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Audience with members of the Italian League for the Fight Against Cancer (LILT)

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the members of the Italian League for the Fight Against Cancer (LILT), on the occasion of the centenary of its founding.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends!

I am glad to welcome you and I greet you affectionately, starting with the National President, whom I thank for his words, so humanistic and profound. Thank you. On 25 February, you celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Italian League for the Fight against Cancer. A history rooted in a past rich in important developments, handed over to a present of constant commitment and open to a future of expectations and prospects. Let me say: happy birthday! And I extend this wish to the many people for whom you work: to the many patients, first of all, and also to health workers and researchers.

Your League is a historical precursor to current palliative care, so important and valuable. Your history manifests the capacity to redefine tasks and approaches of the Association in changing both the social and healthcare systems; in particular, the activities you carry out relate to, aside from formation and information, research and prevention. In this way you contribute to constituting that "good fabric" of which Italy is composed. Faced with the reality of so many people, of all ages, who find themselves facing sickness, you have chosen and always choose to "fight" with them and with those who care for them. You choose to be close to them.

In a society threatened by the culture of indifference – the great sickness of our times is indifference, looking away – it is necessary more than ever before to be close to others. And this, for you, means being close to people who suffer from cancer, who over the last two years have struggled even more due to the pandemic, which has thrown the healthcare system into crisis. It also means standing by the families of patients, who need

competent and active support. Finally, it means being close to healthcare professionals, who have also been severely tried by the difficult conditions in which they have had to work.

The pandemic has also slowed down prevention and diagnostic procedures, with clear consequences primarily for the treatment of the disease, but also for the serenity of families and society as a whole. This too calls for further prevention and care from now on.

Your commitment is a form of social charity, which you exercise in the form of an association, cooperating with public and private bodies and with the voluntary sector. Associationism is an important form of witness in the face of indifference, in the face of a mentality that would prefer to exclude those who are not perfect. This witness presupposes formation. It is not enough to “do”: it is necessary to be educated, to be trained in order to respond to the throwaway culture that tends to marginalize vulnerability, fragility, and suffering, to marginalize it so as not to see it. “Remember that the right to care and treatment for all must always be prioritized, so that the weakest, particularly the elderly and the sick, are never rejected” (*General Audience*, 9 February 2022). And on this issue of care for all, I encourage you to maintain, indeed, to advance the Italian public health system. Do not lose it, make it grow, consolidate it more, because it is a gift for society. Think of those countries that do not have it, where people who cannot pay do not have healthcare. You have a treasure to cherish and to nurture. “Life is a right, not death, which must be welcomed, not administered. And this ethical principle concerns everyone: everyone, not just Christians or believers”, everyone (*ibid.*).

Together we can curb this culture that seeks to affirm an “economic” model of man, who is only as good as his production and consumption. On the other hand, even in suffering and illness we are fully men and women, without diminishment, recognizing ourselves in that unified psycho-physical-spiritual totality that is typical only of the human person.

In the words of Saint John Paul II, there is a “Christian reflection” in suffering: “If one becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ, this happens because Christ has opened his suffering to man, because he himself in his redemptive suffering has become, in a certain sense, a sharer in all human sufferings. Man, discovering through faith the redemptive suffering of Christ, also discovers in it his own sufferings; he rediscovers them, through faith, enriched with a new content and new meaning” (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 11 February 1984, 20).

Dear friends, continue in your service to people, faithful to your slogan, which says: “To prevent is to live”. May you be accompanied from heaven by Saint Leopold Mandić – a great man, the patron saint of cancer patients. A patron also of “spiritual cancer”, because he confessed and forgave all. A great and merciful man. We need such priests today. With all my heart I bless you, all our members and your families. And I ask you please not to forget to pray for me, as I am in need. Thank you!
