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Audience with members of the Circolo San Pietro

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Place, the members of the Circle of Saint Peter (*Circolo San Pietro*), to whom he addressed the following greeting:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I wholeheartedly thank the President and I welcome you all here, at the tomb of Saint Peter, whose name your Association bears. For you it is like returning to the wellspring, the root from which your charity comes, and before that, the faith that inspires you and leads you forward.

I thank God for all the good you do. We know: it is He who gives us the strength to carry it out. But I also give credit to you, who give all your commitment, your time, energy, creativity, patience, perseverance. I am always struck to see the statistics of your activity, not for the numbers themselves but because behind them there is the same number of faces, there are stories, there are very often wounds, suffering. And then I think of you who meet these brothers and sisters in the soup kitchens, in the reception centres, in the dormitory, or in the foster homes for the young patients admitted to “Bambin Gesù”, and I recognize in you the image of the good Samaritan. The good Samaritan, in the parable of the Gospel of Luke, approaches the wounded man at the side of the street, he approaches moved by compassion. He does not know him, he is a stranger, in a certain sense also an “enemy”, because the Samaritans were ill-regarded and despised. Yet he approaches him because his heart is tender, it is not hardened, it is capable of tenderness.

And this is the first thing I want to recommend to you: tenderness. Beware: I am not talking about sentimentalism, no. I am talking about a feature of God’s love, which is needed today more than ever. In societies that are increasingly contaminated by the culture of indifference and the throwaway culture, as believers we are required to go against the grain, with the culture of tenderness, that is, of taking care of the other as God took care of us, of me, of you, of each one of us. We see this in the Gospel: just as Jesus

approaches the small, the marginalized, the least. He is the Good Samaritan who gave his life for us, those in need of mercy and forgiveness.

And this, dear friends, is the second thing we must never forget: that we truly love others to the extent that we recognize ourselves to be loved by Him, by our Lord and Saviour. We help to the extent that we feel we have been helped; we lift up if we allow ourselves to be lifted up by Him every day. And we can experience this in the silence of prayer, when we shed our roles, our positions - perhaps even our masks, God forbid - and stand before Him as we are. There, then, he can place his Spirit in our heart, he can give us his compassion and tenderness. And so we can move on. Not ourselves - as Saint Paul would say - not by ourselves, but him with us! This is the secret of the Christian life and, in a special way, of charitable service.

Dear brothers and sisters, I renew my gratitude and encouragement to you. I cannot accompany you physically on the streets of Rome, but I do so with my heart and prayer. I ask the *Salus populi Romani* to keep you and to protect the people you meet and your families. I bless you all and I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you!
