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Audience with members of the “Lazare” Association

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Lazare” Association on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its founding.

The following is the address the Pope consigned to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

I am happy to welcome you, members of the “Lazare” Association, during this year in which you celebrate your tenth anniversary. I thank God for this meeting, which was cancelled last year due to the health crisis.

It is always a joy to see that even today many people, full of faith, good will and courage, commit themselves to living the experience of service and fraternity.

Your Association is built on simple principles, such as, for example, “being oneself with others, rediscovering joy, feeling loved, learning benevolence as if within the family, living together very simply”.

These principles have meaning and give form to a stable group only if they spring from a strong friendship with Christ, the wellspring of our work for good. Going towards others in the situations in which they find themselves and forming a family in which harmony and the joy of living together reign, you participate in the Church’s mission to go out towards the peripheries of our society. As I told you in the video conference of 29 May 2020, “the existential peripheries are the centre of the heart of God. Jesus wanted to come to our existential peripheries. He made Himself into an existential periphery”.

Dear young people, you have chosen to place yourself at the service of human dignity, to make yourself close to

those who are excluded, homeless, rejected, often betrayed in their rights. By serving them, you serve the Lord Himself. With your apostolate, you help us understand that every person is a sacred story, an inestimable gift. Indeed, “the Lord asks us to be generous, to conquer fear with the courage of love, to overcome the passivity that becomes complicity” (Homily of the Mass for the World Day of the Poor, 15 November 2020). In these times of uncertainty, of fragility, instead of wasting your lives thinking only of yourselves, you experience living together in solidarity. This gives you the opportunity to enrich your lives by becoming a source of hope for those who no longer believe in themselves and feel humiliated.

You have wished to be, for those whom you serve, the hand, the eyes, the ears, the smile of God. You express to them the closeness of the Lord who cares for His people, especially for those who are wounded and who buckle under the burdens of life, because “love of neighbour is concrete and squanders none of the resources needed to bring about historical change that can benefit the poor and disadvantaged” (*Fratelli tutti*, 165). By your commitment and your dedication you seek to be Christians not only in words, but also in deeds. In this way you bear much fruit and this can be seen in the expansion of your Association in other countries and continents.

Do not be afraid to hand on the torch of hope and love. Be witnesses to the tenderness of God in the midst of a culture of selfishness, of individualism, of indifference, of waste, of disdain towards the poor and the weak.

Dear friends, benefitting from this initiative of love, you who are living this great adventure with your history, sometimes full of sadness, loneliness, tears, trials, exclusion and rejection, you are a precious gift that makes us see the Lord's love. You are not rejects, inferior people, failed people, as society sometimes wants us to believe. In God's eyes, you are a treasure, a gift, a life, dignity. On your faces, we see the suffering face of Christ who invites us to an urgent love and an open heart.

Having received so much good and attention from others, you in turn become men and women capable of uplifting, consoling, soothing wounds and making God present in the heart of your lives. I encourage you to give the best of yourselves, to live every moment of existence as a grace, to come out of anonymity and make of your life an offering for the beautiful, for the good. In fact, “Lazarus means an offering, the offering of humanity, of what it has at its best: the awareness of limits” (Videoconference with the “Lazare” Association, 29 May 2020).

I urge you all to remain faithful to your goals. Today, more than ever, we need to build a world, a society of fraternal and full of life relationships. Because “actions have their source in a union increasingly directed towards others, considering them of value, worthy, pleasing and beautiful apart from their physical or moral appearances. Our love for others, for who they are, moves us to seek the best for their lives. Only by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no-one and a fraternity that is open to all” (Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 94). I therefore invite you to be witnesses, witnesses of God's mercy and goodness.

I entrust each one of you and your families, as well as the members of the Association, to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and Saint Lazarus, and I cordially impart to you the apostolic blessing. Please do not forget to pray for me.
