspects of daily life. For you, this means courageously fighting the causes of suffering and lovingly tending to the distress of those who are suffering or in difficulty. Times have changed since the beginning, but it is necessary to go on with the same spirit, with the attitude and style that Don Gnocchi described as follows: "Active, optimistic, serene, concrete and profoundly human Christians who look at the world no longer as an enemy to be defeated or fled, but as a prodigal son to be conquered and redeemed with love" (*Education of the heart*).

The meaning and value of the health profession, and of every service rendered to our ailing brothers, are fully manifested in the ability to combine competence and compassion, both together. Competence is the fruit of your preparation, experience and the updating of your skills; and all this is supported by a strong motivation to serve your suffering neighbour, a motivation which in the Christian is animated by the charity of Christ. Competence is the quality that makes the witness of the lay faithful credible in the different environments of society; competence also guarantees you when you go against the tide with respect to the dominant culture: in your case, when you devote time and resources to fragile life, even if to someone it may seem useless or even unworthy of being lived.

Competence and compassion. The suffering of our brothers demands to be shared, demands for attitudes and initiatives of compassion. It is a matter of "suffering *with*", pitying like Jesus who, out of love for man, became man Himself in order to be able to share fully, in a very real way, in flesh and blood, as is shown to us in His Passion. A society that is not able to welcome, protect and give hope to suffering is a society that has lost its piety and that has lost its sense of humanity. The vast network of centres and services that you have set up in Italy and in other countries is a good model because it seeks to combine assistance, hospitality and evangelical charity. In a social context that favours efficiency over solidarity, your structures are instead houses of hope, whose purpose is the protection, appreciation and true benefit of the sick, the handicapped and the elderly.

Dear friends, I renew my appreciation for the service you render to those who find themselves in difficulty. I encourage you to continue your journey in your commitment to human promotion, which is also an indispensable contribution to the Church's evangelizing mission. Indeed, the proclamation of the Gospel is more credible thanks to the tangible love with which Jesus' disciples bear witness to their faith in Him.

May the human and Christian witness of Blessed Don Carlo Gnocchi, characterized by love for the weakest, always guide your choices and your activities. May the Lord grant you everywhere to be messengers of His mercy and consolation, messengers of His tenderness. I accompany you with my prayer and from my heart I impart to you my Blessing, which I gladly extend to those who are hosted in your centres. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
