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Audience with Italian pilgrims of the Camino de Santiago (Way of Saint James) cared for by the Opera Don Guanella

This morning, in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Italian pilgrims of the *Camino de Santiago* (Way of Saint James), cared for by the *Opera Don Guanella*, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I have the pleasure of welcoming you, Italian pilgrims of the Way of Saint James, at the Tomb of Peter. I see that you are very numerous, thank you. Welcome!

I welcome Archbishop Francisco Prieto Fernández of Santiago de Compostela. I greet the Superior General of the Guanellian Fathers and the members of the Guanellian family – so many of them – who for nearly fifteen years have worked in that Church of Galizia, both in Santiago and Finisterre, to provide spiritual welcome for pilgrims. And you pilgrims are something of a living proof of their apostolic commitment. I also greet the Confraternity of Saint James of Perugia, present here with the spiritual assistant, Archbishop Paolo Giulietti of Lucca; they too are engaged in this service of evangelization.

It is interesting to see how the number of pilgrims to Santiago has grown over the last thirty years. And among these there are also my predecessors Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, who wished to visit the Shrine, especially because of its great prominence in the Christian history of Europe.

This numerical growth is a very positive fact, and at the same time it poses a serious question: are the people who complete the Way of Saint James carrying out a true pilgrimage? This is the question we must answer. Or is it something else? Obviously, there are different experiences, but the question makes us reflect.

We can recognize the Christian pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Apostles from three signs. The first is *silence*, the first sign. The Way lived in silence allows one to listen, to listen with the heart, and in this way to find, while one walks, through the effort, the answers that the heart is looking for, because the heart asks questions. Indeed, God speaks in silence, like a gentle breeze; remember the story of Elijah (cf. *1 Kings* 19:9-13).

In the second place, the *Gospel* – silence, the Gospel – always have the Gospel in your pocket, I recommend this; by a small pocket edition and keep it in your pocket, and read something every day: open it up like this and read. It is a good way to pray. A pocket Gospel, it costs nothing, but if someone cannot pay for it I will pay, just ask me ... [*laughter*]. But it is important to keep the Gospel in your pocket. The pilgrimage is made by re-reading the journey that Jesus took, up to the extreme gift of Self. The way is far more true, far more Christian, the more it leads one to come out of oneself and to give oneself freely, in service to neighbour. And the Holy Spirit does this when we read the Gospel every day. Because something happens, I will explain it to you. We can read a good novel, it will perhaps do us good, we can read the news every day, some of it makes us weep, but we can read; but when one reads the Gospel, there is someone beside us. It is the Holy Spirit. It is He who makes us understand well what the Gospel does. And He does it, the Holy Spirit.

The third element - silence, the Gospel, and the third, "Matthew 25 Protocol": "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (*Mt* 25:40). Silence, the Gospel, and doing good, to people who also smaller, the most disadvantaged people. Always do good. Along the way, be attentive to others, especially those who struggle the most, who have fallen, who are in need... Saint Luigi Guanella used to say that the purpose of the life of those who believe is to make sure that no-one is left behind.

Dear friends of the Way of Saint James, I encourage you in this, your apostolate of evangelization and care. The ancient pilgrims teach us that, from Christian pilgrimages, one returns an apostle! I make a pilgrimage and return as an apostle to proclaim Jesus.

May the Holy Family of Nazareth, pilgrims in the land of Palestine, be an example to us in this time of expectation. Thank you for coming! I like this and I thank you very much, and I say this from my heart. I bless you and pray for you. And you too, please, pray for me. Do you understand? But pray hard, pray!
