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Audience with Firefighters with family members

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a group of firefighters with their families, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear firefighters, good morning!

I welcome you and your families; I greet the authorities present here and I thank the Prefect, Laura Lega, for her words. This meeting offers me the opportunity to express my appreciation for what you represent and for what you do to serve the community, both in daily services and in major emergencies. Of these, the most recent is the flood on the island of Ischia; but we all know of your many and prolonged interventions to rescue earthquake victims. I too have been able to witness in person, on the occasion of some visits I have made in Italy, the good you have done for the people and for the environmental and art-historical patrimony in those situations.

Your work – in synergy with the other forces – is aimed at guaranteeing conditions of safety and tranquility for civil life; and in addition, as we were saying, to intervene when it is a matter of keeping citizens safe from calamity or danger. Your sense of dedication - and this is decisive, you have so much of it! – your promptness, your selflessness, your daring, your willingness to sacrifice even to the point of risking your own life - and this is great about you - are well known and the people are justifiably proud of you. In certain situations of grave danger, you risk your own safety. Therefore, your mission is a personal and conscious choice that is justified by your duty to protect people and the community in times of need.

From the Christian perspective, this particular job you have embraced is reflected in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who, encountering a robbed, wounded and abandoned man on the road, took care of him with great compassion and generosity (cf. *Lk* 10: 33-35). This parable “*presents the basic decision we need to make in order to rebuild our wounded world. In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan*” (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 67). This man shows charity and readiness to assist the

unfortunate man at the time of greatest need. And he does this when so many others – out of indifference or hard-heartedness – turned their eyes the other way. The Good Samaritan also teaches to go beyond the emergency, to prepare, we might say, the conditions for a return to normality. Indeed, after providing first aid, he takes the wounded man to an inn and entrusts him to the innkeeper so that he can recover.

The protagonist of this parable manifests to us God's compassion and tenderness. This is God's style: proximity with compassion and tenderness. This is how the Lord is: close, compassionate and tender. He tells us that fraternity is the answer to build a better society, because the stranger I encounter, wounded along the way, is my brother. And you, firefighters, represent one of the most beautiful expressions of the long tradition of solidarity of the Italian people, which has its roots in evangelical altruism. I encourage you to safeguard this moral and civil heritage, cultivating it first and foremost in your personal lifestyle. Indeed, yours is one of those professions that has the nature of a mission: a mission of service to the people in moments of need, from the small to the major emergencies that may occur; a mission of service to the dignity of people, who must never be abandoned in difficulty; a mission of service to the common good of society that, especially in moments of crisis, like the one we are living, needs healthy, trustworthy forces that work tenaciously in the shadows.

Dear friends, Christmas, now close, is the feast that more than any other sums up the value I have proposed to you: *proximity, compassion, tenderness, solidarity, service, brotherhood*. And all this was revealed not in writing, in a codex to be observed, but written in the flesh of a Son of man, Jesus. This is the Christian novelty that never ceases to amaze us: God came to *save us* by making himself like us. He did what we do: he came to rescue us in danger, to save us, and he did so in the most radical way, knowing he had to give his life to save us. He is the Good Samaritan of humanity. May this great Christian feast, Christmas, be an occasion for us all to rediscover and experience how much God loves humanity, every human being!

And with this hope I reiterate my gratitude for your valuable service, thank you truly! And at times, if I have something to wish you, may it be this: "Lord, may they have no work to do, may they have no need to go!". May the Virgin Mary, who went "in haste" to her cousin Elizabeth to help her (cf. *Lk 1:39*) – you always go in haste when there is something, don't you? – be your model. I entrust you to the intercession of your patroness, Saint Barbara, I bless you and your families heartily, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
