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Audience with a Group from the “Lazare” Association, France

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Group of the “Lazare” Association of France on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its founding.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

I welcome you to Rome on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Lazarus Association. I thank your representative for his kind words. I greet you all with affection and, through you, I express my spiritual closeness to all the members of your association in different countries.

I thank God for your beautiful experience in cohabitation and fraternity, which you live out on a daily basis. You have an opportunity to be, not only for yourselves but also for the world, a example of the social friendship that we are all called to live. In an environment full of indifference, individualism and selfishness, you help us understand that the values of authentic life are found in accepting differences, respecting human dignity, listening, caring, and serving the most humble. Indeed, love for others, for who they *are*, moves us to seek the best for their lives. Only by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that is open to all” (*Fratelli tutti*, 94).

In society, you may feel isolated, rejected and suffer from exclusion. But do not give up, do not be discouraged. Go forward, cultivating in your hearts the hope of a contagious joy (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 88). Your witness of life reminds us that “the poor are true evangelisers, for they were the first to be evangelized and called to share in the Lord’s joy and his kingdom (Message for the Fifth World Day of the Poor, 13 June 2021).

Dear friends, I invite you to remain steadfast in your convictions and in your faith. You are the loving face of Christ. So spread around you this fire of love that warms cold and dry hearts. Do not be satisfied with a life of friendship and sharing between the members of your association, but go beyond that. Dare to take a chance on love given and received freely. Go out to the peripheries, which are often filled with solitude, sadness, inner wounds and loss of the taste for life. Through your words and actions, pour the balm of consolation and healing on wounded hearts. Never forget: you are God's gift, God's gift today, and you have a special place in his loving heart. Even if the world looks down on you, you are precious, and you count for much in the eyes of the Lord. I wish to say it again: God loves you, you are his privileged ones. So do not let yourselves be robbed of your joy in living and helping others to live.

I entrust each of you and your families to the Lord, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, and I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and your leaders here present and to the members of the association throughout the world.

Please do not forget to pray for me.
