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Audience with pilgrims from the diocese of Asti, Italy

Today, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the pilgrimage from the diocese of Asti, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the bishop, and I am happy to welcome your pilgrimage, which revives in me memories and sentiments of my visit to Asti, last November, for the Feast of Christ the King.

That day and a half I spent with you was a consolation for me, something of a return to the roots. A moment of great human warmth – made of Piedmontese wood, that does not heat up immediately, but after a little time, and then it lasts! A moment of *family*, in a broad sense: the family of origin, roots, the gatherings with my relatives; the family of the Church, the celebration in the Cathedral, with the participation of all of the people of God; and then the family of the civil community, the collaboration with the authorities, the presence of the people. This sense of human warmth that I mentioned is not only an emotion: no, it was the human warmth of Asti, it is something that is yours! It was ignited in me, looking at your joyful faces, feeling your affection, seeing a family that goes ahead, that walks the path of the Gospel, with all its limitations and difficulties. And I saw this also in the letters that the people of Asti wrote to me, many letters, and some recounted problems and how to solve them. A great closeness. For me too, those letters were a consolation. I hope to have answered all of them, I am not sure.

And so, we can dwell a little on this word: *family*. Because it is a reality that has changed a great deal, and is changing, yet the family remains a key value. But do you know when the true “revolution” of the family took place? Do you know who did it? It is easy to answer, because true newness has been brought to this world by one only: Jesus Christ. The true revolution of the family was done by him. And he also renewed, transformed, the family. In what sense? We are told by an episode of the Gospel, where there is one of those words of Jesus

that leave us disconcerted, that throw us into crisis. The three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke tell it. Jesus is preaching in the midst of his disciples and other people, and at a certain point they say to him that his mother and his brethren are outside. Do you remember how Jesus answers? He turns to those around him and says: "Here are my mother and my brethren!", adding, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (cf. *Mt* 12: 46-50; *Mk* 3: 31-35); *Lk* 8: 19-21). This word of Jesus, if we think about it carefully, generates a new way of understanding the family.

Do you see? At the beginning I addressed you by calling you "brothers and sisters". It is not merely a formula, a conventional turn of phrase. No. It is a reality, a new reality generated by Jesus Christ. And as I was saying, this word of Jesus radically renewed the family, so that the strongest, most important bond for us Christians is no longer that of blood, but of the love of Christ. His love transforms the family, freeing it from the dynamics of selfishness, which derive from the human condition and from sin; he frees it and enriches it with a new bond, even stronger but free, not dominated by the interests and conventions of kinship, but animated by gratitude, recognition, and reciprocal service.

Brothers and sisters of Asti, I wanted to share this reflection with you, because the paternal roots of my family lie in your land. Roots are important! And let us give thanks to God for the gift of life and for those who have transmitted it. But above all, let us give thanks because Jesus Christ has called us to be part of his family, in which what counts is doing the will of the Father who is in Heaven. And this new family of Jesus, while it gives a new meaning to family relations – between spouses, parents and offspring, brothers and sisters – at the same time also "leavens" the life of the ecclesial and civil community. For example, it nurtures gratuitousness, respect, acceptance and other human values.

And here we find the meaning of the expression "*Fratelli tutti*", which you have chosen as the name for the new clinic intended for the most disadvantaged people. "*Fratelli tutti*" means that there, in that environment, the family will be made up of the people who are cured, along with the doctors, the nurses, and all the volunteers who will work there. A family for this job of curing the sick.

And so, in the city, in the villages, in the parishes, the word "fraternity" is not only a nice figure of speech, an ideal for dreamers; it has a foundation, Jesus Christ, who made us all brothers and sisters, and it has a path, the Gospel, that is, the way of walking in love, in service, in forgiveness, and in bearing each other's burdens.

Dear friends, here is some food for thought I share with you as I look back on my experience in Asti. I thank you very much for coming; convey my greetings to those who could not come.

And now I invite you to pray the "Lord's prayer" together, and then I will give you my blessing, to you and to all the diocesan community. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
