The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO A DELEGATION OF THE SALVATION ARMY

Friday, 12 December 2014

[Multimedia]

Dear Friends,

I extend a warm welcome to you, the leadership of The Salvation Army, well-known to me for its evangelizing and charitable mission. Your visit is the happy outcome of more frequent and fruitful contacts in recent years between The Salvation Army and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, including a series of theological conversations aimed at fostering a better understanding of one another, mutual respect and regular collaboration. I thank you again for this book of conversations. I earnestly hope that Catholics and Salvationists will continue to offer a common witness to Christ and to the Gospel in a world so much in need of experiencing God's mercy. It needs it!

Catholics and Salvationists, together with other Christians, recognize that those in need have a special place in God's heart, so much so that the Lord Jesus Christ himself became poor for our sake (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). As a result, Catholics and Salvationists often meet in the same peripheries of society. It is my hope that our shared faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour, the one mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim 2:5), will become evermore the firm foundation of friendship and cooperation between us.

"The Church which 'goes forth' is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative; he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads, and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24).

I pray that in today's world all of Christ's disciples will make their contribution with the same conviction and dynamism that The Salvation Army demonstrates in its devoted and highly appreciated service. The differences between Catholics and Salvationists regarding theological and ecclesiological questions need not impede the witness of our shared love of God and love of neighbour, a love which is capable of inspiring a concerted commitment to restoring the dignity of those who live on the margins of society.

I need a translator… [he said, departing from his prepared remarks]. And now I would like to tell you an anecdote, and I would also like to thank you. When I was four years old — it was 1940, none of you were born yet! — I went out with my grandmother. In that time, it was thought that all Protestants went to hell. On the other side of the sidewalk there were two women of The Salvation Army, with that hat that you all have.... Have you worn one? And I remember like it was yesterday, I said to my grandmother: "Who are they? Nuns?". And my grandmother said: "No, they are Protestants, but they are good". Therefore, because of your good witness, my grandmother opened the door to ecumenism to me. The first ecumenical preaching I ever heard was in front of you. Thank you very much.

Dear friends, I pray to God for the work of The Salvation Army. May many people in difficulty continue to rely on your efforts, which enable Christ's light to shine in the darkest recesses of their lives. May you and your fellow Salvationists be filled with the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom, understanding, fortitude and peace, and so witness to the Lord's Kingdom in our suffering world. And I ask that you also pray for me. I need it. Thank you.

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