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Audience with members of the “Progetto Agata Smeralda”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Progetto Agata Smeralda”.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I welcome you all and I thank the President, Professor Mauro Barsi, for the words with which he introduced our meeting. And I am glad that the archbishop of Florence, Cardinal Giuseppe Betori, has accompanied you. I know that your association has a strong bond with the Florentine diocese, a bond that is not formal but of substance, of direct collaboration “in the field”, especially in Salvador de Bahia. This is very good.

Recently, in one of the catecheses dedicated to Saint Joseph, I touched on the theme of the adoption of children. I praised and encouraged couples who open their heart and their home to welcome a boy or a girl who does not have a family. Similarly, this sensibility, this openness, this fatherhood and motherhood are also at the basis of your work. Indeed, those who choose long-distance adoption are moved by the desire to lend a hand to a boy or a girl so the he or she will feel loved, so that they do not lack the necessities, so they can grow up well... Giving a hand means, in this case, giving a future.

I thank you so much, because you cooperate to spreading God’s tenderness in the world, his fatherhood, which is the great gift that Jesus gave us. Jesus did not only speak about the Father, no, he welcomed us into his own relationship with the Father. This is why he was incarnated and born of Mary, this is why he lived our human existence, this is why he suffered, this is why he died and rose again: all so that we, every one of us, can become children of the Father who is in heaven. And Saint Paul says, “that we might receive adoption as sons” (*Gal 4:5*). We have been “adopted” by the Father for Jesus: he enabled us to enter into this relationship with the

Father, with the awareness of being adopted children. And this is what you do with others.

There is a great need for paternity and tenderness! "Tenderness" is a word that has been banished many times from the dictionaries of daily life. The true revolution in the world is carried out by those who work day after day, quietly, so that the small and the poor are no longer despised, discarded, abandoned, but can arise and live according to their dignity as children of God. And a well-prepared, well-monitored, well-accompanied long-distance adoption does just that. It is a small seed of the Kingdom of God, which grows and bears fruit in the measure that it is cultivated with love.

I read that your active distance adoptions to date number around seven thousand, and involve a great many supporters and laypeople, religious sisters and priests who work in the peripheries of the world. I thank the Lord with you! And I appreciate the fact that attribute all this to his Providence. Yes, we are merely cooperators with Providence. And this fills us with joy and gratitude.

Dear friends, I thank you for this meeting. Continue, with the grace of God. I accompany you with my blessing, which I warmly give to those of you present here, to all those who share in and support your work, and all the children and young people you accompany with the adoptions. May Our Lady always keep you. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
