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Audience with pilgrims from the parishes of Rho, Milan

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the faithful of the parishes of Rho, Milan, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I greet you all, and in particular Msgr. Michele Di Tolve, your parish priest, whom I have known for many years and whom I thank for his words. I met him as soon as I was created cardinal: I had gone to visit a cousin of mine and she spoke to me about an exceptional deputy priest they had there: “Look how that priest works!” “Really? Let me meet him, but don’t tell him I am a cardinal”. “No, I won’t tell him”. I took my ring off, we arrived at the oratory and he was going from one place to another, he was moving like a dancer with everyone... That is how I met him. And he has stayed that way all his life: one who knows how to move, who does not wait for the sheep to come and look for him. And as the rector of the seminary, he did a great deal of good, for the youngsters who are preparing for the priesthood, a lot of good. Now, as parish priest, he does very well, and therefore I would like to bear witness to and thank him in front of you all, for what he is doing: thank you, thank you!

Some time ago, I told Don Michele I wanted to meet you, and today you have granted my wish: thank you for coming! Last summer, when calling Msgr. Michele on the telephone during your community holidays, I was also able to greet some members of the group, and I heard your joy and enthusiasm in staying together.

Today you have come in large numbers, and I know that you have made sacrifices for all of you to be together and not to exclude anyone. You represent many different realities in your parishes and you bring with you, in your heart, the brothers and sisters who for various reasons were unable to come, thank you! You bring together different and complementary generations, origins, services and gifts, and this is wonderful. This is the Church! Indeed, the Church is a body made up of many members, each one in the service of the others, and all inspired by the same love: that of Christ (cf. *1 Cor 12:12*). And when the Church is not like this, it descends to

worldliness, it descends into clericalism, which is a very bad thing. Always remember that it is with the beauty and the richness of this variety and this communion that you bring Jesus to the world: this is the most powerful way that you proclaim the Gospel, even before words!

Some of the groups present this year are celebrating a special anniversary. Together, let us thank the Lord, of whom we are all humble servants, for the good he has accomplished, and continues to accomplish, through us, and let us reiterate our commitment to being generous in the gift of ourselves and obedience to his will. Msgr. Michele, in his greeting, recalled among other things the very words I spoke ten years ago, on 13 March 2013. I had just been elected as Bishop of Rome, and when I appeared for the first time on the balcony of Saint Peter's Basilica, I said: "Bishop and People ... A journey of fraternity, of love, of trust among us". It is the wish that has accompanied me all these years, and it is the wish I make also to you, with your bishop. I am the Bishop of Rome, but you have another one. Keep going ahead!

I urge you to walk together as brothers and sisters, because fraternity makes people freer and happier. The world does not end with ourselves, please! Community is not made in front of the mirror, the mirror and myself, no! We truly discover the world only when we walk together with others, day by day. Therefore, the parish is important: because it is the place where, following Jesus, we meet, we get to know each other, we enrich each other, people of different generations and different cultural and social conditions, all with something unique to give and to receive. We see in our cities what happens when we forget this: the horizon recedes and we all become more alone.

Walking together, walking with love. May the love among you always be in first place (cf. *1 Cor* 13:1-13, Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 92). Through formative activities, the Infant School, the groups, the activities of the Oratory, attention for the poor and the least, the elderly and those who are alone, to engaged couples and young families, through the musical band and sporting activities, you prepare the ground, at times arid and harsh, to sow love and to transform the land where you live into lush countryside, rich in the good fruits of the Gospel. In particular, to love means "widening the circle", building unity in trust and hospitality, working together and always seeking commonalities and opportunities to be a community, rather than reasons for division (cf. *Fratelli tutti*, 97). Respecting differences.

You know, I was a parish priest for six years, and I cherish that experience in my heart. I liked mass with the children... Think, in that area there were many of them, and at the Sunday Mass there are 200, 280 – in that area families each had four or five children, and they always used to start to talk among themselves. Once, it was Pentecost – I said, "Today is Pentecost!" The children answered, "Yes, father, yes". "And so, there is the Holy Spirit... Who knows who the Holy Spirit is?" And some of them raised their hand. "Good, you?" "The paralytic!". "What did you say?". "The paralytic!" "A person in a wheelchair?". "Yes!". "No, dear, it is the *Paraclete*, it is something else!" But it is nice. Another time, I told them not to gossip because gossip causes harm, and people who gossip do harm. "Ah", said one child immediately, "like Mrs. So and So!". Children are spontaneous, and Mass with children is beautiful: always keep it going. The parish is a blessed place, where one goes in order to feel loved. Those who knock at the door of our Churches and our environments are often looking primarily for a welcoming smile, they look for open arms and hands, eyes eager to meet and full of affection.

In some parishes, if you knock at the door out of hours, they say to you: "Go away, time is up". Once, a parish priest said to me: "I'd like to brick up the windows". "What, are you mad?". "No, because people come and if I don't receive them at the door, they knock on the window". People never tire of asking and calling, and we must never tire of opening the doors and windows. If you are a priest, this is why; if you are in the parish circle, this is why: to open doors, to open windows, always to receive with a smile. And not to say, "Now is not the time". Total openness: arms and hands open, eyes eager to meet and full of affection. In the parish each person also brings his or her own burden, to be able to share it with someone else and to lighten the load, but also to share the good things it contains!

Yes, there is a great enemy, in parishes, as elsewhere: gossip. Beware, do not let gossip enter. Gossip kills. And do not speak badly of each other. If you do not like this or that person, keep your judgement to yourself, but do

not share it to ruin the other. "Yes, Father, it is so easy to gossip". "Yes, it is easy, this is true. But there is a good medicine against gossip; I don't know if you know it, but it is good, it is a good medicine. If you feel like gossiping, bite your tongue! Your tongue will swell and you won't be able to talk. Bite your tongue before gossiping. No gossip, please, it is a scourge that ruins parishes, ruins families, and many things...

Dear brothers and sisters, your parishes located in a place rich in spirituality, characterized by a generous and fruitful Church history. You share in the great and lively Ambrosian heritage, and live in the shadow of the ancient Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows in Rho, desired by Saint Charles Borromeo shortly before his death, a place of devotion and a destination for pilgrims, then as now. I thank you because, with your faith and your fraternal love, you keep this legacy alive, so that it does not stop growing. There will be many difficulties, much internal strife, much envy, but together you must hold on, so that this does not destroy the beautiful parish history you have. Keep on! You, seniors, you adults, transmit to the young the witness that you in turn received from the generations before you; and do so enriched with your effort and your witness. And you, young people, do not be afraid to talk with the elderly! Go and speak to them, discuss, go and listen to the elderly, because they will give you strength, taking from their history, so that you can go forward, you who are young now. This does not mean always looking backwards, no. Go to the elderly, speak to them, but look forward, to the horizon. It is important for the young to meet the elderly, and to speak with the elderly.

And thank you again for this visit, which should have been done two years ago, I think, and was postponed. May Saints Peter and Paul strengthen you in faith, hope and charity. And may Our Lady keep you and accompany you always. I bless you all from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
