



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE BOLLETTINO

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Audience with members of the Italian Federation of Blood Donor Associations (FIDAS)

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Italian Federation of Blood Donor Associations (FIDAS), on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of its founding.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet the president and all of you. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the founding of the Italian Federation of Blood Donor Associations (FIDAS), animated by the silent commitment of thousands of donors throughout the country. I would like to pause with you to reflect for a moment on three aspects of your activity: *joy* - because I know that you are joyful -, *witness*, and *solidarity*.

First: *joy*. Joy and positivity are frequent characteristics in volunteer circles and more generally among people committed to the good of others. We feel it here too, among you, and it is no coincidence. Giving with love, in fact, brings joy. Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (cf. *Acts 20:35*). The reason is that we "were made to give love, to make love the inspiration for all we do" (Benedict XVI, *Greeting to young people in Westminster Cathedral*, 18 September 2010). Giving brings joy, because in it our whole life changes and flourishes, entering into the luminous dynamic of the Gospel, in which everything finds its meaning and fullness in charity. The gift gives joy, this gesture [giving] makes you happier than this gesture [taking]. This gesture [giving] makes us happy. You freely give to others an important part of yourself, your blood, and you certainly know the happiness that comes from sharing.

Second: *witness*. In a world, as we know, contaminated by individualism, which often see the other as an enemy to defeat rather than a brother to encounter, your selfless and anonymous gesture is a sign that conquers indifference and solitude, that overcomes boundaries and breaks down barriers. The donor does not know to

whom his or her blood will go, nor does the recipient of a transfusion generally know the identity of his or her benefactor. And blood itself, in its vital functions, is an eloquent symbol: it does not look at the colour of the skin, or the ethnic or religious affiliation of the recipient, but enters humbly where it can, seeking to reach, running through the veins, every part of the body, to bring it energy. This is how love acts. And in this regard, the gesture of extending the arm, which one does when the blood is withdrawn, is meaningful. It resembles that of Jesus in the Passion, when He voluntarily extended His body on the cross. It is a gesture that speaks of God, and reminds us that “the evangelizing mission of the Church passes through charity” (cf. Saint John Paul II, *Homily for the Beatification of Mother Teresa of Calcutta*, 19 October 2003).

Finally, *solidarity*. Whoever follows the blood arrives at the heart, physically, but also spiritually; it arrives at the “unifying centre of the body” (Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos*, 55), where one encounters “one’s personal uniqueness and the willingness to give oneself to others” (*ivi* 18), the quintessential place for reconciliation and unity. And in this regard, I would like to invite you to experience the donation of blood not only as an act of human generosity, but also as a journey of spiritual growth on the path of the solidarity that unites us in Christ, as a gift to the Lord of Mercy, who identifies with those who suffer (cf. *Saint John Paul II*, Address to participants in the March for Solidarity organized by the directors of the Italian Volunteer Association of Blood and Organ Donors, 2 August 1984). Following blood to reach the heart – do not forget this – that is, always to embrace every man and woman you meet, all of them, in a single act of charity.

Dear friends, thank you for what you do! I bless you and your families, the donors, and all those who collaborate with your Federation. I will remember you in prayer, and please, you too, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
