The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE "POPE JOHN XXIII COMMUNITY" ASSOCIATION

Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 20 December 2014

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you with joy and I thank you for your warm welcome. I thank your leader, Giovanni Paolo Ramonda, for the words he addressed to me on everyone's behalf; and many thanks to those of you who gave your testimony.

Your accounts speak of slavery and of liberation, they tell of the selfishness of those who think of building a life for themselves by exploiting others and of the generosity of those who help their neighbour to rise again from material and moral degradation.

They are experiences which shed light on the many forms of poverty which unfortunately afflict our world; and they reveal the most dangerous misery of all, the cause of all the others: separation from God, the presumption of being able to do without Him. This is the blind misery of considering the purpose of life to be material wealth, the search for power and pleasure; of exploiting the life of one's neighbour in order to achieve these objectives.

Yes, friends, it the presence of the Lord that marks the difference between the freedom of good and the slavery of evil, that can enable us to perform good works and to draw from them intimate joy, one capable of shining upon those who are near us. May the Lord's presence broaden our horizon, heal our thoughts and emotions, give us the strength necessary to overcome difficulties and trials. Wherever the Lord Jesus is, there is resurrection, there is life, for He is the Resurrection and the Life.

Faith truly moves the mountains of indifference and apathy, of disinterest and sterile withdrawal into the self. Faith opens the gates of charity, making us want to imitate Jesus, urging us to do

good, instilling the courage to act according to the example of the Good Samaritan.

Don Oreste Benzi, the Founder of your Association, was well aware of this. His love for the small ones and the poor, for the excluded and the neglected, was rooted in the love of Jesus Crucified, who made Himself poor and the least for us. His courageous determination in giving life to so many initiatives of sharing in various countries flowed from trustful abandonment to God's Providence; it originated from faith in the Risen Christ, alive and at work, capable of multiplying the little strength and few resources available, as He once multiplied loaves and fish to feed the crowds.

Beginning with the mission of engaging adolescents and arousing their interest in the Person of Jesus, in the servant of God Don Oreste Benzi, the idea was born to organize for them a "friendly meeting with Christ", that is to say, a radical and life-giving encounter with Him as hero and friend, through the testimony of lives lived, that demonstrated the Christian message in its fullness, but in a joyous and even playful way. This is how your community came into being. It is present today in 34 countries with its Family Homes, social and educational cooperatives, Houses of Prayer, services associated with difficult pregnancies and other initiatives. Providence has enabled you to grow, giving proof of the vitality of your Founder's charism, which he loved repeating — as your Leader said — that "in order to stand up, one must kneel".

Dear brothers and sisters, I invite you to turn to St John Paul II, that he take care of your spiritual formation, and regular attendance at the Sacraments, and especially to make the Eucharist the heart of the Family Homes and of every other social and educational activity (cf. *Insegnamenti* XXVIII, 2, 2004, 632). It is from a heart filled with the love of God that love for brothers and sisters springs.

I ask you to please pray for me. I entrust you all to Our Lady, that she grant you a Christmas filled with love and joy, and I bless you from the heart.

Let us pray to Our Lady to receive the blessing, all together: Hail Mary,....

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