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BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 170601d

Thursday 01.06.2017

Audience with the participants in the meeting organized by the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe

At midday today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the meeting organized by the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe to for the 20th anniversary of its founding.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer you a warm greeting, dear families belonging to this Federation that is celebrating its twentieth anniversary. I thank your President, Antoine Renard, for his kind words.

Twenty years is not much time to attempt an overall assessment, but it is certainly a good occasion to give thanks for the vitality and the enthusiasm with which you have carried out your daily commitment. Your Association, "young" in spirit and in years, is called to attract others in the service of families, so that Europe can continue to consider the family its most precious treasure. This image of "treasure" was present in your meeting yesterday, which brought families from many countries of Europe to Rome. It is an image that well reflects the esteem that all of us must have for the family. In effect, families are not museum pieces, but through them, the gift is made concrete in mutual commitment and generous openness to children, but also in service to society. Families are thus a kind of leaven that helps to make the world more humane and more fraternal, where no one feels rejected or abandoned.

1. Your wide gamut of activities is summed up in integral service to the family, which is the fundamental cell of society, as I recently reiterated to the authorities of the European Union gathered for the sixtieth anniversary of

the Treaty of Rome. Your work, in both the ecclesial and civil sectors, would at first sight seem to respond to a variety of disparate needs. Yet in fact it responds to the service of that good news which is the family. In *Amoris Laetitia*, I emphasized how, on the basis of the family, we can make the gift concrete through the beauty and the joy of mutual love. Seen in this light, your activity should help remind everyone that there is no better ally for the integral progress of society than to favour the presence of families in the social fabric. Today too, the family is the foundation of society and it remains the most suitable structure for ensuring for people the integral good necessary for their continuing development. I wanted to stress how the unity of all the members of the family, and the fraternal commitment of the family with society, are allies of the common good and of peace, also in Europe.

The family is the interpersonal relationship *par excellence*, inasmuch as it is a communion of persons. Your relationships as spouses, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, make it possible for every person to find a place in the human family. The way to live out these relationships is dictated by communion, the driving force of true humanization and evangelization. Today more than ever, we see the need for a culture of encounter that can enhance unity in diversity, reciprocity and solidarity between generations. This “family capital” is called to impregnate the economic, social and political relationships of the European continent. The way of “being family” that you want to spread is not subject to any contingent ideology, but grounded in the inviolable dignity of the person. On the basis of that dignity, Europe will be able to be truly one family of peoples (cf. *Address to the European Parliament*, Strasbourg, 25 November 2014).

2. Crises of different types are presently springing up in Europe, not least in the institution of the family. But crises are incentives to work harder and better, with trust and hope.

I am familiar with your initiatives to promote concrete policies favouring the family in the areas of the economy and employment, and not only these, with the goal of procuring a dignified and fitting employment for all, especially the young, who in many areas of Europe endure the scourge of unemployment. In these initiatives, as well as in others directly related to the legislative field, concern for showing respect and for the dignity of each person should always prevail. In this sense, the culture of encounter always includes an attitude of dialogue in which listening is always necessary. May your dialogue be always based on actions, testimonies, experiences and lifestyles that speak more loudly than your speeches and programmes. This is indispensable for if families are to play the role of “protagonists” to which my predecessor Saint John Paul II called them (*Familiaris Consortio*, 44).

Four crises in particular affect Europe at the present time: demographics, migration, employment and education. These crises might find positive outcomes precisely in the culture of encounter, if different social, economic and political actors were to join in shaping policies supportive of families. In these four areas, you are already working to propose answers tailored to families, seeing in the latter a resource and an ally for the person and his or her milieu. In this sense, your task very often will be to invite to a constructive dialogue with the various actors on the social scene, without concealing your Christian identity. Indeed, that identity will enable you always to look beyond appearances and the present moment. As you have clearly stressed, the culture of the ephemeral calls for an education for the future.

3. To carry out this demanding work, the family cannot remain isolated like a monad. Families need to go out from themselves; they need to dialogue and to encounter others, in order to build a unity that is not uniformity and that can generate progress and advance the common good.

Dear families, you have received much from your elders. They are the permanent memory that must encourage us to employ the wisdom of the heart and not merely technical expertise in crafting initiatives about the family and for the family. They are the memory and the younger generations are the responsibility facing you. With this wisdom, for example, your service to the sacredness of life takes concrete form in the covenant between generations and in service to all, especially those most in need, the disabled and orphans. It takes concrete form in solidarity with migrants, in the patient art of education that views each young person as a subject worthy of all the family’s love, in defending the right to life of the unborn who have no voice, and in ensuring dignified living conditions for the elderly.

The work before you is great and complex. Only by strengthening your association and inviting other families to join with you, will the task become less arduous, since union makes for strength. Frequently it will fall to you to be the ferment that teaches others to work together, respecting legitimate differences and approaches.

4. In conclusion, I encourage you to develop with creativity new methods and resources, so that the family can exercise, both in the ecclesial and the civil sectors, the threefold task of supporting the younger generation, accompanying others along the often rocky roads of life, and pointing to values and meanings in the journey of everyday life. This threefold mission can be a specific contribution that your Federation, by its daily service, can offer to families in Europe.

I give you my blessing and I accompany you with my prayers, asking the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth. And I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me.
