



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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Audience with a delegation of the “Manos Unidas” Commission

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the “Manos Unidas” Commission, to whom the Pope addressed the following greeting:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear bishop,

Brothers and sisters, good morning.

I am pleased to welcome you this morning, the Standing Commission of “Manos Unidas – Catholic Committee of the Campaign against World Hunger”.

This association, established in 1959 as a response by the women of Catholic Action in Spain to the appeal of the Food and Agriculture Organization, which denounced the “*hunger for bread, hunger for culture and hunger for God which afflicts a large part of humanity*”, and for 65 years you have carried out the task of helping and contributing to the promotion and progress of developing countries. Mrs McCain, who is running the hunger campaign, was here a couple of months ago and she told me that with the whole campaign they are barely covering 15% of the world's hunger. It is very hard, very hard. Thinking of the work you carry out with the sensibility and strength proper to the feminine spirit, in order to eliminate the evils that continue to affect many nations, I would like to make reference to the figure of the Mother of God, whom we celebrate in her Immaculate Conception, because the Virgin Mary is the quintessential *Woman*.

With this male-dominated culture, we are used to seeing women, not as the dog or cat of the house, but as a second-class human being, and we forget that it is women who run the world and - some say - they are the ones who are in charge. But that's fine. But the woman who runs a family, who runs the villages, who is close to the needs, that rich sensibility of women.

Mary, with her heart rooted in God, continues to be attentive to the needs of her children, urges us to go out towards them and to bring them the Lord's consolation. She is the *fully realized model* for our humanity, through which, with God's grace, we can all contribute to improving our world. This is what you try to do, thanks to your characteristics and your intuition and reality as mothers, daughters, wives, and mothers-in-law.

I would like to tell you an anecdote, that happened here. Madam Ursula, President of the European Commission, is a doctor and a mother of seven children. And one day I said to her – she had solved a very difficult problem with Belgium, the Netherlands, a lot of money, and she had solved it well – and I said to her, “Madam” – we were sitting here – “How did you manage to solve this?”. She began to gesture with her hands, and she answered, “Like we mothers do”. Women have that genius, the feminine genius. And so, with the compassion and tenacity that characterizes the female spirit, “Manos Unidas”, a public association of the faithful of the Catholic Church in Spain, carries out its specific mission: to fight against hunger, underdevelopment and lack of education, also endeavouring to eliminate the structural causes that produce these things. This task becomes possible only with a Christian vision of the human being, which has as its foundation the Gospel and the Social Doctrine of the Church.

Sisters and brothers, I encourage you to continue your beautiful mission of voluntary work, of assistance, of walking together. And now, as we approach the Jubilee, I invite you to be pilgrims of hope and to reorient your lives towards Jesus, also through your contribution to the material improvement, moral progress and spiritual development of the most fragile and most in need, to help them obtain a life that responds to their dignity as children of God.

I hope that this time of Advent, in the patient expectation full of hope in God's promises, may help us all to reach spiritual renewal and the much longed-for construction of the civilization of love, so as to enable us to join our filial love towards God with love for neighbour.

May Jesus, in every person you encounter, and in every person you assist, bless you, and the Holy Virgin accompany you with her intercession and her maternal love.

And when I go to confession, I usually ask people, when the occasion arises: “And do you give alms? And when you give alms, do you look into the eyes of the person to whom you are giving alms? I don't know”. If you don't look the beggar in the eye, if you don't touch his hand, your alms are worthless, because they don't come from your heart, they only come from your pocket. Preach this: look him in the eye and touch his hand. Thank you.
