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PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

# **BOLLETTINO**

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. holy

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## **Holy Father's Message to members of the International Association of Charities (AIC)**

The following is the full text of the Holy Father's Message to the International Association of Charities (Association Internationale des Charités, AIC)

### **Holy Father's Message**

In this year 2017, you celebrate the 400th anniversary of the first Brotherhoods of Charity, founded by Saint Vincent de Paul in Châtillon. It is with joy that I join with you spiritually in celebrating this anniversary, and I convey my best wishes that this beautiful initiative continue its mission of bringing authentic witness of God's mercy to the poorest. May this anniversary be an occasion for you to give thanks to God for His gifts and to open yourselves to His surprises, to discern, through the breath of the Holy Spirit, new ways to render the service of charity ever more fruitful.

The Charities were born of the tenderness and compassion in the heart of Mr. Vincent for the poor, often marginalised or abandoned in the countryside and in the towns. His work for and with them was intended to reflect God's goodness towards His creatures. He saw the poor as representatives of Jesus Christ, as the members of His suffering body; he grasped that the poor, too, were called to build up the Church and in turn to convert us.

In the wake of Vincent de Paul, who entrusted the care of these poor people to the laity, and especially to women, your Association aims to promote the development of the most disadvantaged, and to alleviate the

moral, physical, moral, material and spiritual suffering. And it is in God's Providence that the basis of this commitment is found. What is Providence, if not the love of God Who acts in the world and asks for our cooperation? Today too I would like to encourage you to accompany the person fully, paying special attention to the precarious living conditions of many women and children. The life of faith, the life united with Christ, enables us to perceive the reality of the person, his incomparable dignity, not primarily as limited to material goods, to social, economic and political issues, but rather as a being created in the image and semblance of God, like a brother or sister, our neighbour for whom we are responsible. In order to "see" poverty and to approach it, it is not enough to follow great ideas but rather to live from the mystery of the Incarnation, this mystery so dear to Saint Vincent de Paul, the mystery of this God Who lowered Himself by becoming man, Who lived among us and died to elevate man and to save him. These are not simply fine words, but rather the very being and action of God. It is the reality we are called to live as a Church. This is why human development, the authentic liberation of man, does not exist without the proclamation of the Gospel "for the most sublime aspect of human dignity lies in this vocation of man to communicate with God".

In the Bull for the opening of the Jubilee Year, I expressed my hope that "the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God!" (5). I invite you to follow this path. The credibility of the Church pursues the way of merciful love and compassion that is open to hope. This credibility also depends upon your personal witness: it is not merely a question of encountering Christ in the poor, but also of the poor perceiving Christ in you and in your action. By being rooted in the Christ's personal experience you can contribute to a "culture of mercy" that profoundly renews hearts and opens them up to a new reality.

Finally, I would like to invite you to contemplate the charism of Saint Louise de Marillac, to whom Monsieur Vincent entrusted the inspiration and coordination of the Charities, and to find in her the finesse and gentleness of mercy that never hurts or humiliates anyone, but instead raises up, restoring courage and hope.

By entrusting you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and to the protection of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing and ask you to pray for me.

From the Vatican on February 22, 2017.

Francis

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