



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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Audience with a delegation from the Franciscan Solidarity Centre of Florence

Today, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the Franciscan Solidarity Centre of Florence.

The following is the greeting the Pope addressed to those present:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to welcome all of you from the Franciscan Solidarity Centre, and I thank your president, Maria Eugenia Ralletto, for her words of greeting.

For many years, in the city of Florence, you have been providing a valuable service of listening and companionship to people who find themselves in difficult economic and social conditions: families who face hardships of various types; the elderly or disabled who are in need of support and company. I would like, first of all, to say thank you for this. In a world that tends to run at two speeds, that on the one hand produces wealth but, on the other, generates inequality, you offer effective assistance based on voluntary work and, with an outlook of faith, you are among those who sow the seeds of the Kingdom of God.

Indeed, Jesus, by coming into the world and proclaiming the Kingdom of the Father, approached human sufferings with compassion. In particular, he drew close to the poor, to those who were marginalised and rejected, the discouraged, the abandoned and the oppressed. Remember His words: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink ... I was naked and you clothed me" (*Mt 25: 35-36*). In this way, Christ revealed God's heart: He is a Father who wants to protect, defend and promote the dignity of every one of His sons and daughters, and who calls upon us to construct the human, social and economic conditions to ensure that no-one is excluded or deprived of their fundamental rights, that no-one should suffer for lack of material necessities or for loneliness.

In this task you are inspired by the luminous witness of Saint Francis of Assisi, who practised universal brotherhood and “wherever he went … sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters” (Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 2). Endeavouring to follow his example, for almost forty years you have provided this service, which is a tangible sign of hope, and also a sign of contradiction in the busy life of the city, where so many people find themselves alone with their poverty and suffering. It is a sign that awakens slumbering consciences and invites us to emerge from indifference, to be compassionate towards those who are wounded, stooping with tenderness to those who are crushed by the weight of life.

Dear friends, go forth courageously in your work! I ask the Lord to sustain you, for we know that our good hearts and our human strength are not enough. Before the things to be done, and beyond these, when we are in front of a poor person we are called to feel love that makes him or her seem like our brother or our sister; and this is possible thanks to Christ, present in that very person. I assure you of my prayers that the Lord, by the intercession of Saint Francis, will always preserve for you the joy of serving. And please, you too, pray for me. Thank you.
