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The Pope receives Caritas Italia on the 45th anniversary of its foundation

Vatican City, 21 April 2016 – Raising awareness of the local Churches and of each believer of the meaning and duty of charity in forms that respond to the needs of the times was the mandate given by Blessed Paul VI in 1972 to Caritas Italia, which will celebrate the 45th anniversary of its foundation this year. To commemorate this date and on the occasion of the Caritas Congress of Italian dioceses, this morning Pope Francis received in audience in the Paul VI Hall the seven hundred participants in the meeting.

Faithful to this mandate, which requires "the commitment of concrete love towards every human being, with a preferential option for the poor, for whom Jesus Himself asks for help and closeness", in our times Caritas is faced with the difficult but fundamental task of converting charitable service into commitment by every one of us, so that "the entire Christian community becomes the subject of charity. This is the principal object of our way of being and acting: to be the stimulus and soul so that all the community grows in charity and is able always to find new ways to be close to the poorest, able to interpret and face the situations that oppress millions of our brothers, in Italy, in Europe and throughout the world".

In this respect, the role of promotion and education that Caritas fulfils in relation to the various types of voluntary work is particularly relevant. It involves, in different ways, all the community and is able to become a stimulus to civil institutions and for adequate legislation to favour the common good and the protection of the most vulnerable groups, tools for proper and constructive knowledge of situations.

"Faced with global challenges that spread fear, iniquity, financial speculation – even in relation to food –, environmental degradation and wars, it is necessary, alongside everyday work in the territory, to continue your commitment to educating in the respectful and fraternal encounter between cultures and civilisations, and in the care of creation, with a view to an 'integral ecology'", affirmed the Holy Father, reiterating his invitation to Caritas to promote communities that nurture a passion for dialogue, "to live conflicts in an evangelical way, without denying them but turning them into an opportunity for growth and reconciliation: this is the peace that Christ has won for us and which we are invited to carry forth".

"May you always be proud of your desire to get to the causes of poverty, in order to remove them: the effort to prevent marginalisation, to influence the mechanisms that generate injustice, to work against any structure of sin. It involves educating individuals and groups in conscious ways of life, so that we all feel responsible for all

others". Francis also encouraged them to continue in their commitment with immigrants. "The phenomenon of migration, that today presents critical aspects that have to be managed with organic and broad-ranging policies, is always a wealth and a resource, from different points of view. Therefore, your work is valuable, and alongside a fraternal approach, it tends to favour choices that promote integration between citizens and foreign populations".

The Pope went on to emphasise that the family "is constitutionally 'Caritas', as God Himself made it that way: the soul of the family and its mission is love. That merciful love that, as I recalled in the post-Synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, knows how to accompany, discern and integrate situations of fragility. The fullest responses to many discomforts can be offered precisely by those families who, overcoming the temptation of short-term and sporadic solidarity, while at times necessary, choose to collaborate between themselves and with all the other services committed to solidarity throughout the country, offering the resources of their daily availability".

"The Lord nears us in the faces and in the stories of the brothers and sisters who are most in need. He is at the door of our heart, of our communities, and waits for someone to answer his discreet but insistent call. Charity awaits: the merciful 'caress' of the Lord, through the 'hand' of His Church. A caress that expresses tenderness, the closeness of the Father. In today's world, complex and interconnected, may your mercy be attentive and informed, concrete and competent ... but also community-led, credible by force of a coherence that is evangelical witness ... open to all, attentive when inviting the least and the poor of the world to be an active part of the community. ... Because the poor are the great offering God makes to our Church, so that she may grown in love and faithfulness".
