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Mercy is spreading beauty and joy in a sometimes sombre and sad world: Francis to travelling and folk performers

Vatican City, 16 June 2016 – "Artisans of celebrations, wonder and beauty" was how Pope Francis defined itinerant artists, from puppeteers and street musicians to open-air painters and circus performers, this morning. They are all, he said, members of the great family of popular entertainment whose qualities enrich society throughout the world.

Travelling and popular entertainers gathered in Rome to participate in the Jubilee of Mercy. Yesterday, following the Mass celebrated by Cardinal Antonio Maria Vegliò, president of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, they performed in Piazza Santa Maria di Trastevere, and this morning they did likewise as they awaited the Holy Father in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall. In his brief address, the Pope reiterated that celebration and joy are the distinctive characteristics of their identity, profession and life, "which could not be missing from the Jubilee of Mercy". He added, "You have a special resource: with your continual movements, you are able to take God's love, His embrace and His mercy, to everyone. You can be an itinerant Christian community, witnesses of Christ Who is always journeying to meet even the most distant. I also congratulate you because, in this Holy Year, you have opened up your shows to the needy, to the poor and homeless, the imprisoned, to disadvantaged children. This too is mercy: spreading beauty and joy in a world that is at times sombre and sad."

"The travelling and popular show is the most ancient form of entertainment", he remarked. "It is accessible to all and is intended for all, young and old, and in particular families. It spreads the culture of encounter and the social dimension of entertainment. Your working spaces can become places for gathering and fraternity. Therefore, I ask you always to welcome the smallest and neediest, to offer words and gestures of consolation to those who are wrapped up in themselves, recalling the words of St. Paul: 'if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness'."

The Pope went on to refer to the difficulties that travelling artists face as a result of their lifestyles, and the problems of becoming part of a parish community in a stable way. He invited them to nurture their faith, making the most of opportunities to partake in the sacraments, and urging them to transmit love for God and neighbour to their children. "I encourage particular Churches and parishes to be attentive to your needs and to those of all itinerant peoples. As you know, the Church is concerned with the problems that accompany your itinerant life,

and wishes to contribute to eliminating the prejudices that at times marginalise you. May you always carry out your work with love and care, trusting that God will accompany you with His providence; be generous in works of charity and willing to offer the resources and the genius of your arts and your professions", concluded the bishop of Rome.

Following the audience with the Holy Father, the artists proceeded to the Holy Door and at the end of their visit to St. Peter's Basilica they presented a show in the Square, transforming it into a "universal square of wonders", with performances from musical bands, jugglers, acrobats, puppeteers, and others.
