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Audience with the organisers of the GiàveraFestival

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis met with the organisers of the intercultural festival of Giàvera del Montello, and addressed the following greeting to them:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

Thank you for bringing to my knowledge the experience of your Festival, also through the words of Don Bruno, to whom I give my heartfelt thanks, but above all with your presence, with your faces. Welcome!

I was struck when I read the list of migrant associations and groups taking part in this initiative and carrying it forward: you can see that the house Fr. Bruno was talking about, your reception house, is *a house with many windows open on the world!* And so the GiàveraFestival has become a crossroads, a place to meet, to engage in dialogue, to get to know each other. It is also a place where we can share hope, the dream of a more fraternal world.

It is beautiful and very significant that your Festival was born and is always reborn from an experience of coexistence. It was not drawn up at a desk, on the basis of an ideological project, but from days, months, years of sharing with migrants. With their stories, their problems, and above all with their baggage of humanity, traditions, culture, faith...

And then - this is true - your initiative stems from the desire to make your experience known, to make it circulate within the social fabric, to help spread a culture of welcome. A culture of welcome as opposed to a culture of rejection. There is a great need for this! Because the reality of migration in our time has taken on characteristics that can sometimes be frightening. Objectively speaking, the phenomenon is very complex, and unfortunately there are criminal groups that take advantage of it; migrants risk being exploited also in geopolitical conflicts. Then they cease to be people and become numbers. That is why there is a greater need than ever for places

where the faces, stories, songs, prayers and art of migrants are placed at the centre.

This morning I received the Prime Minister of Albania and he was telling me that the first Constitution in Albania – it dates from a hundred years ago? - It said that to whoever knocks on your door you must open, because it is God. And from there, the humanity that the Albanians have in receiving migrants. This thought touched me: whoever knocks at your door is God. Open to him and leave your place for him.

This way of looking at the reality of migration does not mean hiding or ignoring the difficulties and problems. Who knows them better than you and can testify to them? It is therefore important that your experiences are also made *available to good politics*, to help those with governmental responsibilities at local, national and international level to make choices that always know how *to combine healthy realism with respect for the dignity of people*. I saw one of the pictures you brought, on the torture that migrants suffer when those traffickers catch them. And this is happening today. We cannot close our eyes! The dignity of people. This is why your festival, like other similar initiatives in Italy and in various countries, should not be reduced to a folkloric event or a gathering of idealists. No, I say this also as a point of reflection and verification for yourselves. We can ask ourselves, after thirty years: has our experience succeeded, and to what extent, in influencing political choices, in dialogue with the institutions and with civil society? I think it is important to pose ourselves this question.

Dear friends, above all I thank the Lord with you for the journey he has given you to make over these years through the experience of the Festival. I hope that you may go forward with an ever renewed spirit. I suggest that you take as your model Abraham, whom God called to depart and who remained a migrant throughout his life. Abraham is a “father” whom, as Christians, we share with Jews and Muslims, but he is a figure with whom all men and women can recognise themselves who see life as a journey in search of the promised land, a land of freedom and peace, where they can live together as brothers and sisters.

Thank you for your visit. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
