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Audience with members of the Voir Ensemble Association

This morning, the Holy Father received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the members of the *Voir Ensemble* Association, on the occasion of their pilgrimage to Rome. The following are the words he addressed to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet you all, members of the *Voir Ensemble* Association, who have organized this pilgrimage to Rome. Your Association brings together many blind and visually-impaired people who wish to walk together to live the joy of the Gospel in fraternity. I thank the president for his kind words, and I extend my greeting to all the members of *Voir Ensemble*.

Your pilgrimage is a sign of the full participation of the faithful in conditions of disability in the communion of the Church. From this perspective, I would like to share with you a brief reflection based on the Word of God: on the episode in which Jesus meets the man blind from birth (see *Jn* 9: 1-41), in accordance with the name of your Association, *Voir Ensemble*.

The first thing to note is that Jesus' gaze precedes us, it is a gaze that calls for encounter, that calls for action, for tenderness, for fraternity. Jesus arrives at the pool of Silo'am: he sees a man blind from birth. The disciples also see this man, who asks for nothing. Jesus sees in him a brother who needs to be freed, to be saved. The Lord requires us to cultivate tenderness and the style of encounter. The disciples, for their part, are fixed in the outlook that prevailed at that time regarding people born blind: they were considered to have been born in sin, punished by God, prisoners of an outlook of exclusion.

In a culture of prejudice, Jesus radically refuses this way of seeing. Therefore, he affirms, in front of the disciples, that "it was not that this man sinned, or his parents" (v.3) that was the cause of his affliction. It is a

word of liberation, acceptance and salvation. Today, unfortunately, we are used to perceiving only the exterior of things, the most superficial appearance. Our culture affirms that people are worthy of interest in relation to their physical appearance, their clothing, their beautiful houses, their luxury cars, their social status, their wealth. As the Gospel teaches us, even today the sick or disabled, starting from their frailty, from their limitation, can be at the heart of the encounter: the encounter with Jesus, which opens up to life and faith, and which can build fraternal and solidarity-based relationships, in the Church and in society.

Secondly, Christ performs for the blind man “the works of God” (v. 3), giving him sight. He approaches the blind man, applies mud to his eyes and sends him to the pool of Silo’am. Jesus’ heart cannot remain indifferent in the face of suffering. He invites us to act immediately, to console, soothe and heal the wounds of our brothers and sisters. The Church is like a field hospital. How many wounded people, how many brothers and sisters need an outstretched hand to heal their wounds!

The paradox is this: that blind man, by meeting he who is the Light of the world, becomes able to see, whereas those who see him, despite encountering Jesus, remain blind. This paradox very often runs through our own lives and our ways of believing. Saint-Exupéry, in his book *The Little Prince*, wrote: “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye”. To see with the heart is to see the world and our brothers and sisters through God’s eyes. Jesus invites us to renew our way of seeing people and things. He proposes to us an ever-new vision of our relationships with others, especially in the family, of our human frailty, of illness and death. He invites us to see all this through God’s eyes! Faith is not reduced to a set of theoretical beliefs and traditions, or a set of customs. It is a bond and a journey following Jesus, who always renews our way of seeing the world and our brothers and sisters.

Finally, we Christians cannot content ourselves with being enlightened: we must also be “witnesses of the light” (see *Jn* 1:8). While the chiefs of the Pharisees, wrapped up in their traditions and their inflexibility, condemn the man born blind as a “sinner”, he, with disarming simplicity, professes his faith: “One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see” (*Jn* 9:25), and he becomes a witness to Jesus, a witness to the work of God, a work of mercy, of love that gives life. We too are required to bear witness to Jesus in our life, with the approach of acceptance and fraternal love.

Dear friends, thank you for coming, and I encourage you to continue on this path that you walk, in this “seeing together”, “*voir ensemble*” with the heart, making fruitful the charism of Fr. Yves Mollat. Let Jesus come towards you, to heal your wounds, and let Jesus teach you to see with the heart. To see with the heart. Only he truly knows the heart of man, only he can free it from closedness and inflexibility, and open it to life and hope.

I entrust you all to the intercession of the Virgin Mary; she always introduces us to the encounter with Christ. I ask her to guide your steps, and I give my blessing to you. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
