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Audience with the Unicoop Florence Cooperative and the “Il Cuore si scioglie” Foundation

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of Unicoop Florence and the “*Il cuore si scoglie*” Foundation.

The following is the Pope’s greeting to those present.

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet the President and all of you. I am pleased to meet you, in such large numbers, on the eve of the Epiphany. This feast, like the Time of Christmas as a whole, calls us to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation of the Lord: in the Child Jesus we see how God made Himself close to us in our poverty (cf. *Phil* 3:6-7), showing it to us as the privileged way to encounter Him. And this spiritual context is significant also for your commitment, which for fifty years, as a Cooperative, and a further ten as a Foundation, has been targeting people most in need, in various areas of service: from economic destitution to the need for culture, from loneliness to the need for training, using, besides the usual forms of financial and food aid, many other tools, such as hiking, literature, art and music. Thank you, thank you for this.

Unicoop Florence was born – I quote the Statute – to “safeguard the interests of consumers, their health and safety, also by increasing and improving their information and education” (no. 2). By so doing, in 2010 it then formed the Foundation “*Il cuore si scioglie*” (“The heart melts”), conceived to encourage people to do something for others: we might say, using a Biblical expression, to promote the formation of “hearts of flesh” in place of “hearts of stone” (cf. *Ez* 36:36). And this is a very beautiful thing: the heart is a source of knowledge. One might say; “But no, Father, we know with the mind, with the intellect”. This alone is an incomplete knowledge. Without the heart there is no human knowledge. To know, we must know with the mind and with the heart, and then do with the hands. Do not forget the three languages: may the mind be united with the heart and the hands, may the heart be united with the hands, to do; and may the hands be at the service of the heart and the mind. Do not

forget this, in your activity.

And I would really like to stop a moment to reflect with you on the value of this journey. Indeed, considering from the very beginning the protection of the consumer above the simple commercial aspect, you have managed to grasp a fundamental human dimension: that of helping each person do something for others, that is, to live charity, active love (cf. Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 87). In this way you remember that safeguarding the good of the person means not only looking after some of his or her sectorial interests, but promoting his or her full realization and dignity. And at this level, the encounter between those who have greater possibilities and those in poverty, far from being reduced to mere philanthropy, always constitutes a providential opportunity for mutual enrichment. In this way you propose a model of protection that unites individuals not so much “against” the threat of a common adversary, as “for” the construction of virtuous relations of mutual support (cf. *ivi*, 215). And you do all this with a great deal of creativity, which happens when people work together inspired by a common dream.

Be close to the people we help, be close. When, in confession, at times we ask people, “Do you give alms, do you help?” – “Yes, yes” – “And tell me, when you give alms, do you look people in the eye, do you touch their hand, or do you throw the money there?”. To touch, to touch poverty, to touch, a heart that touches; look and understand. Do not forget this.

Dear friends, thank you for what you do, in Italy and abroad; in particular, in this dramatic moment, in support of tormented Ukraine: it is terrible, what is happening there. Thank you for your collaboration with the Dicastery for the Service of Charity, whose activities you have supported for some time. Continue to aim, in your work, at the integral development of the person, at the growth of the community in the sharing of resources and skills, at inclusion, by valuing what each person brings of his or her own, for the good of all. I bless you and I wish you all the best for the year that has just begun. And please, do not forget to pray for me; pray in favour, not against! Thank you.