



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE MEMBERS OF UNITALSI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 110th ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FOUNDATION***

Saturday, 9 November 2013

Video

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I greet you all with affection, especially the sick and disabled who are accompanied by volunteers, ecclesiastical assistants, those responsible for the individual sections and the national President, whom I thank for his words. The presence of Cardinal De Giorgi, the bishops, and leading figures within the institution is a sign of the appreciation UNITALSI meets within the Church and civil society.

1. For 110 years your association has dedicated itself to people who are sick or in poor health, and it has done so in a manner in keeping with the Gospel. Indeed, your work is not welfare or philanthropy, but rather a genuine proclamation of the Gospel of charity; it is the ministry of consolation. And this is something great: your work is truly evangelical, it is the ministry of consolation. I am thinking of the great many members of UNITALSI scattered throughout Italy. You are men and women, mothers and fathers, and a great many young people who are moved by love for Christ and by the example of the Good Samaritan, and who in the face of suffering do not look the other way. And not turning your face away is a virtue: go forward with this virtue! On the contrary, always seek to make your gaze one of welcome, offering a helping hand that elevates and sustains, a word of comfort, a tender embrace. Do not become discouraged because of difficulties and fatigue, but continue to give of your time, your smile and your love to your brothers and sisters who are in need. May every sick and frail person see in your faces the face of Jesus, and may you come to see Christ's own flesh in every suffering person.

The poor, even those with poor health, are a source of wealth for the Church; and you who belong to UNITALSI, together with so many other ecclesiastical organizations, have received the gift and the charge of welcoming this richness, of helping to bring out the very best in it, not only for the Church herself but for all of society.

2. Today's cultural and social context tends to hide physical weakness, considering it only as a problem that requires resignation and pity or that at times casts people aside. UNITALSI is called to be a prophetic sign and to go against this logic of the world, this logic of waste, by helping those who suffer to be protagonists in society, in the Church and even in the association itself. In order to promote the effective inclusion of sick people in the Christian community and to inspire in them a strong sense of belonging, pastoral care — which is inclusive — is necessary in parishes and associations. It is a matter of truly esteeming the presence and witness of individuals who are frail and suffering, not only as recipients of the work of evangelization, but also as active subjects in this apostolic endeavour.

Dear brothers and sisters who are sick, do not look upon yourselves only as the objects of solidarity and charity, but feel you are fully included in the life and mission of the Church. You have your own place, a specific role in the parish and in every sector of the Church. Your presence, which may be silent but is actually far more eloquent than many words, your prayer, the daily offering of your suffering in union with those of Jesus Crucified for the salvation of the world, the patient and even joyful acceptance of your condition, are a spiritual resource and a patrimony for every Christian community. Do not be ashamed to be a precious treasure of the Church!

3. The most powerful experience that UNITALSI lives out during the course of the year is its pilgrimages to Marian shrines, especially to Lourdes. Your apostolic manner and your spirituality derive from the Holy Virgin. Rediscover the deepest reasons for this devotion! In particular, imitate Mary's motherhood, the maternal care that she has for each one of us. During the miracle at the Wedding at Cana, our Lady turned to the servants and said to them: "Do whatever he tells you". Jesus ordered the servants to fill the jars with water and the water became wine, better wine than that that had been served before (cf. Jn 2:5-10). Mary's intercession with her Son shows the care of the Mother for people. It is a care which is attentive to our most concrete needs: Mary knows what we need! She takes care of us, interceding with Jesus and asking the gift of "new wine" for each one of us, i.e. the gift of love, of grace which saves us. She is always interceding and praying for us, especially at the hour of difficulty and weakness, at the hour of distress and confusion, and especially at the hour of sin. That is why, in the prayer of the Hail Mary, we ask her: "Pray for us sinners".

Dear brothers and sisters, let us always entrust ourselves to the protection of our heavenly Mother, who comforts and consoles us and intercedes for us with her Son. May she help us to be, for all those whom we meet along our journey, a reflection of the One who is the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3). Thank you.

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