The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR PROMOTING NEW EVANGELIZATION

Clementine Hall
Saturday, 21 October 2017

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to meet you, especially because in these days you have addressed a theme of great importance for the life of the Church in her work of evangelization and Christian formation: *Catechesis and people with disabilities.* I thank Archbishop Fisichella for his introduction, the Dicastery over which he presides for its service, and all of you for your work in this field.

We recognize the great development there has been over the course of recent decades with regard to disability. Greater awareness of the dignity of each person, especially of the weakest, has led to the espousal of courageous positions for the inclusion of those who live with various forms of handicap, so that no one should feel like a stranger in his own home. Yet, at the cultural level, through a prevailing false understanding of life, expressions that harm the dignity of these persons still persist. An often narcissistic and utilitarian vision, unfortunately, leads not a few to consider persons with disabilities as marginal, without grasping their manifold human and spiritual richness. In the common mind-set, there is still too strong an attitude of *rejection of this condition,* as if it prevents one from achieving happiness and self-fulfilment. It is demonstrated by the eugenic trend of ending the lives of the unborn who show some form of imperfection. In reality, we all know many people who, despite even serious fragility, have found, albeit with difficulty, the path of a good life, rich with meaning. Likewise, on the other hand, we know people who are seemingly perfect, yet they despair! After all, it is a perilous deception to think we are invulnerable. As said by a girl whom I met on my recent journey to Colombia: *vulnerability is intrinsic to the essential nature of mankind*.

The answer is love: not that false, saccharine and sanctimonious love, but that which is true, concrete and respectful. To the extent that one is accepted and loved, included in the community and supported in looking to the future with confidence, the true path of life evolves and one experiences enduring happiness. This — as we know — applies to everyone, but for the most fragile people it is like a test. Faith is a great life companion when it lets us touch by hand the presence of a Father who never forsakes his creatures, in any state of their life. The Church cannot be voiceless or out of tune in the defence and promotion of people with disabilities. Her closeness to the families helps them to overcome the loneliness that often risks closing them off for want of attention and support. This applies even more so due to her responsibility with regard to *generating and forming the Christian life.* The community must not lack the words and above all the gestures for encountering and welcoming people with disabilities. The Sunday Liturgy, especially, must be able to include them, so that the encounter with the Risen Lord and with the community itself may be a source of hope and courage in the difficult journey of life.

Catechesis, in a particular way, is called to discover and test congruent forms so that each person, with their gifts, limitations and even severe disabilities, can encounter Jesus on the journey and trustfully abandon themselves to Him. No physical or mental limitation should ever be an impediment to this encounter, because Christ's face shines in the heart of each person. Moreover, let us take care, especially we ministers of Christ's grace, not to fall prey to the neo-Pelagian mistake of failing to recognize the need for the strength of grace that comes from the Sacraments of Christian initiation. Let us learn to overcome the discomfort and fear that at times we can feel toward persons with disabilities. Let us learn to seek and also to intelligently "invent" appropriate tools so that no one lacks the support of grace. Let us form — first of all by example! — catechists ever more able to accompany these persons so they may grow in faith and give their genuine and original contribution to the life of the Church.

Lastly, I hope that in the community, more and more, people with disabilities may be their own catechists, by their witness too, so as to pass on the faith in a more effective way.

I thank you for your work in these days and for your service in the Church. May Our Lady accompany you. I bless you wholeheartedly. And I ask that you, please, not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

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