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Audience with members of the Romena Fraternity, Arezzo, and the Nain Group

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Fraternity of Romena, Arezzo, and the Nain Group, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

I greet Don Luigi Verdi, founder and head of the Romena Fraternity, and all of you who in various ways form part of it. I thank you for this visit of yours, because you also enable me to “enter” somewhat in this oasis of peace and spirituality that is Romena.

For many years now you have represented a space of beauty, simplicity and listening, which helps many travellers and pilgrims in need to take a rest, to retreat into themselves, to share the questions and anxieties they carry in their hearts. Already in the Middle Ages, this ancient Romanesque parish church was a resting place where pilgrims would stop for a night. Today, the Community that you have dreamed of, and that the Holy Spirit has helped you to realize, presents itself as a place of encounter and fraternity, in which those who are weary and oppressed can regenerate themselves, can breathe in the beauty of nature and the charm of silence, can shape their search for God and find the way back to their journey.

As I think of the parish church of Romena, its three naves and the light filtering through the small windows, I would like to take my cue from this and reflect briefly on three experiences, which allow the light of the Gospel to filter through and illuminate the darkness of the lives of those who stop in Romena. These three experiences are *welcome*, *care* and *fraternity*.

The first is *welcome*. Romena was born with this spirit, as a place where anyone can feel at home; anyone can arrive with whatever oppresses them, with the desire to rest in body and spirit, and to breathe the perfume of the Gospel. Indeed, the heart of the Good News is exactly this: God’s freely-given love, which does not set

conditions and does not impose burdens on the shoulders, but simply welcomes and loves us freely: thus is God. I like to recall the words of Father Vannucci: “Before we existed, in the silent world of nothingness, a love loved us and a love spoke our name. [...] Have you ever told yourself this, that you are loved by God? [...] Whatever our reality, we are loved by God, [...] we are the fruit of an infinite love, which is God’s love” (G. Vannucci, *Nel cuore dell'essere*, Romena 1998, 75). What Father Vannucci said is beautiful.

And so I say to you: never lose this spirit; on the contrary, always work to cultivate this style of openness and welcome, to continue to be an oasis of freedom, expressing God’s infinite and gratuitous love for every creature.

A second “place” of the Spirit – the first was to welcome – where the light of the Gospel filters through, is *care*. This word immediately makes us think of Jesus’ compassion, of his heart stirring before the pain of the world, of his inward participation that leads him to weep with those who are weeping. In this way, the Son of God exercised and embodied that tenderness of the Father who takes care of us and especially of the wounds of the body and spirit. The care of wounds: this is at the heart of Jesus’ action, and you, in Romena, try to follow in his footsteps. In particular, I would like to recall the service offered by the Nain Group, which welcomes and supports along the way parents who have experienced the tragedy of the loss of a child. This is an immense pain, inconsolable, that must never be trivialized by empty words and superficial answers; instead, it is a question of knowing how to weep together and to bring together the cry of one’s grief to Jesus who, in the small city of Nain, felt compassion for a widowed mother who had lost her son (cf. *Lk 7:11*). This is a vocation proper to Romena. Indeed, the parish church was built in a time of famine and crisis, so as to be a small light in the darkness of that historical period. And Romena reminds us of this: being Christians means taking care of those who are wounded and those who are in pain, so as to kindle small lights where all seems to be lost. Thank you, thank you for this service of yours.

Finally, *fraternity*. This is the heart of your lifestyle. In the simplicity of work, also farming work, in the contemplation of creation, in Gospel sobriety, you offer to anyone who passes by Romena a space of fraternity, where the beauty of being together is cultivated – fraternity is this, the beauty of being together – and discovering in the face of each person a brother to love. You do not stay together to chatter, no: this is not beautiful, you stay together as brothers! And I would like to say to you that this is also a prophecy of Romena: keeping alive the dream of a fraternal, solidarity-based world; being sowers of peace and social friendship. This expression, “social friendship”, is very beautiful. But it is not easy to carry it forward, and one of the worst things that contrasts this social friendship is gossip. It is an infectious illness, which does a great deal of harm: gossip destroys. And it is necessary to deal with this. I know of a very good medicine for gossip, which gives good results: bite your tongue. Because when you feel like chattering, and bite your tongue, the tongue swells and you can no longer gossip.

Today’s world, still marked by violence and conflicts, has a great need for this brotherliness, this social friendship. Therefore, I ask you to continue to practice fraternal hospitality, to offer a place where people can rest their head and where each person can feel loved by God and part of a universal fraternity, the one the Father wished to inaugurate in Jesus, and which Jesus asks us to build together with Him and with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, life is too short, it is too short, and I am not the one saying this, your founder says so: it is too short to be selfish.

I hope you may carry this dream forward, and I bless you from my heart. May Our Lady accompany you. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
